

Detroit "Polar Bears" in the Land of Lice and Snow:
The American Soldier Experience in North Russia, 1918 - 1919

By
Jake Zellner

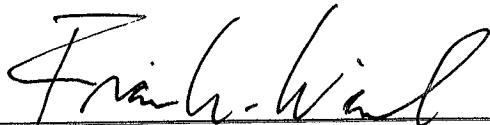
Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Department of History of Vanderbilt University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For Honors in History

April 2017

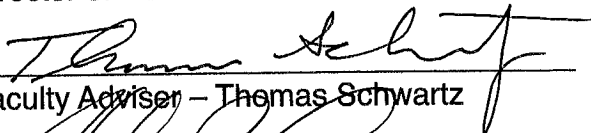
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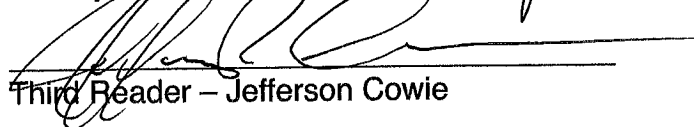
we, the undersigned, recommend that the candidate be
awarded HIGHEST HONORS
in History.



Director of Honors – Frank Wcislo



Faculty Adviser – Thomas Schwartz


Third Reader – Jefferson Cowie

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“In Russia’s Fields”
Joel R. Moore

In Russia’s fields no poppies grow
There are no crosses row on row
To mark the places where they lie,
No larks so [gaily] singing fly
As in the fields of Flanders.

We are the dead. Not long ago
We fought beside you in the snow
And gave our lives, and here we lie
Though scarcely knowing reason why
Like those who died in Flanders.

At Ust Padenga where we fell
On Railroad, Kodish, shot and shell
We faced, from just as fierce a foe
As those who sleep where poppies grow,
Our comrades brave in Flanders.

In Toulgas woods we scattered sleep,
Chekuevo aid Kitsa’s tangles creep
Across our [lonely] graves. At night
The doleful screech owl’s dismal flight
Heart-breaking screams in Russia.

Near Railroad bridge at Four-five-eight,
An Chamova’s woods, our bitter fate
We met. We fell before the Reds
Where wolves now howl above our heads
In far off lonely Russia.

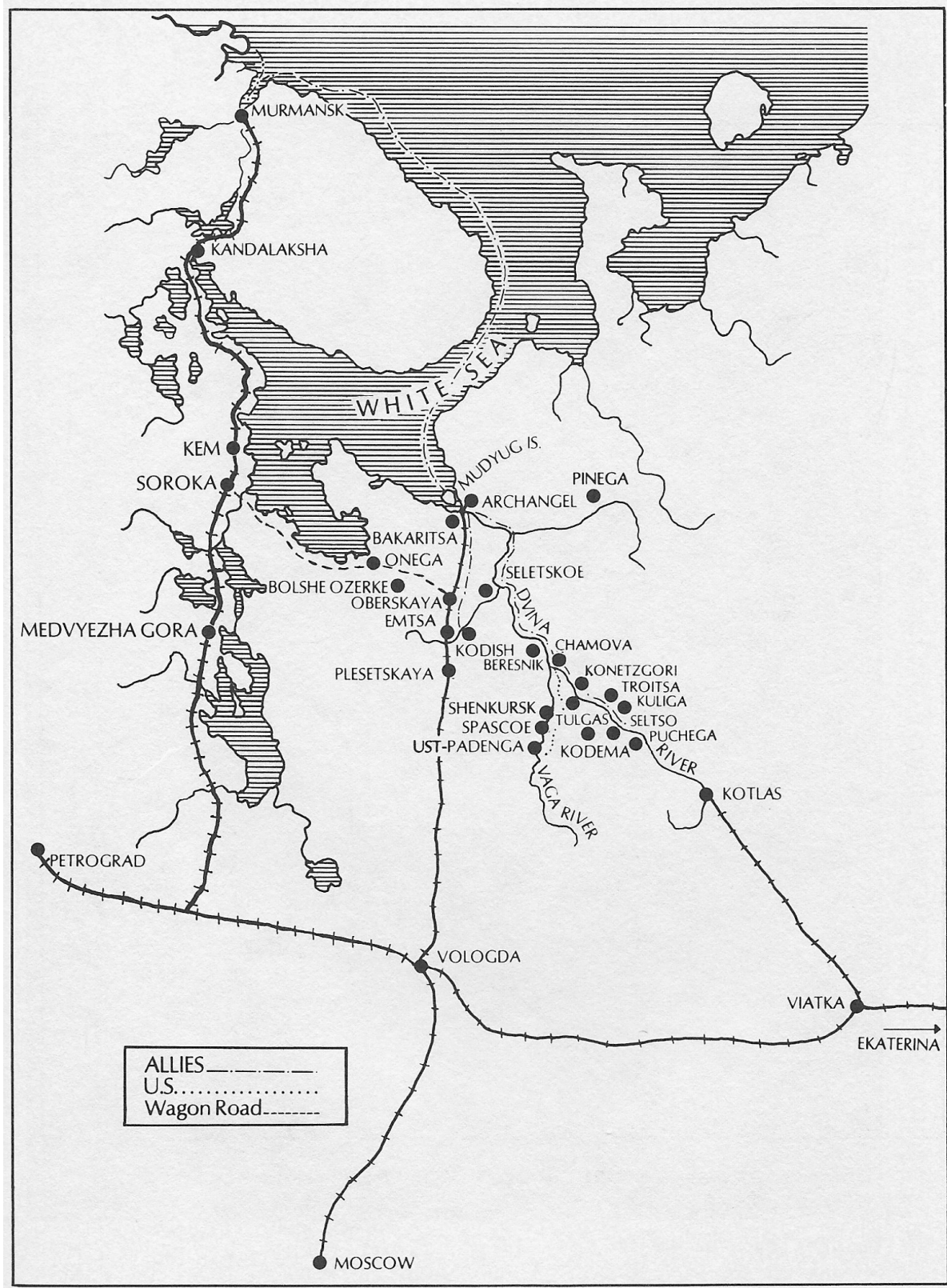
In Shegovari’s desperate flight,
Vistavka’s siege and Seltso’s night,
In Bolsheozerk’s hemmed-in wood,
In Karpogor, till death we stood
Like they who died in Flanders.

And, Comrades, as you gather far away
In God’s own land on some bright day
And think of us who died and rest
Just tell our folks we did our best
In far off fields of Russia.¹

¹ BHL: Joel Moore, “In Russia’s Fields by Joel R. Moore (undated)”, Michael J. Macalla Papers, 1.

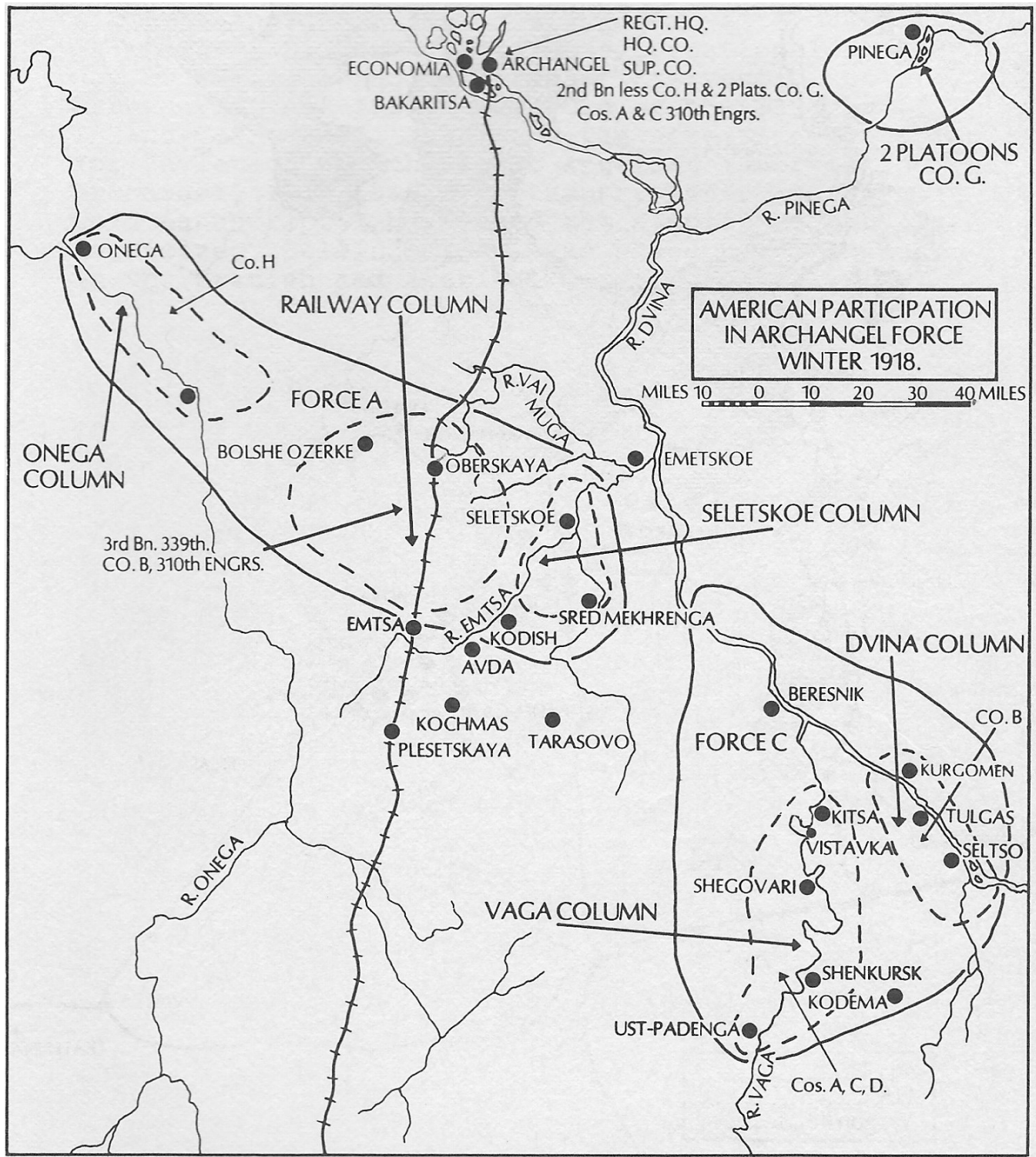
Relevant Maps

I: Map of Northern Russia, 1918, outlining key points during the intervention²



² Rhodes, xiii; Place names have been edited (not in quotes, though) to match the spelling on these maps.

II: Southern-Archangel Area, Winter 1918, showing locations of American forces³



³ Rhodes, xiv.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	6
CHAPTER ONE: ARDUOUS BEGINNINGS	17
THE PATH OF THE AEFNR	18
HEALTH, DISEASE, AND SANITATION	22
SUPPLYING DEFICIENCIES AND TRAINING SHORTFALLS	27
VIOLENCE	32
AMERICANS AND THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE	36
PHOTOGRAPHS	41
CHAPTER TWO: A CRISIS OF MORALE	45
COLD WEATHER	46
EXPERIENCE IN A POLYGLOT ARMY	50
BOLSHEVIK FIGHTING ABILITY AND POST-ARMISTICE ENGAGEMENTS	56
CONFUSED LEADERSHIP, DECLINING MORALE	60
LEISURE TIME	65
PHOTOGRAPHS	69
CHAPTER THREE: PROPAGANDA & AMERICAN MEDIA	73
BRITISH PROPAGANDA	75
AMERICAN PROPAGANDA AND MEDIA	77
BOLSHEVIK PROPAGANDA IN RUSSIA	81
CONCLUSION	95
PHOTOGRAPHS	103
APPENDIX	106
A: CASUALTIES	106
B: POLAR BEAR EXPEDITION DIGITAL COLLECTIONS ANALYSIS BY RANK	107
BIBLIOGRAPHY	108
PRIMARY SOURCES	108
SECONDARY SOURCES	111

Introduction

France, November 11, 1918:

The artillery kept it up until the last minute. So did the Boche [German] guns. But there seemed to be little hate in that morning's barrage. The guns weren't pointed anywhere in particular; they were just headed in the general direction of Germany and turned loose as fast as they could be fired [...] As the hour approached, officers and men of the artillery gathered at the batteries, all eager to fire "the last shot of the war".

-Frank Sibley, *Boston Globe* Correspondent, 26th Division¹

Unfortunately for the men accompanying Sibley, their quest was in vain as “the last shot of the war” fired by a member of the American Expeditionary Force would not be until June 1919. On Armistice Day, crowds celebrated in the streets of major cities across Europe and America in a collective sigh of exhaustion and optimism. Thousands of American soldiers were travelling back from France to rejoin their families. The imminent reunions of Americans with their sons, brothers, and friends excited the country. In the heartland of America some families' celebrations were muted. Over 5,000 American soldiers, mostly from the Detroit area, remained in North Russia for months after the war in Europe ended. The troops, formally known as the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia (AEFNR), fought the Bolshevik armies until the summer of 1919 after the official end of hostilities in November 1918. The invasion of Archangel province by an amalgamation of Allied forces remains an unexplored occurrence in Western histories of World War I, and one that American officials seemed to forget. This forgotten war, never formally declared, led modern banker-turned-historian Robert L. Willett to dub the offensive a “sideshow” of the Great War.²

Ignorance has surrounded the intervention in the American public sphere since the Cold War. Two American presidents, Richard Nixon in 1972 and Ronald Reagan in 1984, incorrectly claimed that the United States and the USSR had never fought each other in an armed conflict. A

¹ Frank P. Sibley, *With the Yankee Division in France*, (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1919), 340-341 in James H. Hallas, *Doughboy War: The American Expeditionary Force in World War I*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2000), 305.

² Robert L. Willett, *Russian Sideshow: America's Undeclared War, 1918-1920* (Washington D.C: Brassey's Inc., 2003), Kindle.

1985 *New York Times* poll found that only 14% of Americans were aware that an intervention with American support had ever occurred in Russia.³ Unlike the Americans, Russian leaders never forgot the intervention. Nikita Khrushchev, while on a 1959 visit to the United States, erupted during a speech: “We remember the hard time after the October Revolution, U.S. troops led by their generals landed on Soviet soil [...] to strangle our Revolution [...] Our troops have never set foot on American soil, while your troops have set foot on Soviet soil”.⁴ An opportunity exists for further examination of this relatively unknown offensive in North Russia. This thesis focuses on the experience of those who fought, highlighting issues that can arise amongst soldiers when American intervenes in a foreign war. The examination places it within the developing soldier experience genre as a precursor for what became common in the twentieth century, as American soldiers found themselves in increasingly complex political situations on foreign soil.

Longstanding interest in World War One has spurred countless books regarding the great battles, strategy, and complicated diplomacy of the conflict.⁵ However, a new genre of literature regarding the experience of American soldiers, spanning conflicts from the Civil War to Iraq, has emerged over the last few decades.⁶ Specific interest in the American soldier during World War One has appeared more recently, joining a longstanding British literary tradition that examines the experience fighting the Great War.⁷ Especially now, with the upcoming centennial of the 1918

³ David Foglesong, *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1995), 7.

⁴ “Khrushchev in America,” Internet Archive, accessed April 2, 2016, <https://archive.org/details/khrushchevinamer006997mbp>.

⁵ For further reading, see: Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West*, (London: Penguin Books, 2006); John Keegan, *The First World War* (London, UK: Hutchinson, 1998); William Philpott, *War of Attrition: Fighting the First World War* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2014); James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1981).

⁶ The style and focus of this thesis was directly inspired by literature which focuses on the soldier's combat experience in Vietnam, which emphasized the words of the soldiers by using primary sources and gleaned overarching themes. This thesis adopts a similar methodology and applying it to the conflict in North Russia, See: Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity*, (New York: Viking, 2015), Mark Baker, *NAM: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Soldiers Who Fought There*, (New York: Berkley, 1981); Eric M. Bergerud, *The Dynamics of Defeat: The Vietnam War in Hau Nghia Province*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Eric M. Bergerud, *Red Thunder, Tropic Lightning: The World of a Combat Division in Vietnam*, (New York: Westview Press, 1993); John C. McManus, *Grunts: Inside the American Infantry Combat Experience, World War II through Iraq*, (New York: Nal Caliber, 2010).

⁷ James Hallas' *Doughboy War* and David Snead's *An American Soldier in World War I* are emblematic of the emerging soldier experience genre. As Snead and Hallas heavily quote primary materials written by American soldiers in Europe, the books allowed the thesis to compare and contrast the experience of the AEF and the AEFNR, See: George Browne, *An American Soldier in World*

Armistice, this thesis contributes to an ongoing reassessment of the Great War from new dimensions. More, this thesis contributes to the burgeoning literature arising from the centenary.

This study of the intervention in North Russia asks two questions: *How was the intervention a case study of an American military mission that lacked a defined political purpose and what was the relationship of propaganda and domestic American media to the soldier experience?* Bountiful archives allow such comprehensive analyses of the AEFNR experiences.

The Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections make the scope of this thesis possible by providing detailed glimpses into the daily life experiences of the AEFNR. The archive consists of diaries, photographs, correspondences, poems, manifestos, interviews, scrapbooks, military pamphlets, Bolshevik propaganda, enlistment records, and maps collected from nearly 300 soldiers and several American diplomatic officials.⁸ The collection offers an extensive source base totaling 2,304 digitized items, many of which are lengthy diaries, in 110 individual collections with more primary sources residing at the Bentley Library at the University of Michigan. This volume of material makes it “the largest collection of manuscript and print materials on the Polar Bear Expedition”.⁹ Many soldiers recorded daily events in journals and some wrote long reactions in a multitude of forms including reflections, poems, and essays. Correspondences illuminate key themes which the writer thought prominent enough to send back home. Scrapbooks provide an interesting medium as they reflect what the soldiers chose to remember in the press and if they followed events in Russia after returning home. Similarly, the objects soldiers brought home highlighted what the soldiers deemed important, such as Bolshevik propaganda and mementos like

War I, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); James H. Hallas, *Doughboy War: The American Expeditionary Force in World War I*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2000).

⁸ Notes on sourcing: Bentley materials are cited as: BHL: Author, “File Name in Collection”, Paper Collection Title, Page Number (Date, if possible). After the first source usage, author and file names will be abbreviated and Paper Collection will be dropped. Also, many footnotes contain multiple references. In these cases, the first source listed contains the quotation while the latter sources reinforce the claim.

⁹ “Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections,” Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections, accessed March 3, 2017, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/polaread/>.

Russian money. Enlistment records help classify soldiers by rank, nationality, and pre-war vocation. Lastly, photographs provide a visual aid to supplement the words of these soldiers.

A small degree of imbalance is present in the Bentley materials. Officers' records comprise a larger share of the archive than the actual ratio of officers to enlisted men would suggest. While no official numbers exist and estimates vary, the soldier to officer ratio was around 24 to 32 enlisted men per officer, with 3 – 4% of the force consisting of officers.¹⁰ The Bentley archives, on the other hand, present a sample of 30% junior enlisted men, 19% NCOs, and 35% officers (Appendix B). Despite the overrepresentation of officer documents, enlisted men and non-commissioned officers still encompass the majority of the archive. Various methodologies sought to minimize potential overuse of officer viewpoints.

Research, sourcing, and writing tactics reduced imbalances in the archival collection to make it representative of the AEFNR experience. Diaries were given priority in the research process due to their relatively unbiased nature. Correspondences posed an issue. Many original copies of letters are emblazoned with an "Opened by Censor" tab and some had pieces removed. Even if the letters were not actually censored, soldiers were ordered not to write of the conditions in Russia and thus the subject matter of letters tends to be more trivial. As such, diaries were prioritized over letters. Letters sent after the war and free of censorship provide glimpses into the veteran experience. During the research process, I independently cataloged the Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections to keep track of rank, company, contents subject matter, and media type to diversify sourcing. When quoting soldiers, concise and impactful writing was prioritized for stylistic reasons. Specific soldiers are sometimes used heavily to achieve narrative cohesion or illustrate themes through microhistory.

¹⁰ BHL: Primm, 133; Charles Lewis, "War Diary", Charles E. Lewis Papers, 82.

Several other primary sources provided additional details to support the Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections. The National Archives hold the Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919, which include official reports.¹¹ These reports range from daily dispatches back to Washington, internal memos, casualty reports, Bolshevik strength estimates, and various reports on morale. The University of Michigan digitized issues of the newspaper published for the AEFNR in Archangel, *The American Sentinel*, and these papers detailed aspects of the soldier experience through military censorship.¹² Lastly, several soldiers published literature after leaving Archangel. Many are included in the Bentley collections, yet notable exceptions include: Joel Moore, Harry Mead, and Lewis Jahns' *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki Campaigning in North Russia 1918-1919* (1920),¹³ John Cudahy's anonymously published *Archangel: The American War with Russia* (1924),¹⁴ and Godfrey Anderson's *A Michigan Polar Bear Confronts the Bolsheviks: A War Memoir* (2010).¹⁵ While the secondary source base concerning the soldier experience in North Russia was not as extensive, the primary source scope makes such detailed study possible.

Journalist E.M. Halliday's¹⁶ *The Ignorant Armies*, first published in 1958 and revised in 2001 under the title *When Hell Froze Over*, contains additional information from unobtainable primary sources. Halliday relied on interviews with veterans and thus offers alternative sourcing to the documents at Bentley. Halliday's study verified themes in the Bentley sources and provided background information on the intervention.

¹¹ National Archives, "Historical Files of the American Expeditionary Force, North Russia, 1918-1919", accessed March 2, 2017, https://www.fold3.com/title_483/us_expeditionary_force_north_russia#overview.

¹² American Red Cross, "The American Sentinel," Hathi Trust Digital Library, accessed January 28, 2017, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/003241550>.

¹³ Joel R. Moore, Harry H. Mead, Lewis E. Jahns, *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviki: Campaigning in North Russia 1918-1919* (Detroit, MI: The Polar Bear Publishing Co., 1920).

¹⁴ "A Chronicler" [John Cudahy], *Archangel: The American War with Russia*, (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1924), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/miua.3931775.0001.001>; John Cudahy had an established career after his experience in Russia, later serving as ambassador to Ireland, Poland, and Belgium.

¹⁵ Godfrey J. Anderson, *A Michigan Polar Bear Confronts the Bolsheviks: A War Memoir* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010).

¹⁶ It is worth noting that Halliday is not a professional historian and made it clear in his introduction, writing that "this book is not intended as an academic work, and such paraphernalia as appendixes and exact source references are missing" in Halliday, Kindle Location 83/4001.

The need for further study of the Bentley collections and a lack of attention to the soldier experience in North Russia created an opportunity for this thesis. Most secondary sources were published during the Cold War as interest in the violence in North Russia and Siberia reemerged.¹⁷ This literature outlined the diplomatic history of the expedition while themes illustrated by the soldiers on the ground received little coverage. Since the end of the Cold War, professional historians covered the subject less.¹⁸ Halliday noted that the “American Expedition to North Russia in 1918-1919 has been oddly neglected by professional historians”.¹⁹ Benjamin Rhodes, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater as of 1988, is the only academic historian to write about the soldier experience in North Russia, despite a detailed study by Robert Willett.²⁰ Ultimately, only these two secondary sources focused on the American soldier experience in North Russia in detail, presenting an opportunity for further examination. This thesis differentiates itself as it is structured around the Armistice, a critical turning point, and it places a new emphasis on the role of propaganda and news from the United States.

Two secondary sources covering the intervention specifically, Willett’s *Russian Sideshow: America’s Undeclared War* (2003) and Rhodes’ *The Anglo-American Winter War with Russia* (1988), provided a foundation for this thesis. Rhodes described the soldier experience chronologically, starting with the pre-intervention situation among American diplomatic representatives in North Russia and continuing through the evacuation. He argued that, despite the small scale of the intervention, the soldier experience is worthy of study due to the military lessons

¹⁷ See: Lloyd Gardner, *Safe for Democracy: The Anglo-American Response to Revolution, 1913-1923*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Richard Goldhurst, *The Midnight War: The American Intervention in Russia, 1918-1920*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1978); George F. Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene. Vol. 2. Soviet-American Relations*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958); John Swettenham, *Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918-1919: And the Part Played by Canada*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967).

¹⁸ There is evidence that interest in the Allied intervention in Russia may be reappearing along with the centennial of the Great War, as retired U.S. Army Col. John M. House recently published an examination of the American intervention in Siberia. Still, this book is a military history and does not explicitly focus on the soldier experience. See: John House, *Wolfhounds and Polar Bears: The American Expeditionary Force in Siberia, 1918-1920* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2016).

¹⁹ E. M. Halliday, *When Hell Froze Over: The Secret War between the U.S. and Russia at the Top of the World* (New York, NY: iBooks, Inc., 2001), Kindle Location 61/4001, Kindle.

²⁰ Some academic historians (such as David Foglesong) have written about the intervention since, yet the books focus on the political side of the intervention, despite using some Bentley sources.

learned from the expedition.²¹ Rhodes concluded that the Allies did not learn these lessons. Willett examined the geopolitical situation leading up to the intervention and delved into the soldier experience in both Siberia and North Russia, dividing the chapters by front. Early on in the book, Willett stated his goal of detailing “the U.S. infantry, the doughboys, and how they fared,” and his book is largely a summary of these conditions.²² This thesis expands on Willett and Rhodes. It further utilizes the Bentley collections to continue their analyses, focusing on themes which led to declining American morale. Unlike Rhodes and Willett, this thesis argues that propaganda after the Armistice was a key component of deteriorating American confidence.

Several of the secondary sources covering the intervention in North Russia have used the Bentley collections, yet none utilized the collection to the same extent as this thesis. Willett, Rhodes, and Foglesong used the Bentley collections. Only Willett used the collections extensively while Rhodes and Foglesong favored other primary materials.²³ The time since a secondary source last investigated the collection could also yield new discoveries. The Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections were created in 1963 and digitized in 2004. In 2005, the archive underwent a next-generation revamp including new finding aids and better digitization.²⁴ As such, this thesis is the only work on the AEFNR that utilizes the new Bentley collection and has researched the additional documents that have been donated since 2003.²⁵ Secondary sources helped contextualize the intervention through Great War American policy to compare the AEFNR experience to that of their peers in France.

²¹ Rhodes, 124.

²² Willett, Kindle Location 71/7303.

²³ Willett cited 19 Bentley collections; this thesis utilizes 51 BHL collections.

²⁴ "About the Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections," Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections, accessed February 18, 2017, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/polaread/about.html>.

²⁵ The collection homepage states that “we continue to add newly discovered collections every year”, "About the Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections," Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections, accessed February 18, 2017, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/polaread/about.html>.

David Kennedy's *Over Here* analyzed World War One through the context of American society.²⁶ This book represents a landmark departure from other Great War books as Kennedy was among the first to consider the effects of the war on American society rather than through a geopolitical frame. Kennedy's focus on the American soldier experience in France makes the book a cornerstone of this thesis's secondary literature. This thesis verifies and modifies themes Kennedy identified when looking at the brief snapshot of World War One in North Russia from 1918 to 1919. It also continues his research's emphasis on diaries, as "thousands of men [...] faithfully kept journals while they were in the Army" and "even a modest sampling of the personal documents left behind [...] reveals common responses to the shared enterprise".²⁷

Most secondary sources focus on the pre-intervention political machinations and the strategy in North Russia. The chief source for the events leading up to the intervention and U.S. – USSR diplomatic consequences is statesman and historian George Kennan's *The Decision to Intervene* (1958). Kennan analyzed the policy decisions which led to the conflict and concluded that "never, surely, in the history of American diplomacy has so much been paid for so little".²⁸ Historian David Foglesong, in his 1995 *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism*, broke from Kennan. Foglesong described the American intervention in Russia as a thought-out culmination of longstanding covert tactics used by the Wilson administration to combat Bolshevism.²⁹ Both sources illustrated the poor execution of the intervention at the highest ranks of the confused American government, a theme which trickled down to the ordinary soldier.

The intervention did not occur in a vacuum, and Jonathan Smele's *The "Russian" Civil Wars* (2015) and Orlando Figes' *A People's Tragedy* (1996) put the intervention in perspective

²⁶ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

²⁷ Kennedy, 205.

²⁸ Kennan, 471.

²⁹ Michael J. Carley reviewed Foglesong and postulated that "Foglesong indirectly raises another question. Why do most Western historians start the Cold War after 1945, rather than after 1917? Foglesong's book includes the familiar characteristics and shibboleths of what I would call the "later Cold War"." In Michael J. Carley. "Review of Foglesong, David S., *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920*". H-Russia, H-Net Reviews. June, 1996.

from the Russian side. Easily inferred from the title, Smele argued that the Russian Civil War was but one piece of the “compound compendium of overlapping wars and conflicts” which plagued Tsarist Russia and the new Bolshevik state from 1916 to 1926.³⁰ Smele emphasized the complicated nature of the political situation in Russia and the increasing tenacity of the Red Army, realities that plagued the American soldiers. Figes reassessed the Russian Civil War “as a human event of complicated individual tragedies” by detailing the role of Russian peasants and arguing that ordinary Russian sided with the merciless Bolsheviks.³¹ Figes’ examinations of propaganda and ordinary Russians demonstrated the odds faced by the AEFNR, who served amongst increasingly hostile Russians and were surrounded by powerful propaganda. Ultimately, this thesis argues that this propaganda proved critical in the morale crisis the AEFNR faced.

The thesis comprises three chronological chapters to detail the experience of soldiers in the AEFNR. All chapters are heavily sourced in primary documents and attempt to use the soldiers’ own words as much as possible. The first two chapters examine the period between September 1918 to June 1919, from the soldiers’ first landing to their evacuation. Chapter One begins with brief background information to place the expedition in context. It then identifies key themes which were apparent in multiple primary sources: poor sanitation, health issues, unpreparedness in training and supplies, violence, and impressions of Russian civilians.³² These topics illustrate the harsh conditions faced by the AEFNR in the early months of the expedition. Chapter One ends on Armistice Day, November 1918, to emphasize the shift in morale which occurred thereafter.

Chapter Two details the deteriorating morale after the Armistice and analyzes several contributing factors. The Armistice innately undermined the soldier’s sense of purpose as many

³⁰ Jonathan Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars, 1916 – 1926: Ten Years That Shook the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7.

³¹ Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1996), xvii, 573.

³² It is worthy to note that many of these themes, such as supplying deficiencies, did not end in November 1918. Many of the themes continued until the AEFNR’s evacuation. Such themes are covered in Chapter One because that is when they first emerged in soldier literature. For example, while the Spanish Flu’s first outbreak began in September and is thus addressed in the first chapter, health conditions continued to be an issue until evacuation.

believed that their goal was to reopen the Eastern Front and fight German influence in Russia. As such, their continued presence in Russia was confusing. Several elements of the winter and spring campaign accentuated the post-Armistice morale crisis. Cold weather made fighting conditions even more arduous, and casualties rose as a result. The Americans functioned as a piece of a diverse Allied force. Tensions rose precipitously between the AEFNR and their Russian and British counterparts due to their unreliable Russian peers and mistreatment by the British. The Bolsheviks coalesced into a formidable fighting force due to new Red Army organizational strategies and fought the AEFNR in deadly battles after the Armistice. The confused military leadership in North Russia, who knew little more of the purpose than the ordinary soldier, relayed little information and did not act to stem declining morale. Morale waned unabated until it collapsed entirely in some companies, manifesting in mutinous activity. As the mission shifted from an offensive to a defensive campaign, the men had more time for leisure. They also had time to analyze their predicament, read propaganda, and read literature covering the domestic controversy over the intervention.

The third chapter breaks from the chronological flow of prior chapters and examines the role of propaganda among the AEFNR. By reviewing British, American, and Bolshevik propaganda and American media, it is evident that such materials undermined morale. British propaganda aggravated Anglo-American tensions and inspired demoralizing Allied atrocities. American media spread news of the domestic controversy that surrounded the intervention and verified the soldiers' post-Armistice confusion over the expedition's purpose. Bolshevik propaganda called attention to preexisting poor conditions and proposed answers to questions that American military leadership did not address. Chapter Three differentiates the thesis from Rhodes and Willett who describe propaganda exposure but do not identify it as a key theme that impacted morale.

The conclusion follows the AEFNR's evacuation and veteran experience while questioning the impact of fighting face to face with the Bolsheviks. It explores the veterans' opinions of Bolshevism and their longstanding comradery after returning home, manifested through the Polar Bear Association. After a 1929 trip to recover remains from North Russia, veterans still expressed perplexity about the expedition's goals. The conclusion uses Polar Bear Association documents to illustrate how, several years after leaving Russia, the veterans already associated the military mission with other misguided American interventions. Finally, the thesis synthesizes the findings of the prior chapters to draw conclusions from the AEFNR's time in Russia to contribute new findings on an unexplored chapter of the twentieth century American soldier experience and to reassess the timeline of American interventionism.

Chapter One: Arduous Beginnings

September – November 1918

*It's the land of the Infernal Odor
The land of the National Smell
The average American soldier
Would sooner be quartered in Hell¹
-Sgt. Roger Clark*

On September 4, 1918, Second Lieutenant Charles Brady Ryan peered off the deck of the *HMT Somali* towards the emerging coast. French and British warships swayed against the docks nearby. Lt. Ryan looked beyond the waterways where the White Sea meets the Dvina River to observe storehouses, saw mills, lumber yards, white and grey houses, and church spires rising in the distance (Photograph 1.i). Lt. Ryan, like many of his fellow soldiers, had never left North America before. Now, after a brief stay in England, the nearly six thousand Americans comprising the 339th Infantry Regiment, 310th Engineers, 337th Field Hospital, and 337th Ambulance Company found themselves over four thousand miles away from home in a foreign and mysterious place.

The soldiers did not know what to expect as the wooded coast came into view. Some aboard the *Somali* felt excited to reach their destination. Lt. Ryan, coming off a “very nice trip” with plentiful food and no run-ins with German submarines, remarked how the land seemed to be of good quality.² Two hours later, Lt. Ryan had reassessed his thoughts on North Russia, amending his comment on the good land in favor of the phrase “most god forsaken hole on Earth”.³ As the men unloaded in Archangel, they quickly noted the putrid smell and the poor state of the city and residents. One can imagine the looks on the faces of the men, absorbing this new and strange place, as they wondered how the AEFNR got here in the first place.

¹ BHL: Sgt. Roger S. Clark, “The Creation of Russia”, Earl V. Amos Papers.

² BHL: Charles Ryan, “Diary July-Mar. 1919”, Charles Brady Ryan Papers, 18 (9/4/19).

³ Ibid.

The Path of the AEFNR

By 1917 the Great War had escalated into the deadliest conflict in history. The combatant nations saw the war effort to be in dire straits.⁴ As conflict ravaged Europe, the collapse of Tsarism in late 1917 and the subsequent Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia exacerbated worries amongst the Allies. These worries were confirmed with the closing of the Eastern front, and the leaders of Britain and France pressed for action.

British, French, and American leaders lamented the rise of the radical Bolsheviks to oppose the democratic Provisional Government. These countries, especially Britain, became alarmed at the news that the Bolsheviks had taken Archangel in February 1918 and were confiscating the city's vast military stores, shipped to the Tsarist regime on loan. In March 1918 the Bolsheviks made peace with Germany by signing the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, effectively closing the Eastern Front. This became the last straw for the increasingly desperate Allies, and the British and French governments formulated a campaign with three initial goals: to rescue the stranded Czecho-Slovak Legion,⁵ protect Allied military stores and investment in Archangel and Murmansk,⁶ and reopen the Eastern Front. A fourth goal, proposed by historian David Foglesong, was the hopeful eradication of Bolshevism as part of Britain, France, and the United States' formulaic struggle against radical left movements.⁷ In addition, the objectives seemed of the utmost importance and timeliness because of rumors that the Germans and Bolsheviks were cooperating. Due to the overexerted resources used in the Western theatre, they turned to the United States to provide manpower for the campaign.

In only a matter of months, events a world away had left Washington and London confused and created conditions for misguided action. Pro-interventionists gained momentum in

⁴ Kennan, 4-5.

⁵ The plight of the Czechoslovak Legion captivated American and European citizens. The fighting force was originally created in 1917 to aid the Russian Army and, after the revolution, was surrounded by Bolshevik enemies on all sides.

⁶ The British had made large investments in Russia prior to 1917, including the development of the town of Murmansk starting in 1915 and expensive railroad projects, in Willett, Kindle Location 447/7303.

⁷ Foglesong, 4.

the State Department, and soon enough the highest officials in President Woodrow Wilson's administration joined the chorus. His advisor Colonel Edward M. House, the Lansing-headed State Department, the American representatives on the ground in Russia, and the British and French governments all wheedled Wilson to formally intervene, to which he finally agreed.⁸ Wilson formalized their thinking in a confused written statement, called his *Aide Memoire*, on July 17, 1918.⁹ The paper contradicts itself repeatedly, both calling for a military intervention while reiterating the sovereign rights of the Russian state by stating "that military intervention there would add to the present sad confusion in Russia rather than cure it [...] and that it would be of no advantage in the prosecution of our main design, to win the war against Germany."¹⁰ The piece generally outlines a role for American soldiers: to protect the military stores but not to launch offensives in North Russia and Siberia.¹¹

Wilson's rambling and chaotic policy gave the British leeway for usage of American troops under their command. Historian Benjamin Rhodes claimed that the British selectively read the policy to understand Wilson authorizing a military intervention.¹² Rhodes called attention to the fact that the British military acknowledged the ambiguity of Wilson's policy, failing to even send a copy of the policy to British General F. C. Poole, who was to lead the expedition.¹³

The first American military involvement in North Russia came in August 1918 as a small fifty-man detachment of American sailors joined the British and French. In early August, a British-orchestrated coup d'état ousted the pro-Bolshevik government in Archangel and replaced it

⁸ Some forces did oppose intervention. The American military realized the lack of feasibility of intervention from the early days of planning, citing the deficiency of available resources given the war in Europe and the huge demands a successful intervention would call for. As such, American military leadership failed to properly support the expedition for victory by providing subpar equipment and leadership, in Rhodes, 18; Willett, Kindle Location 362/7303.

⁹ Kennan, 485.

¹⁰ Ibid., 483.

¹¹ The decision-making process leading up to its epitome, the *Aide Memoire*, was so incompetent that Kennan remarked that "a brief glance at the manner in which this [U.S.] participation came into being might not be without usefulness as an illustration of the prevailing atmosphere and of the casualness with which Americans contrive, on occasion, to back into confused and delicate political situations", in Kennan, 26.

¹² Rhodes, 20.

¹³ Ibid.

with a White Russian leader, N.V. Chaikovsky.¹⁴ The coup, followed by a demonstration of British airpower over Archangel, precipitated the Bolshevik retreat south as they interpreted the British seaplanes as a part of a large-scale invasion. Poole's British, French, and fifty American sailors, totaling around 1,500 men, landed in Archangel on August 2 to large celebrations in the roughly 100,000-person city. Even before the bulk of an Allied force reached Archangel, Poole had demonstrated the aggressiveness with which he would lead the campaign. After one day the Americans followed the British south down the Archangel-Vologda railroad, with the goal of eventually reaching Vologda, and faced their first combat with Red forces. Less than one month after Wilson formulated a policy, Poole disregarded the American agreement to defend supplies in favor of an offensive. The Bolsheviks destroyed bridges behind them to slow the Allied advance and Poole was forced to wait for reinforcements.¹⁵

Those reinforcements comprised 6,293 British and Canadians, 5,302 Americans, 1,686 French, and 2,715 White Russian and other nationality troops in Archangel as of December 1918. Another Allied force of 15,000 troops supported them from Murmansk.¹⁶ Nearly 9 out of 10 Americans hailed from Michigan, with 70% from Detroit.¹⁷ Many of the men or their parents were immigrants with roots in Eastern Europe, giving the Americans Russian-communication abilities unmatched by the other fighting forces.¹⁸ While the AEFNR was a sizeable body, it was not enough to combat the well-equipped¹⁹ and numerous²⁰ Bolshevik forces.

¹⁴ Archangel and Murmansk were pivotal strategic points as the Allies feared a German invasion from Finland, despite the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. The cities also contained crucial Allies stores, had developed infrastructure due to British and French investment, and were beacons of White Russian resistance, in Kennan, 17; Halliday, Kindle Location 557/4001.

¹⁵ Halliday, Kindle Location 536-578/4001.

¹⁶ John Swettenham, *Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918-1919: And the Part Played by Canada* (London, UK: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967), 54.

¹⁷ Roger Crownover, *The United States Intervention in Northern Russia-1918,1919: The Polar Bear Odyssey* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 23.

¹⁸ Willett, Kindle Location 721/7303; Although the AEFNR certainly had a high degree of immigrant and first-generation American soldiers, this was not uncommon. Some estimate that 20% of all draftees were foreign-born, in Kennedy, 157.

¹⁹ The Red Army was often equipped with American-made arms which had been loaned to the pre-revolution Russian army.

²⁰ A February report noted a precipitous increase in Bolshevik forces, reaching an estimated strength of 45,500 in late February in the Archangel province alone, in Historical Files Relating to North Russia, "Situation Reports on the Efficiency and Morale of the AER, North Russia, Dec 1918-Mar 1919", 16.

The AEFNR's story begins in Michigan. After the June 1918 draft the recruits left their homes and travelled to Camp Custer and the men broke into regiments. The 339th, due to its high proportion of Detroiters, became known as "Detroit's Own".²¹ The urgency in Europe called for new soldiers and prompted abridged training at Camp Custer including riflery, gas attack preparation, and other courses designed for the war in France. After three short weeks at Camp Custer the regiments travelled by rail through Detroit and Buffalo to Long Island, NY, where they spent several days between Camp Mills and visits to New York City. The soldiers subsequently arrived in New York harbor, convinced they were going to France. On July 22, the men left aboard the troop transports *SS Plattsburg* and *HMT Northumberland*. After organizing a naval convoy, the troops began their weary trip across the Atlantic, still swarming with German U-boats.²²

Despite sparse soldier records of submarine encounters and plentiful records of the unpleasant conditions aboard the transports, the convoy arrived unharmed in Liverpool, England in early August. The men still believed that they were destined for France. The 339th continued training at Camp Stoney Castle while enjoying occasional trips to London. It was at Stoney Castle, during more fire-drill training sessions, that the men first learned of their true objective.²³ Commander in Chief of the AEF, General John J. Pershing, selected the 339th for two reasons: the cold-weather experience of their commander Lt. Colonel George Evans Stewart and the fact that most of the men hailed from a cold region of America.²⁴ To the chagrin of the men, they were alerted that the British would command the AEFNR and were issued British winter provisions and clothing. On August 25 the men mobilized to London, where they took trains north to Newcastle-on-Tyne. From the docks in England the troops boarded the British transports *Nagoya*, *Somali*,

²¹ Willett, Kindle Location 721/7303.

²² Willett, Kindle Location 721-754/7303; Kennedy, 189.

²³ Halliday, Kindle Location 587/4001.

²⁴ Willett, Kindle Location 777/7303.

and *Tydeus* and set out along the Norwegian coast, into the White Sea, and onwards to Archangel. The Americans arrived in Archangel on September 4, 1918 (Photograph 1.ii).

After arriving in North Russia, the AEFNR splintered into several forces and their experiences began to diverge (See Maps and Photograph 1.iii). As the men split and moved toward the fronts they were often separated by miles of swampy, forested, inaccessible terrain. Colonel Stewart watched with a sense of helplessness from Archangel as his small force spread throughout North Russia, an area larger than Texas, under the orders of Poole.²⁵ Poole's Allied forces executed aggressive drives towards Moscow, although they never reached south of Ust-Padenga. Some forces stayed in Archangel while most went south along six fronts: the Pinega Front, the Onega Front, the Railway Front, Seletskoe Front, the Dvina River Front, and the Vaga River Front. After only one day in Archangel, the 3rd Battalion of the 339th packed into boxcars on the rickety wood-burning locomotives and headed south while the 2nd Battalion disembarked to patrol Archangel, leaving the 1st Battalion the thankless action of loading into disgusting vermin-infested barges and floating down the Dvina.²⁶ The sanitary conditions endured by the AEFNR during their first week reflected a consistent theme of the pre-Armistice phase of the expedition.

Health, Disease, and Sanitation

Even before the Polar Bears landed in Archangel on September 4, sanitary conditions were miserable. From the outbreaks of Spanish Influenza aboard the troop transports to the infested homes they stayed in while at the front, the men noted poor living conditions unanimously. The often disgusting and dangerous environments the Polar Bears faced were not entirely unique to this expedition; the lack of medical technology, wartime sanitation standards, and outbreaks of

²⁵ Halliday, Kindle Location 667/4001.

²⁶ Ibid., Kindle Location 639/4001.

Spanish Flu also became an integral part of the soldier experience in France.²⁷ Health issues denoted the early days with foreboding overtones as fatalities due to disease increased.

The deadly Spanish Influenza brewed among the unwitting AEFNR before they even reached the White Sea. After a four-day incubation period, outbreaks began in early September aboard the *Somali* and *Nagoya*. Pvt. Godfrey J. Anderson of the 337th Field Hospital recounted his experience aboard the *Somali*: “All bunks were occupied by soldiers desperately ill, with raging fevers [...] The first death occurred on the White Sea and the body was dumped to a watery grave”.²⁸ The situation aboard the *Nagoya* was similar, where Pvt. Edwin Arkins recorded the events unfolding: “Spanish Influenza breaks out; men begging for medical attention. Insufficient medical personnel”.²⁹ The conditions on the troops transports were very conducive for a contagious disease.

The scope of the deadly outbreak can be attributed to a lack of preventive measures aboard the vessels. The British ship lodgings placed soldiers near each other with no room for a quarantine, an ideal setting for the disease.³⁰ Sergeant Edward Trombley agreed, writing that all “three deaths [of his fellow soldiers] were caused indirectly by the bad sanitary conditions on board H. M. Transport Nagoya”.³¹ The persistent Spanish Influenza spread through the 339th even after departing the clustered conditions on the ships.

Initially, Archangel’s medical facilities were completely under resourced and unsanitary.³² Regarding the hospital in September, Capt. Joel R. Moore, Lt. Harry H. Mead, and Lt. Lewis E. Jahns asked: “What “flu”-weakened soldier will ever forget those double decked pine board beds, sans mattress, sans linen, sans pillows? [...] The glory of dying in France to lie under a field of

²⁷ Stokesbury, 287; Ferguson, 144-145; Kennedy, 198; Hallas, 293.

²⁸ Anderson, 65.

²⁹ BHL: Edwin L. Arkins, “Diary, transcribed from original diary written in shorthand, recording daily events while serving with the 339th Infantry, since leaving Camp Custer, July 14th, 1918, for Overseas Duty, until discharged, July 19th, 1919”, Edwin L. Arkins Papers, Page 5 (9/2/18).

³⁰ Willett, Kindle Location 617/7303.

³¹ BHL: Edward Trombley, “Diary (Shenkursk, Nijni Gora)”, Edward Trombley Papers, 15.

³² Anderson, 71; BHL: Clarence Scheu, “Diary, typescript”, Clarence G. Scheu Papers, 5 (9/6/18).

poppies had come to this drear mystery of dying in Russia under a dread disease in a strange and unlovely place”.³³ Pvt. Anderson, as part of the medical team, recounted his time in the makeshift hospital in Archangel, “a bedlam of coughings, hackings, of rasping stertorous breathings, of moans and incoherent cries, all like some grisly charnel house”.³⁴ He recorded numerous deaths as his colleagues and he constantly removed the newly deceased from the ward during the night shifts, pegging total Spanish Flu fatalities at roughly one hundred and dictating the creation of an American cemetery in Archangel. This estimate is high, and later sources count 69 fatalities due to the disease.³⁵ Still, Anderson was correct in his assessment of the lack of available resources. In a later report filed on the work of the medical detachment, Chief Surgeon Jonas Longley noted that, despite being informed in England of available medical facilities, the “Archangel district was practically without hospital facilities” for the 175 cases of Influenza (Photograph 1.iv).³⁶ The unhealthy circumstances in Archangel and beyond prompted disgust amongst the men.

Soldiers’ early impressions of Archangel, even after the containment of the Spanish Influenza after several weeks, reflect the lack of sanitary conditions in Russia which were commonplace in the U.S. at the time, such as modern plumbing. Upon arrival, soldiers recorded thoughts regarding Archangel. Lt. Ryan noted the disgusting “assorted odors”.³⁷ Corporal Fred Kooyers of “E” Company recorded the free livestock roaming the streets and the “cockroaches by the millions,” ultimately leaving Kooyers to label Archangel as “the dirtiest city we had ever been in”.³⁸ Normal infrastructure had fallen into disarray as the government of Archangel shifted between the White and Red Russians in the prior months, creating cesspools of feces which

³³ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 15.

³⁴ Anderson, 72-73.

³⁵ Ibid., 75.

³⁶ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Report of Chief Surgeon Jonas R Longley on the Work of the Medical Department, AEF, North Russia, for the Period Aug 1918-Mar 1919”, 3.

³⁷ BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 18 (9/4/18).

³⁸ BHL: Fred Kooyers, “Diary, 1918-1919 of Fred Kooyers”, George Albers Papers, 4 (9/6-9/9/19).

contaminated drinking water.³⁹ To the surprise of the men, Archangel would be one of the most sanitary places they would encounter in Russia. After early hardships with makeshift facilities, Archangel became the center for operations and the Americans turned an imperial-era educational facility into a decent hospital.⁴⁰ Accounts from the front illustrated the relative luxury of the city.

Sanitary conditions on the front were lacking if not entirely absent and doctors often could do little to stop deaths from disease. Soldiers rode in barges previously used to transport goods ranging from coal to livestock during early operations along the river front. Clarence Scheu wrote down his experience on the barges: “what a rotten hole they have dumped us into now, coal dust 2 inches thick, damp, filthy dungeon, we are sleeping on bottom [...] no light, ventilation, or anything”.⁴¹ Many of these soldiers still had early flu symptoms from their prior boat ride. Pvt. Arkins recorded the terror aboard his barge as multiple men died from disease compounded by a lack of care and poor conditions: “Man from Co. C dies on barge. Left in improvised coffin on open front of barge. Blood from underneath coffin trickles across floor of barge while we eat our hard tack and black tea”.⁴² Lt. Henry Katz, a medic from New York City, also travelled on the barges. He wrote of the poor accommodations upon landing in Beresnick, where several sick men had to be stored in a wood shed and three died subsequently.⁴³ Water sanitation posed another issue on the front. Sgt. John Crissman, who managed to avoid the Spanish Flu, commented on the issue: “Sick today for the first time since entering Army. Stomach must be poisoned from impure water. Water very poor. Wells very low so all waste material runs back into well”.⁴⁴ Civilian Russian homes were an improvement, albeit a small one.

When the soldiers lodged in towns and had accommodations with roofs, the Russian houses were often filthy and insect-ridden. Such was Corpl. Cleo Colburn’s experience, who

³⁹ Rhodes, 35.

⁴⁰ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 18, 265.

⁴¹ BHL: Scheu, 5.

⁴² BHL: Arkins, “Diary”, 5.

⁴³ BHL: Henry Katz, “Short summary of activities of Medical Personnel with First Battalion 339th Infantry”, Katz Papers, 1.

⁴⁴ BHL: John Sherman Crissman, “Diary”, John Crissman Papers, 4 (9/22/18).

renamed one of his early posts the “Cockroach Inn”.⁴⁵ As the weather cooled, the Russian families often brought their livestock inside with the soldiers, adding to the amalgamation of dirt and vermin.⁴⁶ Not all Polar Bears described Russian houses as dirty, however. Pvt. Roy Paul Rasmussen voiced a rare alternate opinion in a letter home: “Because I say they are log houses don’t think that they are not clean, for most of them are”.⁴⁷ While most men disagreed with Rasmussen, Russian homes had their perks over life outside on the front.

Despite unsanitary conditions, many Russian homes featured bath houses that functioned as steam rooms for bathing. Sgt. Silver Parrish described the bath houses: “They are made out of logs [...] and they are about 8 ft long [...] set [with] a rock furnace. They build a fire and when the water is hot they get in there and [throw] water on the hot rocks and it makes hot steam”.⁴⁸ These rare opportunities to bathe in a relaxing setting were revered by soldiers.⁴⁹ Chances to bathe came infrequently for soldiers on the front; Corpl. Frank Douma, in mid-October, had his “first bath in Russia and also washed [his] clothes. Richmond discovered some cooties”.⁵⁰ Lt. Ryan dryly noted his appreciation for these “monthly bath[s]”, which usually improved his bad moods: “Took a Russian bath and now feel 100% better”.⁵¹

Due to these circumstances, soldiers were constantly sick.⁵² The lack of available medics or useful supplies, especially in the early months of the campaign, contributed to the spread of disease and generally unhealthy conditions.⁵³ The poor sanitary environment that came to characterize North Russia for the Americans was further compounded by a lack of preparation and supplying, especially with medical supplies.

⁴⁵ BHL: Cleo Colburn, “Diary”, Cleo M. Colburn Papers, 1; Arkins, “Diary”, 28; Kenneth A. Skellenger, “Letter to Skellenger’s Brother”, Kenneth A. Skellenger Papers, 3 (4/10/19); Willett, Kindle Location 1752/7303.

⁴⁶ Rhodes, 50-51.

⁴⁷ BHL: Rasmussen, “Russians Can’t Feed Themselves”, (11/5/18).

⁴⁸ BHL: Silver Parrish, “Diary”, Silver Parrish Papers, 31.

⁴⁹ BHL: Parrish, 31; Ryan, “Diary”, 33 (10/4/18); Moore, Mead, Jahns, 165.

⁵⁰ BHL: Frank Douma, “Diary”, Frank W. Douma diary, 7 (10/10/18).

⁵¹ BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 41 (10/24/18), 33 (10/4/18).

⁵² Halliday, Kindle Location 2717/4001.

⁵³ BHL: Arkins, “Diary”, 5; Trombley, “Diary”, 15; Moore, Mead, Jahns, 89.

Supplying Deficiencies and Training Shortfalls

Early worries regarding medical supplies foreshadowed the poor planning which came to plague the expedition. Military command lacked foresight for proper supplies in the early months of the mission, and the AEFNR realized notable medical, dietary, clothing, and weaponry shortages after several weeks. Soldiers bemoaned the lacking few luxuries they reasonably desired, such as cigarettes and desert foods. The deficiency of basic items was a normal part of the Great War and the AEF in Europe also experienced food shortages.⁵⁴ However, the obscure geographic location of North Russia, compounded by the threat of German U-boats and the freezing of the White Sea, made resupplying rarer than in France. Willett proposed that the lack of enthusiasm for the campaign by the American military was a factor in the AEFNR's poor outfitting, citing Army Chief of Staff General Peyton March who wanted little to do with the expedition and refused to divert supplies and weapons from the Western Front.⁵⁵ This claim aligns with General Pershing's sentiment, as he too condemned the Allied efforts on other fronts like Palestine and Gallipoli, believing "that our task clearly lay on the Western Front and that we would have all we could do to beat the enemy there".⁵⁶ Without much help from the American military, supply issues became paramount early in the campaign and continued until evacuation.

Crucial supplies were lacking from the outset in clothing and medical capacities. As the transportation ships en route from England to Russia reached colder temperatures, the men noticed that their overcoats had been stowed in inaccessible cargo holds.⁵⁷ The outbreak of Spanish Flu demonstrated medical supply issues: "Eight days out at sea, all medical supplies were exhausted, and conditions became so congested in the ships' quarters that the sick, running high fever, were

⁵⁴ Kennedy, 209.

⁵⁵ Willett, Kindle Location 799/7303.

⁵⁶ Pershing, *My Experiences*, II, 149 in Kennedy, 172.

⁵⁷ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 13; Primm, 19.

compelled to lie in the hold or on deck exposed to the chill winds”.⁵⁸ Even after landing, the lack of provisions drove an early wedge between the Americans and British commanders. In one instance some claimed that medicine had been left in favor of British whiskey rations.⁵⁹

Many soldiers complained about living conditions, compounded by rain and offensive maneuvers, on the front. The contrast between Archangel and the front was stark: Sgt. Robert Granville remarked how his “office job [with the Medical corps of the 337th Field Hospital in Archangel] isn’t the easiest job in the world, but as far as physical comfort goes I’m one hundred percent better off than the men at the front”.⁶⁰ After landing at Archangel, the British ordered hundreds of American soldiers to depart for the front without a single blanket.⁶¹ The men spent countless nights sleeping without shelter or proper clothing for the cold that reached sub-zero temperatures. After several skirmishes in mid-September, Lt. Ryan guarded the front line for three nights without sleep, blankets, or fires (for stealth purposes). The climate, while not as cold in the fall as in the winter, challenged the men in different ways as it rained constantly. Due to the lack of bathing many soldiers, like Corpl. James Sibley, became encased in mud: “I fell down in that place and when I got up I was just a mass of mud rifle and everything was mud”.⁶² Oftentimes the troops spent nights in wet areas, compounding the cold. Lt. Ryan described his “worst night ever” which he spent “soaking wet” and Engineer Jay Bonnell further elaborated: “in a swamp all night [...] so we did not do any sleeping but walked back and forth all night to keep from freezing”.⁶³ In an interview conducted in the 1970s, veteran Levi Bartels of “K” Company claimed that he did not sleep inside until Christmas.⁶⁴ Ryan commented on the conditions’ impact on the morale of his

⁵⁸ Cudahy, 50.

⁵⁹ Willett, Kindle Location 882/7303.

⁶⁰ BHL: Robert Granville, “Letters”, Nora G. Frisbie Papers, 5 (3/23/19).

⁶¹ BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 19; Parrish, 6; Willett, Kindle Location 911/7303.

⁶² BHL: James Sibley, “Diary”, James Sibley Papers, 3 (11/11/18).

⁶³ BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 23; Jay Bonnell, “Reminiscence of the Polar Bear Expedition to Northern Russia 1918-1919 (typed narrative format)”, Jay H. Bonnell Papers, 1.

⁶⁴ BHL: Levi Bartels, “Polar Bear oral history project transcript. Glenn Johnson interviewing Levi Bartels, June 12, 1978”, Levi Bartels Papers, 2.

enlisted men: “The condition of the men is terrible. They have been out here for a week with water up to the knees”.⁶⁵

Soldiers often braved the elements in their poor lodgings without proper clothing for the environment nor supplies, like cigarettes, to boost their spirits. In the perpetually wet autumn fighting soldiers went without changes of clothing such as fresh socks.⁶⁶ In his diary, Pvt. John Piers remarked that he had his “first change of clothes since I left the Boat Nagoya” in November.⁶⁷ Veteran Harry Costello recalled how during “October many of our men were patrolling and fighting in shoes so worn out that their feet were practically on the ground” and that men on the front “had no change of underwear, their clothing was torn”.⁶⁸ Morale eroded further as the soldiers patrolled on many nights without cigarette rations.⁶⁹ Men like Ewald Billeau and Clarence Scheu, in dire need of smoking materials, resorted to smoking “tea leaves and dried moss”.⁷⁰ So pronounced was the effect of missing “smokes, which they craved above all”⁷¹ on morale that, after a three-week shortage, a delivery of cigarettes caused Sgt. Trombley to remark: “I have never seen such a change in a body of men”.⁷²

The lack of available quality food made the cold, wet nights hard to endure.⁷³ Willett noted the pervasiveness of food in the soldier experience: “Virtually every letter or diary of soldiers on the expedition made reference to the poor quality of food at the front”.⁷⁴ In September and October, soldiers fought for days with only the small amounts of food they had brought on their

⁶⁵ Ibid., 31 (10/3/18).

⁶⁶ BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 31.

⁶⁷ BHL: John Piers, “Diary (transcription)”, 4 (11/13/18).

⁶⁸ BHL: Harry J. Costello, *Why Did We Go to Russia?*, Harry J. Costello Papers, 27 (Detroit, MI: 1920).

⁶⁹ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 64.

⁷⁰ BHL: Ewald Billeau, “Photocopy of newspaper article Petoskey Evening News, Dec. 18, 1918, reprint of Billeau letter written on Oct. 25, 1918 from the Ewald H. Billeau letter, Oct. 1918”, Ewald H. Billeau Papers, 1 (10/25/18); Scheu, 7 (9/25/18).

⁷¹ BHL: Costello, 28.

⁷² BHL: Trombley, “Diary”, 19 (10/28/18); Crissman, “Diary”, 4.

⁷³ BHL: Sgt. R. S. Clark, “Hardtack”, Earl V. Amos Papers; Ernest Oliver Andrews, “Letter to Parents”, Ernest Oliver Andrews Papers, 8 (10/19/18); John Percy Clock, “Interview Transcript – “Polar Bears Remembered” June 25, 1978, Charlevoix, MI”, 4; Parrish, 6 (9/20/18); Ryan, “Diary”, 22 (9/15/18); Scheu, 6, 12.

⁷⁴ Willett, Kindle Location 2619/7303.

persons.⁷⁵ The meals provided by the British consisted of unfamiliar concoctions lacking nutritional value, such as the detested hardtack. Hardtack, a familiar ration for British soldiers of the era, is a dry biscuit that is usually tasteless and of hard texture. The disgusting and rigid nature of hardtack became a comical recollection for some Americans and rallied the men around a common distaste for British rations. In a letter home, Ernest Oliver Andrews commented on hardtack's texture: "believe me it is some hard tack".⁷⁶ Roger Sherman Clark humorously assessed hardtack in a poem:

How verdant they bloom in the field of my mem'ry-
 The feeds we enjoy in old Company "C",
 The mystery stew, the delicious "blumb-apple",
 And even the tan-liquor rationed as tea.
 I chuckle to think of the M & V [meat and vegetables] Mixture –
 That vegetable compound of flavor so rare;
 And last but not least, of the famous Iron Ration,
 The U.S.A. Hardtack, they fed to us there.
 The armor-plate Hardtack, the jaw-breaking Hardtack,
 The case-hardened Hardtack they fed to us there.⁷⁷

Not only was the food scarce and of poor quality, it was also unfamiliar amongst the Americans. Instead of standard American rations, the British replaced staple American foods with British ones. Supply issues were only one part of the larger motif of ill preparation.

The weaponry and training proved an equally disastrous aspect of the soldiers' experience. While in England, the men were stripped of their American guns and some were armed with the British-made Vickers gun. The Vickers gun utilized water-cooling technology and the sub-zero temperatures rendered it useless in crucial situations.⁷⁸ The men were also equipped with the inferior and detested Moison-Nagant rifles in favor of the Enfield rifles they had trained with.⁷⁹ Many of these rifles had the tendency to misfire, resulting in American soldiers accidentally shooting themselves. Lt. Costello remembered the Russian rifles: "we lacked everything but the

⁷⁵ BHL: Parrish, 6 (9/20/18); Ryan, "Diary", 22 (9/16/18).

⁷⁶ BHL: Andrews, "Letter", 8 (10/19/18).

⁷⁷ BHL: R. S. Clark, "Hardtack", Earl V. Amos Papers, 3.

⁷⁸ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 68.

⁷⁹ Willett, Kindle Location 788/7303.

Russian type of rifle fitted with a bayonet that would not stay on. Any American soldier who has even held one of these Russian rifles in his hands will swear they can “shoot around corners”.”⁸⁰

Due to the lack of American arms, the doughboys became acquainted with a variety of guns from around the world: the British Lewis and Vickers machine guns, the one-pounder, the French Chauchat automatic rifle, French rifle grenade weapons, Stokes mortars, the French 75 gun, and various artillery variations.⁸¹ This aspect of the AEFNR experience aligns with that of a doughboy fighting in Europe, as Kennedy explained “the AEF in fact purchased more of its supplies in Europe than it shipped from the United States”.⁸² Still, the quality of American armament displeased the soldiers. Lt. Ryan utilized his prior military knowledge to point out the deficiency in equipment, claiming that the American troops were not nearly as well prepared as they were in the Spanish American War.⁸³

Several recollections illustrate the difficulty posed by weaponry. As temperatures dropped in the winter, Lt. Katz and a mixed group of Russians and Americans patrolled near the Bolshevik-occupied Kodema. During the advance, they noticed that their one pound cannon and machine guns had frozen.⁸⁴ While Katz escaped the situation unscathed, the malfunctioning guns added to the unpredictable rigors of the campaign. The story of Sgt. Crissman’s first combat experience reflected the variable usefulness of the weapons supplied to the AEFNR. On September 21 near Shenkursk, Crissman and his men engaged the enemy: “At 10:30 AM our boat fired upon my Machine Guns and snipers [...] we sailed under fire with our MG and Artillery continually throwing shells into town. This is the first time we have been under fire”.⁸⁵ Crissman remarked that, while the “MG [was] very effective,” some weapons did not work as well: “In first

⁸⁰ BHL: Costello, 28.

⁸¹ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 40.

⁸² Kennedy, 195.

⁸³ BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 32.

⁸⁴ BHL: Katz, 2 (12/5/18).

⁸⁵ BHL: Crissman, “Diary”, 3 (9/21/18).

fray going over hill I got jam in loading so haven't fired a shot yet".⁸⁶ Such stories reveal the problems that plagued many of the guns used by the Polar Bears. While Crissman and Katz were lucky to escape with jammed weapons, many soldiers were not.

Many Allied troops were ill-equipped to use the weapons. The British military shipped armored automobiles to provide support, yet the vehicles quickly got stuck in mud and became a nonfactor.⁸⁷ While British airpower, naval guns, and the lack of experience of the Reds compensated for these disadvantages and allowed the Allies to swiftly take territory in the early stages of the conflict, the cold winter rendered these offensive benefits useless. The Americans soon found themselves outmanned and outgunned as the campaign turned from offensive to defensive with the switch of British command in October 1918. The Americans struggled as a fighting force early on as well. Just like the AEF in Europe, the AEFNR were new to combat, and they reflected this learning curve in the first weeks.⁸⁸ The British allotted subpar commanders and soldiers for the "sideshow" expedition in Russia, resulting in unrealistic military planning and below average soldiers to carry out such plans.⁸⁹ Rhodes argued that, as "both sides were forced to rely on untrained, poorly motivated second class troops who were outfitted with improvised equipment [...] the military operations in North Russia were often amateurish" when compared "with the professional conduct of the war on the western front".⁹⁰ Consequently, the Allied forces fighting alongside the Americans often did not meet their objectives.⁹¹

Violence

Many soldiers reflected on their first exposures to combat in North Russia. David Kennedy noted that "a romantic view of war had a peculiar hold on the American mind, which still throbbed

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 21.

⁸⁸ Kennedy, 200.

⁸⁹ BHL: Hugo Salchow, "Interview transcript (conducted by Sheldon Annis in 1971)", Hugo K. Salchow Papers, 4.

⁹⁰ Rhodes, x.

⁹¹ Willett, Kindle Location 1159/7303.

with memories of the Civil War”.⁹² The same “affirmative and inspiring” attitude toward combat that appeared in the literary works of American soldiers in France, namely Alan Seeger, Robert Service, and Arthur Empey, also pervaded AEFNR writing.⁹³ However, some AEFNR recollections diverge from Seeger’s glorified assessment of the “magnificent orchestra of war”,⁹⁴ perhaps due to differences in the settings and durations of fighting between Russia and France. By delving into several soldiers’ initial reactions to combat, the similarities and differences between the war in France and North Russia become apparent.

Several Polar Bears, like Seeger, Service, and Empey, accepted Theodore Roosevelt’s vision of WWI as their own “Great Adventure”.⁹⁵ First Lieutenant George W. Stoner wrote about his first combat experience in his diary: “Wed., Sept. 11 – “Baptism of Fire” 1st battle – very successful, interesting, and exciting, no one injured”.⁹⁶ Sgt. Parris emphasized the Americans’ tenacity in an early skirmish to retake Seltso: “we charged yelling like a pack of wolves, and the enemy fell before our onslaught and many went down, never to get up”.⁹⁷ Pvt. Rasmussen also stressed the casualties the Americans inflicted upon the Bolsheviks: “didn’t see or hear anything until they fired on us at 5 A.M. [...] we rushed across the swamp, getting all wet. In a few minutes we were on a hill where we lay on the frozen ground fighting Bolsheviks [...] At the battle we kept low all the time listening to the bullets flying overhead. We lost six men and four wounded. We killed thirty and wounded fifty of their men”.⁹⁸ Not all soldiers glorified war in their writing, however.

Some AEFNR writing illustrated alternative impressions of war. For Ernest Andrews the first battle was almost mechanical: “I have been in one 30 hr engagement with the Bolsheviks and

⁹² Kennedy, 178.

⁹³ Kennedy, 184; BHL: Scheu, 6 (9/13/18).

⁹⁴ Seeger to Mother, Oct. 17, 1914, Seeger Papers in Kennedy, 181.

⁹⁵ Kennedy, 185.

⁹⁶ BHL: George Stoner, “Diary”, George W. Stoner Papers, 7 (9/11/18).

⁹⁷ BHL: Parrish, 11 (10/18)

⁹⁸ BHL: Roy Paul Rasmussen, “A reminiscence covering the period June 1918-March 1919, probably written from the diary”, Roy Paul Rasmussen Papers, 28 (10/1/18).

drew first blood. I often wondered how I would feel to [fire at] a human being [...] but when I got to it I had no time to think about it and after the first shot it was easy enough”.⁹⁹ Lt. Ryan wrote in a similar tone: “This is my first experience under fire and it will certainly leave and [sic] impression that will all be remembered [...] They are [shelling] all around me, high explosives and shrapnel”.¹⁰⁰ Soldier Lawrence K. Montgomery portrayed the duality of his early combat experience, remembering it humorously for his drunkenness but also describing the fear: “I was loaded. Because we was going over the top at six o’clock across the river to take ‘em. I never was so drunk in my life. I never was. Don’t let a guy tell you that when you’re going over the top, that you’re not scared because he’s a liar if he tells you that”.¹⁰¹ Corpl. Frank Douma presented a far bleaker assessment of combat in North Russia:

Leek and I had to go to the farthest [sic] forward point and crawl to the wire fence. The B Company men refused to go. We lay there in the mud all night. Bullets were constantly flying over head [sic]. It turned cold toward morning and we suffered something terrible. At 6:00 A.M. we were sent in. On the way in a machine gun opened up on us and the bullets tore up the ground all around us but neither one of us were hit. It was the worst night I ever hope to spend. War surely is hell.¹⁰²

After a battle in late September, Pvt. Arkins wrote about the first casualty he saw in a gruesome depiction: “The sight of that first casualty I’ll never forget; the lower part of face a bloody [sic] mess; the eye lids swollen and blue and the head resting on the inside of the upturned helmet”.¹⁰³ These dark and realistic portrayals of violence continued as the initial shock and awe wore off. While the scale of the campaign in North Russia paled in comparison to France, the fighting was similarly grueling.

The violence in Russia and France had similarities. Armored trains exchanged fire from both sides, adding to the chorus of artillery (Photograph 1.v). Several soldiers accused the Bolos

⁹⁹ BHL: Andrews, “Letter to Parents”, 11 (10/19/18).

¹⁰⁰ BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 21 (9/15/18).

¹⁰¹ BHL: Lawrence K. Montgomery, “Interview Transcript – “Polar Bears Remembered” June 25, 1978, Charlevoix, MI”, John Percy Clock Papers, 7.

¹⁰² BHL: Douma, “Diary”, 10 (11/13/18).

¹⁰³ BHL: Arkins, “Diary”, 8 (9/21/18).

of using chemical warfare in the form of gas shells, although none bore witness to such an attack.¹⁰⁴ Pvt. Arkins' description of his first major battle also revealed similar tactics to fighting in France, as the men fixed bayonets.¹⁰⁵ Widespread artillery strikes and the subsequent bouts of shell shock characterized both theatres of the conflict. Soldiers in both the AEF and AEFNR expressed duress under shellfire, a helpless state created by new weapons of war.¹⁰⁶ Corporal Douma's first exposure to violence near Toulgas was similar to the trench warfare in France: "We came upon the Bolos [...] and they opened up on us with machine guns and pompoms. We had to dig in right where we were. That night we moved back to a fence in back of which we dug a system of trenches. We slept in the trenches all that night".¹⁰⁷ Trenches were a commonplace feature of the Russian expedition but were not as extensive as those in the West.¹⁰⁸ AEFNR soldiers constructed blockhouses in addition to trenches. These square wooden structures served as lodging and defensive outposts to provide warmer accommodations. Fundamental differences, besides scale, existed in the violence experienced by the AEF and AEFNR.

The chief difference between France and Russia lay in the pace and frequency of combat. Soldiers in North Russia shifted between sleepless days under heavy fire and weeklong stretches with minimal occurrences.¹⁰⁹ European soldiers remember the war as years of grinding trench warfare, a marathon of attrition.¹¹⁰ **For the AEF, of which "few saw sustain or repeated battle" in their several-month campaign, the war was a 10K.**¹¹¹ The campaign in North Russia was a series of sprints.¹¹² Cudahy remembered the early state of affairs: "There were no reinforcements at Archangel ready to relieve the jaded soldiers so far away, [...] no diversion, no break in the

¹⁰⁴ BHL: Arkins, "Diary", 26; Skellenger, "Diary", 6.

¹⁰⁵ BHL: Arkins, "Diary", 8 (9/21/18).

¹⁰⁶ Kennedy, 211.

¹⁰⁷ BHL: Douma, "Diary", 6 (9/20/18).

¹⁰⁸ Keegan, 147.

¹⁰⁹ BHL: Skellenger, "Statement describing an explosion at Shenkursk", Kenneth A. Skellenger Papers, 2; Douma, "Diary", 16; Ryan, "Diary", 23.

¹¹⁰ Philpott, 10.

¹¹¹ Kennedy, 205.

¹¹² Rhodes, 57.

gloomy, monotonous, despairing hours; no relaxation from the ceaseless vigilance in the guard against surprise attack”.¹¹³ Such conditions led to extended engagements. For example, Clarence Scheu described an October retreat from Toulgas: “B. co. has had about 6 hours of sleep out of the past 84, a few of the fellows dropped in their tracks, on the march”.¹¹⁴ While the pace changed in the latter months of the intervention, the pre-Armistice period was extremely intense for many of the AEFNR, unlike anything experienced by most in the AEF due to its prolonged nature.

Americans and the Russian People

Every AEFNR man interacted with Russian people in some form. Many fought alongside Russian soldiers, went on dates with Russian girls, lived with Russian peasant families, and discussed the political situation with Russian elites. Americans in North Russia saw a great variety of Russian people – different ethnic groups and people of different socioeconomic class – and their impressions were as varied as the Russian people themselves.

Most Polar Bears met Russians for the first time as they landed in September 1918 and they had mixed opinions. First Lieutenant Clarence J. Primm remembered how, before the Americans disembarked at Archangel, local Russians rowed small boats out to the troop transports to plead for cigarettes and food as the Bolsheviks had stripped the city clean before retreating.¹¹⁵ Upon landing, the poverty in Archangel was made apparent: Sgt. Parrish, Lt. Ryan, and Corpl. Kooyers noted the “down trodden”¹¹⁶ and “filthy”¹¹⁷ “Russian civilians [...] eating out of our garbage cans” (Photograph 1.vi).¹¹⁸ Clarence Scheu was initially skeptical of the Russian civilians: “natives seem hostile, but not openly, they seem to take us as a necessary evil, yet are terrified of

¹¹³ Cudahy, 59.

¹¹⁴ BHL: Scheu, 9 (10/15/18).

¹¹⁵ BHL: Primm, 20.

¹¹⁶ BHL: Parrish, 2.

¹¹⁷ BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 18 (9/4/18).

¹¹⁸ BHL: Kooyers, “Diary”, 4 (9/6-9/9/18).

the Bolos”.¹¹⁹ Many Americans, like Sgt. Crissman, were unable to speak with the Russians at all: “Have some trouble getting along with Russians. Learning the Russian language”.¹²⁰ Despite early communicating and trust issues, many developed friendships with Russian civilians.

Many high-class Russians sought refuge in Archangel during the Civil War, despite the abysmal conditions in the city. Corpl. Hugo Salchow remembered his impression that “Archangel itself was the home of the Russian aristocrisy [sic] where [those] who had fled from Petrograd [...] found refuge”.¹²¹ In a letter home, Pvt. Rasmussen further detailed the Russian aristocracy: “The richer class dress and act enough like the people of the U.S. that you could not tell them from the Yanks if it were not for their language”.¹²² Ernest Andrews too found that “the Russians who have any education are very well educated but they are only a small part of the population and those who are not well educated can neither read nor write”.¹²³ The majority of Russian-American friendships were with these “elite” Russian men, who were more likely to speak English.¹²⁴

Many Americans befriended Russians and came to admire parts of a generalized Russian character. Brigadier General Wildst Preston Richardson, upon arriving in Archangel in April 1919, wrote that “relations between our troops, both officers and men, and the Russian people generally were cordial and sympathetic, with scarcely an instance of friction”.¹²⁵ Ernest Andrews commented on the language benefits of his friendships with Russians: “we are also becoming aquanited [sic] with some Russian young men who are in the Russian army [...] and a few boys who are attending school and studying English and we often spend an evening to our mutual advantage and I find myself able to [speak] Ruski better every day”.¹²⁶ Andrews even struck up a

¹¹⁹ BHL: Scheu, 7 (9/25/18).

¹²⁰ BHL: Crissman, “Diary”, 3 (9/18/18).

¹²¹ BHL: Salchow, 4.

¹²² BHL: Rasmussen, “Correspondence- Seeing the Land of the Midnight Sun”, (9/11/18).

¹²³ BHL: Andrews, “Letter to Parents”, 4-5 (12/25/18).

¹²⁴ BHL: Arkins, “Diary”, 23.

¹²⁵ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Brig. Gen. Wilds P Richardson’s “Notes on the War and on the North Russian Expedition”, n.d.”, 51.

¹²⁶ BHL: Andrews, “Letter to Parents”, 4 (12/25/18).

friendship with a young male “expert Electrical engineer and a university graduate of Petrograd” as “we are of course interested in many of the same things”.¹²⁷ Even those who did not write of friendships with Russian civilians appreciated Russian hospitality. Corporal C.E. Riordan applauded such characteristics: “The Russians are quite hospitable and usually trot out the steaming samovar¹²⁸ a Russian institution which is universally popular with the Yanks”.¹²⁹

Similar to France and despite the anti-sexual vice campaigns by military institutions, many American men in North Russia sought out relations with native Russian women and possibly prostitutes.¹³⁰ Some men spent holidays with Russian women.¹³¹ Others “met nice Drasky (Drozhka) girl[s]” and took them to dances in Archangel.¹³² Some, like Corporal Douma, had other experiences: “Last night a young Russian woman crawled into my bunk with me and wanted to spend the night. I kicked her out without much ado”.¹³³ No matter the level of interaction, many of the AEFNR agreed on two things: the beauty of Russian women and their intent on dating them. Douma summarized the situation in Archangel: “There are some very pretty girls in this town. The first we have seen in Russia and we had dates almost every evening”.¹³⁴ Despite preventative efforts by the army, venereal diseases plagued the AEFNR to a large degree, prompting lectures by military command.¹³⁵ Americans did not always describe interactions with Russian civilians in such light terms, however.

Many Americans observed the life of Russian peasants on the front lines. After his first trip to the River Front, Ernest Andrews wrote back to his parents: “When we left the barges and marched through the villages [...] I began to realize what poverty meant”.¹³⁶ Pvt. Rasmussen, like

¹²⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁸ A Russian tea urn.

¹²⁹ BHL: C.E. Riordan, “Letter to James and “Buzzards””, C.E. Riordan Papers, 2 (3/20/19).

¹³⁰ Kennedy, 185-187.

¹³¹ BHL: Walter McKenzie, “Diary”, Walter I. McKenzie Papers, 38 (1/7/19).

¹³² BHL: Cleo Colburn, “Diary”, 3.

¹³³ BHL: Douma, “Diary”, 13 (1/20/19).

¹³⁴ BHL: Douma, “Diary”, 18 (4/8-13/19); Henry Abel, “Newspaper clipping”, Henry Abel Papers; Kooyers, “Diary”, 10 (1/30/19).

¹³⁵ BHL: Kooyers, “Diary”, 10; Willett, Kindle Location 2863/7303.

¹³⁶ BHL: Andrews, “Letter to Parents”, 3 (10/19/18).

Andrews, had never seen a peasantry class like that of Russia before: “The peasant class of people here are much different than those of the U.S. I feel sorry for some of them”.¹³⁷ Some attributed the poverty to the desolate land, remarking that the peasants “seem to be able to eke out a bare existence from the soil” (Photograph 1.vii and 1.viii).¹³⁸ The plight of the poorest Russians also worried engineers, who saw the nature of labor in Russia: “loading is done by boys and girls. Some not more than twelve years of age. I can hardly bear to look at these mere children doing men’s work. Their lot in this life certainly must be hard to bear. Scenes like this make a person realize what war moans. It seems like the innocent suffer most”.¹³⁹ The conditions faced by poor Russian peasants led some in the AEFNR to empathize with their situation.

The experiences made many reconsider their preconceived notions of Russians: “The people, for the most part seem very friendly and [...] They are very polite amongst themselves [...] From the observations I have made here, I believe, we in American have a wrong conception of the Russian, who we consider boorish in manner [...] I have formed the opposite opinion”.¹⁴⁰ Other Polar Bears confirmed their “respect for the Russian citizen”, lauding the craftsmanship and character of the “honest, decent, straight-forward, fine [Russian] people”.¹⁴¹ Salchow recalled a tale that demonstrated the point:

There was a story – I know it’s true – of a Russian taxi driver, he drove [...] a sleigh pulled by a horse [...] He was one of those who helped transport military supplies [...] [and] he found that they had overpaid him [...] [and] he drove fifty miles to give back some, oh I don’t know, to give back fifteen rubles – some ridiculous amount like seventy five cents or a dollar and a half – he drove all this way to give it back.¹⁴²

The AEFNR’s contact with civilians made them reassess the character of the aggregate Russian people, and many came to appreciate Russian cultural values.

¹³⁷ BHL: Rasmussen, “Correspondence- Seeing the Land of the Midnight Sun”, (9/11/18).

¹³⁸ BHL: Arkins, “Newspaper clipping, “Forging ahead after Bolsheviki: E. L. Arkins writes interestingly of trip from America to Russia,” Dec. 20, 1918 from the Edwin L. Arkins diary, 1918-1919”, 2.

¹³⁹ BHL: Harry Duink, “Diary”, Harry Duink Papers, 39.

¹⁴⁰ BHL: Arkins, “Newspaper clipping, “Forging ahead after Bolsheviki: E. L. Arkins writes interestingly of trip from America to Russia,” Dec. 20, 1918 from the Edwin L. Arkins diary, 1918-1919”, 2.

¹⁴¹ BHL: Salchow, 5; Andrews, “Letter to Parents”, 4 (10/19/18); Rasmussen, “Correspondence- Seeing the Land of the Midnight Sun”, (9/4/18); Parrish, 26.

¹⁴² BHL: Salchow, 5-6.

Health, supply, training, combat, and Russian-American relations were key issues in the early months. These themes continued and impacted morale as the intervention dragged on. Despite unideal circumstances, the American reaction was not pronounced in the fall; they were an obedient force. The soldiers expressed dissatisfaction in their writing but conditions did not create mutinous sentiment. The Armistice depressed American morale. Defiant behavior largely began after November 1918 as the continued poor conditions, declining temperatures, further mistreatment at the hands of the British, and ultimately a lack of a coherent policy further undermined the fighting spirit of the AEFNR.

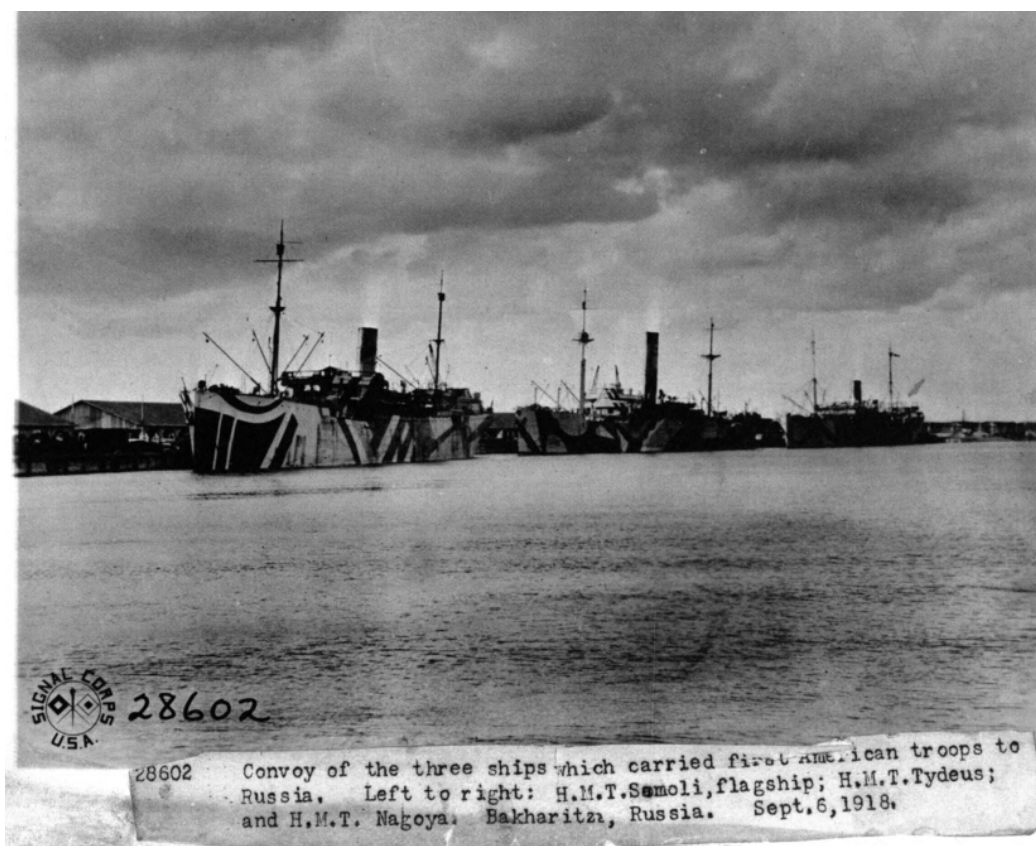
Photographs

1.i: While Lauer's photograph was taken in 1919, the foreign landscape the American encountered in September 1918 was not drastically different.



Source: BHL: Frank Lauer, "Archangel Waterfront", Frank Lauer Papers.

1.ii



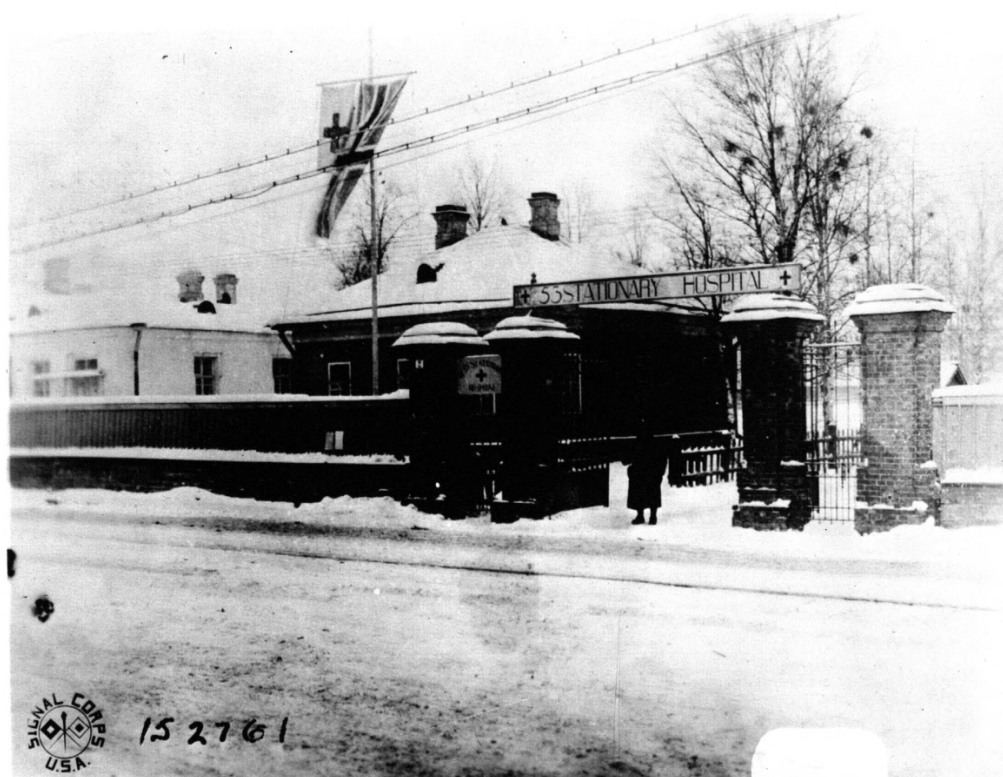
Source: BHL: Print No. 28602, September 6, 1918, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL.

1.iii: "Company M, 339th Inf. after resting an hour, following the 17 hours [sic] march through the woods and swamps, set out again for the front. They are seen in this picture starting out along the railroad line. One of the armored cars use by the Allies is seen in the distance. Obozerskaya, Russia."



Source: BHL: Print No. 28617, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL.

1.iv: "Entrance to the 53rd Stationary hospital (English) in which a number of the American soldiers died from the Spanish influenza, soon after the arrival of the first American forces in Archangel. At present venereal cases are being treated in this hospital. Archangel, Russia."



Source: BHL: Print No. 152761, December 9, 1918, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL.

1.v: Americans on an armored train



Source: John E. Wilson, *The Arctic Antics of the North Russian Transportation Corps of the U.S. Army*, 63.

1.vi: "Line of natives of Archangel, Russia, waiting to get an allowance of bread. Military authorities provide the civil population who cannot get them otherwise, with certain articles of food. Archangel, Russia."



Source: BHL: Print No. 34609, October 7, 1918, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL.

1.vii: "Russians preparing land for cultivation. Bakharitza, Russia."



Source: BHL: Print No. 39242, September 6, 1918, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL.

1.viii: "Russian woman with her horse and cart hauling supplies for soldiers. Bakharitza, Russia."



Source: BHL: Print No. 39251, September 5, 1918, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL.

Chapter Two: A Crisis of Morale

November 1918 – June 1919

*[We] are in danger of annihilation [sic], the old Russian
bear is beginning to show her fangs¹*
-Clarence Scheu

Initially, fears over German ambitions in Russia motivated the soldiers.² Multiple soldiers claimed evidence of German influence. Pvt. Arkins described an encounter with a wounded German-speaking Bolshevik soldier and later attributed the efficacy of the Red fighting force to German leadership.³ In October, Ernest Andrews wrote of finding German ammunition and implied that German troops were in Russia: “[the town] had been stripped of their [sic] cushions by the Bolsheviks, I suppose for German use”.⁴ The November ceasefire undermined this rationale.

Soldiers who had excitedly fought to end German ambitions in Russia felt demoralized on Armistice Day. Arkins, a firm believer in the German conspiracy who had proclaimed he was “glad and willing to share in this struggle against German Militarism” in Russia,⁵ wrote a poem the night of the Armistice: “On the Western Front, the firing has ceased; / No more will they fight against Prussia, / But here in the Winter, our danger’s increased, / For we are fighting in Russia”.⁶ PFC William Lawson echoed Arkins: “When I hear of the boys in France getting ready to go home it sure makes me feel blue, I can picture you waiting and here we are fighting for another nation”.⁷ The AEFNR lusted for the jubilations across Europe and America: “We would have given anything we owned and mortgaged our every expectation to have been one of that great

¹ BHL: Scheu, 8.

² Moore, Mead, Jahns, 217.

³ BHL: Arkins, “Diary”, 8, 18.

⁴ BHL: Andrews, “Letter”, 11-12 (10/19/18).

⁵ BHL: Arkins, “Newspaper clipping”, 3.

⁶ BHL: Arkins, ““In Retrospect,” an unfinished poem about the 339th Infantry in Russia”, 1 (11/11/18).

⁷ BHL: William S. Lawson, “Russia, Archangel”, Andrew Babicki Collection, (2/6/19).

delirious, riotous mob that surged over Paris on Armistice Day”.⁸ The ceasefire had effects on morale that surpassed the disappointment on Armistice Day.

With the Germans out of the picture, soldiers were baffled by their continued presence in North Russia. The predicament left Sgt. Clark perplexed: “Sent to Archangel for the express purpose of guarding supplies, which did not exist, against the inroads of German forces, long since withdrawn”.⁹ YMCA worker Ralph Albertson visited the fronts shortly after the Armistice and summarized the sentiment: “Everywhere, on every occasion, I was asked [...] “What are we here for?” “The Armistice is signed, why are we fighting?” “What have we against the Bolsheviki?””.¹⁰ The Armistice also augmented the effects of preexisting conditions.

The doughboys had fought through ineffectual leadership, asymmetric weaponry allocations, harsh environmental conditions, inadequate supplies, and brutal violence. Despite these hardships, the Americans’ records were devoid of defiant sentiment before the Armistice. The ceasefire illuminated the lack of reasoning behind the campaign and furthered the erosion of American morale. The troops lamented their redirection from France to the icy woods of North Russia.¹¹ C. B. Knight, in a letter to “The Stars and Stripes”, asked to be updated on the war in France, “where we belong”.¹² The long exchange time of correspondences to and from Russia hurt morale, as men could go months without communication from home. The freezing of navigable waterways made these lengthy correspondences nonexistent in the winter months.

Cold Weather

In the fall and winter the doughboys often lodged outdoors and some fared without overcoats.¹³ Corpl. Salchow remembered how the dwindling hours of daylight added to the glum

⁸ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 102.

⁹ BHL: Clark, “What Ails the ANREF?”, 11.

¹⁰ Ralph Albertson, *Fighting Without a War*, 6-7 in Rhodes, 68.

¹¹ BHL: Andrews, “Letter”, 2 (12/25/18); Primm, 88.

¹² BHL: C.B. Knight, “Newspaper clippings”, Henry Abel Papers, 1.

¹³ BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 22.

tone of the expedition: “the land is so gloomy and grim [...] long nights – and during the winter the days are three four hours maybe [...] [and] it really never gets light. And you have an army up there [...] who doesn’t know when they’re going to get out, it does something to them”.¹⁴ Several soldiers noted first snowfall in mid-October, but the fall of 1918 in North Russia was more rainy than snowy.¹⁵ This changed after the Armistice. In late March, Corpl. Riordan wrote that “one expression you frequently hear is, it’s snowing again boys. The snow has shown no disposition to melt yet”.¹⁶ Snow remained a constant during the expedition; one man noted snowy weather as late as June 12, two days before he left Russia.¹⁷ The deep snowbanks that began accumulating in the fall posed greater problems in the winter (Photograph 2.i).

As the snow amassed throughout the winter, the campaign became even bleaker. Wounded men perished after only minutes in the freezing temperatures. The cold also had deleterious effects on men with preexisting conditions, leading one to remark how “in this climate a man with [pneumonia] has no chance to recuperate, they are nearly always casualties”.¹⁸ Even for Michigan boys the arctic conditions presented new extremes; Sgt. Francis George Robins remarked in March that “Michigan’s cold blizzards haven’t anything on this climate”.¹⁹ The shelling of enemy encampments, usually in the form of blockhouses, was core to both sides’ strategies and left soldiers to weather the arctic cold without shelter.²⁰ Men, like PFC Lawson, complained about the cold even more than the war: “its [sic] not the bullets but it is the cold”.²¹ Frostbite became a common occurrence during patrols and heavy snowfall further shifted the odds in favor of the

¹⁴ BHL: Salchow, 9.

¹⁵ BHL: Arkins, “Diary”, 11 (10/21/18); Ryan, “Diary”, 40.

¹⁶ BHL: Riordan, 3.

¹⁷ BHL: Rasmussen, “Diary”, 33.

¹⁸ BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 32.

¹⁹ BHL: F. George Robins, “Correspondence”, F. George Robins Papers, 4 (3/24/19).

²⁰ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 107; Such tactics were characteristic of WWI, for more see: William Philpott, *War of Attrition: Fighting the First World War* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2014).

²¹ BHL: Lawson, “Letter from Russia, Archangel”, Babicki Collection, (2/6/19).

defense.²² Nevertheless, neither Allied nor Bolshevik commanders ceased operations. Aggressive maneuvers in extreme weather often led to fatalities.

The image of snow burned into some soldiers' memories. Richard W. Ballensinger, a captain in "H" Company, described an offensive in his diary: "advancing in the face of heavy machine gun fire for about 500 yards through waist deep snow".²³ Corpl. Douma wrote a vivid account of the snow's effect on morale in his diary:

The snow was waist deep and the going was very hard. Was on patrol again last night. It was very realistic. Three towns were burning at one time and machine guns were popping on all sides [...] The snow was awful. I am getting very worn out as are all the other boys. Tonight we are completely surrounded and cut off. Things look pretty dark and is [sic] we don't get help we are done for. Still patrolling.²⁴

Even in interviews conducted in the 1970s, veterans dwelled on the snowy battlefields. Lawrence Montgomery recalled: "One morning, one Sunday morning, this was at Kodish, they call it the land of red snow [...] fighting was mostly open [...] so you just straight open fighting, and [snow] was just as red as they said it was".²⁵ Corpl. Salchow remembered: "you were in snow up to your waiste [sic], and you couldn't even walk, let alone fight".²⁶ The snow had a clear impact on AEFNR morale and cold weather affected the men in other ways as well.

The soldiers' footwear was incredibly inadequate and ill-suited for snow. Many complained repeatedly about the Shackleton boots they had been issued (Photograph 2.ii). In Shenkursk in late January, after realizing that the Allies were outmanned and outgunned, military leadership ordered a daring nighttime retreat. The boots, designed by the famous British artic explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, provided a warm boot that worked splendidly when standing completely still.²⁷ Upon movement in the snow the boots became "rudderless skates".²⁸ During the

²² BHL: Rasmussen, "Reminiscence", 33; Moore, Mead, Jahns, 129-130; Cudahy, 59.

²³ BHL: Richard W. Ballensinger, "Field Diary Company H", Edward Flaherty papers, 6.

²⁴ BHL: Douma, "Diary", 15 (3/3/19).

²⁵ BHL: Montgomery, "Interview", 25.

²⁶ BHL: Salchow, 3.

²⁷ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 143.

²⁸ BHL: Primm, 87.

hasty retreat, the men “had to hike in our stockings because the road was too slippery for Shackelton boots,” resulting in cases of frostbite.²⁹ So profound was the uselessness of the boots that they became the subject of a satirical poem by Jay Bonnell:

I am the guy, I'm the giddy galeet,
Who tried to chase in the Schackelton boot.
Out of the house and into the street
I find it not easy to keep on my feet,
One step forward and two steps back,
A sideslip, and down with a Hell of a thack.
Up like a fairy, and forward I shoot
All on account of the Schackelton boot.³⁰

The boots were such a disaster that they became a comical subject for Riordan too: “At reveille I can crawl out from under 12 or 15 blankets, dress in a room that has a temp. of 13 below, [...] [and] slide down two flights of stairs in my Shackleton boots in three steps”.³¹ The traction-less boots seared into the memories of soldiers as a testament to the lack of foresight which characterized the expedition. Even as winter clothing arrived, the lack of available replacements left the doughboy's clothing in poor shape. The local Russians produced “footgear a thousand times better” and many Americans bartered with locals or reused dead Bolshevik's footwear.³² The cold weather also altered the men's experiences indirectly.

The geographic location of Archangel slowed and eventually halted mail and medical³³ exchanges with the United States as the White Sea froze. The men treasured mail from home.³⁴ Corpl. Douma summarized the feeling: “It surely seems good to get mail. I wish we could get some every week”.³⁵ As the ports became unnavigable the letters took longer to reach their destinations before halting completely. The soldiers grimly noted that important news from home

²⁹ BHL: Douma, “Diary”, 12 (1/23/19); Ryan, “Diary”, 23.

³⁰ BHL: Bonnell, “An Ode to the Schackelton Boot (By the one who tackled it)”, Jay H. Bonnell Papers.

³¹ BHL: Riordan, 4.

³² BHL: Primm, 88.

³³ Evacuation of injured and sick soldiers also slowed because of the frozen White Sea. Over one hundred evacuations occurred from September to December, yet only twenty-two unfit soldiers were evacuated in the winter months, and no soldiers left from February until June, in Moore, Mead, Jahns, 269.

³⁴ BHL: Parrish, 17; Lawson, “Russia, Somewhere”, (February 1919); Crissman, “Diary”, 5 (10/21/18); Skellenger, “Diary”, 10.

³⁵ BHL: Douma, “Diary”, 18 (4/2/19).

could take months to reach them: “Letters and papers are as a rule two months in reaching here from the States so you can see we are pretty remote from news”.³⁶ Building on the ever-present difficult conditions, the absence of mail from loved ones ended the regular comforting correspondences the AEFNR cherished. The lack of communication brought about feelings of “hopelessness” in “complete isolation during the six months of winter”.³⁷ The letters and diaries penned by the men of the AEFNR took a different tone during this time, especially in the treatment of their peers in the Allied armies.

Experience in a Polyglot Army

Despite some of the Polar Bears coming from immigrant families themselves, many of the Americans had never been part of a community as diverse as the multiethnic Allied armies.³⁸ American forces supplemented the Allied operation along several key fronts, often relieving weary French or British troops. For many the experience of serving alongside foreign men was a noteworthy experience (Photograph 2.iii). Men of the AEFNR had varied experiences within this multiethnic coalition but they unanimously hated the British.

Acting as part of a great Allied coalition was a staple of World War I, and the question of American troop amalgamation proved a controversial point in Europe as well.³⁹ General John J. Pershing, Commander in Chief of the AEF, opposed amalgamation because of how unpopular the move would be with American troops and civilians.⁴⁰ While Pershing and his British counterparts eventually compromised, amalgamating a small amount of American troops into the British Army in exchange for trans-Atlantic transport services, the troops were for emergencies only and

³⁶ BHL: Riordan, 1; Skellenger, “Diary”, 10; Rasmussen, “Seeing the Land of the Midnight Sun”; Parrish, 17.

³⁷ Cudahy, 59.

³⁸ Even in the AEF alone, “*The Stars and Stripes* [...] reported that the AEF censors were required to scan letters penned by American troops in forty-nine different languages”, in Kennedy, 157.

³⁹ The British and French governments wanted American troops to be incorporated into their own units and requested such as early as April 1917, in Kennedy, 170.

⁴⁰ Kennedy, 172.

American commanders could overrule their British equals.⁴¹ The situation in Russia was different, and the British commanded the entire operation to the chagrin of the AEFNR. Still, the diverse experience included more nationalities than just the British.

American impressions of Russian soldiers were mostly negative. The AEFNR's White Russian peers posed real dangers in combat and they were prone to desert.⁴² Counterrevolutionary Russians fought in several groups alongside the Americans: the Caucasian Cossack Regiment, the Russian National Army, and the Slavo-British Legion.⁴³ The Russians continuously reflected their inability to use the artillery in a decisive manner, leading Lt. Ryan to lament that "[our] two 3" guns are jokes they are manned by Russians and hurt us more than they help".⁴⁴ Veteran Harry Costello echoed Lt. Ryan, remembering that White Russians "retarded rather than aided us. A number of desertions and acts of treachery are plainly traceable to these Russians".⁴⁵ On at least one occasion, Americans and White Russians had verbal confrontations.⁴⁶ The atrocities committed by counterrevolutionary Russians forces, especially the Cossacks,⁴⁷ unnerved some Americans like Pvt. Charles A. Simpson. Simpson observed the following: "When Russians finally took over river front, they captured quite a few "Bolos" in one battle. They cut hole in the ice and jam the live Bolos under ice," leading Simpson to conclude that the "Russian people [had] no empathy".⁴⁸ As the winter dragged on, Russian soldiers became mutinous and the Polar Bears came to view them as a threat rather than an asset.

The Americans became skeptical of their Russian peers after Russian National Army soldiers mutinied in December 1918 over food allowances. Lt. Ryan noted the mutiny and

⁴¹ Kennedy, 175-176.

⁴² Moore, Mead, Jahns, 22.

⁴³ The Slavo-British Legion consisted of Russian regulars who served under British officers and NCOs and comprised "large numbers of captured Bolshevik soldiers, deserters, political prisoners, and common criminals" in Rhodes, 103.

⁴⁴ BHL: Ryan, "Diary", 32 (10/3/18).

⁴⁵ BHL: Harry J. Costello, *Why Did We Go to Russia?*, Harry J. Costello Papers, 50 (Detroit, MI: 1920).

⁴⁶ BHL: McKenzie, "Diary", 39 (1/4/19).

⁴⁷ BHL: Crissman, "Diary", 6 (11/12/18); Douma, "Diary", 12 (1/26/19); Parrish, 42.

⁴⁸ BHL: Charles Simpson, "Diary, 1919 and misc.", Charles A. Simpson Papers, 25.

rationalized that “the Russian has no liking for fighting, he came into the army to eat, not to fight”.⁴⁹ The mutiny turned violent and was ended forcefully with executions: “Two [Russian] companies [...] were given until two o'clock on the afternoon of December 11th to obey the order. Promptly at this time machine gun and rifle fire was directed against the building. British troops surrounded the building on three sides, while [American] Headquarters Company, 339th Infantry held the fourth” (Photograph 2.iv).⁵⁰ Word spread of the mutiny among the Americans, many of whom argued that Bolsheviks had infected the White Russian ranks. Such claims are accurate. Lt. Costello believed that the Bolsheviks lured over White Russian fighters with their more abundant food stores and Historian Jonathan Smele confirmed his suspicion: Russian “men were rounded up and pressed into service, received their rations and uniforms, and then routinely disappeared back into the taiga”.⁵¹ As such, Smele argued that the Slavo-British Legion “is now chiefly remembered for all the wrong reasons – as the only unit of the civil war in which Russian conscripts mutinied against and then killed four of their British officers”.⁵² That was certainly the main takeaway of the AEFNR. Late in the expedition, Clarence Scheu remarked that he “would not give one ruble for the loyalty of the Russian Archangel troops under fire”.⁵³ The numerous desertions, mutinies, and fighting skills of White Russians embittered many men.

Conversely, American soldiers had positive opinions of their French and Canadian allies. Many Polar Bears respected the French soldiers they encountered: “They are great men – they seem as optimistic and jolly as can be, mostly always laughing and chatting along the streets but you can’t fail to notice that they are fighting men too”.⁵⁴ Friendships between Americans and French soldiers blossomed as the men fought side by side and aided each other in desperate

⁴⁹ BHL: Ryan, “Diary” 61 (12/11/18).

⁵⁰ BHL: Print No. 152767, December 11, 1918, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL.

⁵¹ BHL: Costello, 48; Smele, 134.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ BHL: Scheu, 30 (4/3/19).

⁵⁴ BHL: Clay Schade, “Letter 2”, Clay Grimshaw Schade Papers, 1 (9/23/18).

situations during the expedition.⁵⁵ The Americans also had good relations with their Canadian counterparts. An episode during the evacuation of Shenkursk represented the mutual comradery: a Canadian offered Pvt. Arkins, who was over-encumbered with heavy supplies, to carry some baggage on his horse. Arkins subsequently remarked: “Real guys, those Canadians”.⁵⁶ Salchow echoed Arkins: “We were closer to the French than to any of the other – the French and the Canadians”.⁵⁷ The Armistice created some tensions between the Americans and French due to higher rates of French mutinous behavior after the ceasefire, however.⁵⁸ Still, the Americans and French agreed on their greater disdain for the British.⁵⁹

The AEFNR bore an almost unanimous contempt of the British.⁶⁰ Captain Martin noted in an official report that “American and French troops were resentful of an immediate British command [...] [the Americans] felt continually that they were taking orders from officers of another nationality”.⁶¹ The root of this sentiment developed initially from the early problems with supplies and medical attention and continued to deteriorate due to a perceived offhanded treatment, conspiracy allegations, and poor military planning. A lack of clarity from British command after the Armistice only added to the growing animosity. Such sentiment was not isolated to the North Russia expedition; many military planners of the AEF in France were also distrustful of the British, in one instance suspecting the British of falsifying supply data.⁶² According to many American soldiers, the British misused their leadership position to force other

⁵⁵ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 234.

⁵⁶ BHL: Arkins, “Diary”, 23 (1/25/19).

⁵⁷ BHL: Salchow, 8.

⁵⁸ BHL: Colburn, “Article from the Literary Digest, July 12, 1919”, 2.

⁵⁹ Halliday, Kindle Location 1520/4001; Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Report of Capt H.S. Martin, American Military Mission, on his Personal Observations Concerning the American Intervention in North Russia, Aug 20, 1919”, 7.

⁶⁰ BHL: Jay Spaulding, “Diary”, Jay Earle Spaulding Papers, 21; Moore, Mead, Jahns, 17.

⁶¹ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Report of Capt H.S. Martin, American Military Mission, on his Personal Observations Concerning the American Intervention in North Russia, Aug 20, 1919”, 7; Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Brig. Gen. Wilds P Richardson’s “Notes on the War and on the North Russian Expedition”, n.d.”, 51.

⁶² Kennedy, 176.

nationalities into the intense combat while providing meager supplies, creating “a live enmity [sic] between English and Americans”.⁶³

As was the case with the lack of proper supplies, military operations were often poorly planned. Countless attacks failed due to a deficiency of guides and poor leadership resulting in a lack of coordination between forces. Several British officers were known to show up drunk to military maneuvers.⁶⁴ British commanders’ misguided attack plans increased casualties and increasingly drove a wedge between the Americans and the British, resulting in huge losses of morale. To supplement the lack of planning the British architects of the expedition, initially General Poole and later General Edmund Ironside, and their subordinates repeatedly organized risky maneuvers. Lt. Ryan repeatedly criticized British plans, calling one proposed flank maneuver “suicide” and another “a reckless proposition”.⁶⁵ The latter plan ended with the Americans’ cover being blown and Ryan forcing a retreat under intense shelling.⁶⁶ Further encounters with drunk and or rude British officers led Ryan to label them “pigheaded and stupid” and one egregiously rude Brit “a regular ass”.⁶⁷ Tensions boiled over to the point that many American officers refused to mess with their British counterparts and Lt. Ryan claimed, near Kodish, that they “would rather walk to Archangel, than stay here [with the British officers] any longer”.⁶⁸ Some reasons for the unanimous distaste for the British may have predated the British handling of the intervention.

Some AEFNR men were skeptical of Britain’s colonial past, class hierarchy, and misuse of Wilson’s policy. First Lieutenant Cudahy referenced Britain’s imperialist tendencies to argue that the “war with Russia was in fact a typical British show, conducted by that conquering people who have spread the dominions of the mother country to every shore of the far seas [...] [with] all of

⁶³ BHL: Roger Clark, “What Ails the A.N.R.E.F.?” Roger Sherman Clark Papers, 14.

⁶⁴ BHL: Trombley, “Diary”, 22-23; McKenzie, “Diary”, 35-36;

⁶⁵ BHL: Ryan, “Dairy”, 28, 35.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 36-37.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 44, 45.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 47.

the muddling, blundering, and fuddling [...] that are forever British”.⁶⁹ Some, like Corporal Salchow, attributed part of the enmity to the hierarchical nature of the British Army: “There was a feeling of antagonism between our troops and the British. Well, the British somehow still had this class system where they would hardly talk to an enlisted man unless it were to give him orders”.⁷⁰ In an interview decades later, Lawrence Montgomery responded to the interviewer’s question: “How many [soldiers] did the British have?” “Don’t make a difference; they didn’t go up to the front anyway”.⁷¹ Cudahy, Salchow, and Montgomery emphasized the issues the AEFNR had with their British commanders. Out of the Anglo-American hostility came stories, widespread amongst the Americans, which border on being conspiracy theories.

Several suspected the British of conspiracy, accusing them of gaming the ruble currency markets and plotting to exploit North Russia’s lumber endowment.⁷² A widely known story among American troops consisted of the British Col. Sutherland ordering an artillery strike on an Allied-held bridge. Allegedly, after being notified of his mistake, he first called for a refill of whiskey before extending the range of the strike.⁷³ The fractured relationship caused Americans to strike back, engaging in small acts of thievery with British supplies, usually in the form of stealing alcohol.⁷⁴ The anti-British sentiment lingered with some. During an interview sixty years later, veteran Levi Bartels confirmed: “Talk about England! I’ve always said that if we start a war with England tomorrow morning I’ll be there”.⁷⁵

Ultimately, Anglo-American friction hurt the intervention drastically. Captain Martin argued that “the ordinary American will never show an enthusiastic military spirit while serving

⁶⁹ Cudahy, 74.

⁷⁰ BHL: Salchow, 8; Clark, “What Ails the ANREF?”, 18.

⁷¹ BHL: Montgomery, “Interview Transcript”, 44-45.

⁷² BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 50; Levi Bartels, “Polar Bear oral history project transcript. Glenn Johnson interviewing Levi Bartels, June 12, 1978”, Levi Bartels Papers, 6.

⁷³ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 26.

⁷⁴ BHL: Kooyers, 14.

⁷⁵ BHL: Bartels, “Polar Bear oral history project transcript”, 3; Tensions were so high that one American enlisted man was claimed to have killed an English officer, although such a statement may have been a rumor as it only appeared in one man’s records, in BHL: McKenzie, “Diary” 46 (2/24/19).

under the immediate command of a foreign officer – particularly the British. Unfortunately our national characteristics cannot always be depended on to harmonize [...] [the] expedition lacked that unity of spirit which might have brought forth more favorable results”.⁷⁶ The uncooperative Allied forces struggled in the winter, as the newly organized Bolshevik armies posed a greater challenge.

Bolshevik Fighting Ability and Post-Armistice Engagements

The Bolsheviks, who initially seemed to be a disorderly and ineffectual fighting force, soon turned into a formidable foe in the eyes of the AEFNR. Early on the Bolsheviks retreated when under the threat of an Allied advance and the Americans controlled large portions of the province with minimal casualties. The post-Armistice Bolshevik armies launched lethal offensives, some of which resulted in Bolshevik victories, and fiercely resisted Allied attacks. While the Red Army was officially created in December 1917, Trotsky redesigned the ineffectual Bolshevik forces in the summer of 1918. The improved Bolshevik combat abilities noted by the AEFNR were due to organizational efficiency as well as material advantages; Smele highlighted that the “coordinating organs of the Red Army” were developed in September and November 1918.⁷⁷ The American soldiers realized the growing threat posed by their enemy as they fought deadly battles in the winter while wondering why they were in Russia at all. The shifting momentum of the intervention heightened criticism of their leaders and decreased morale.

Clarence Scheu, of “B” Company, fought in the Armistice Day battle at Toulgas and his opinions of the Bolshevik combatants, along with his confidence in the expedition, shifted because of the engagement. Scheu and his company arrived in Toulgas on October 15 and began fortifying. Constant shelling, aimed at the American blockhouses for the coming winter, put pressure on the

⁷⁶ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Report of Capt H.S. Martin, American Military Mission, on his Personal Observations Concerning the American Intervention in North Russia, Aug 20, 1919”, 8.

⁷⁷ Smele, 77-85.

men and instilled fear; Scheu remarked: “we all have a profound respect for their field pieces”.⁷⁸

They raced to build trenches and blockhouses while patrolling to detect attacks (Photograph 2.v).

Such attacks occurred regularly the week before the Armistice and Scheu lamented: “their actions seem to indicate confidence in themselves now, but which they did not display when we were on the offensive in the early fall, the further they retired in our early fall advance, the stronger they

became, and now, flushed with their victory at Selso, they are going to push us back into the

White Sea”.⁷⁹ The Bolsheviks attacked in force on November 11, Armistice Day:

the enemy suddenly lauch [sic] attack on our front, our immediate right, simultaneously with an attack in our rear, their gunboats and field pieces pounding our positions continuously, [...] battle raging all day [...] at 1 p.m. our machine gunner was killed as I was helping him reload, a sniper got Kooyers as he was firing out a porthole, a while later a bullet split my gun in two, rendering it useless, thier [sic] shells were landing so close [to the blockhouse] that they loosened the logs and covered our front porthole⁸⁰

The fighting kept up overnight, and Scheu and his peers in the blockhouse were not as lucky the

next day: “[artillery] made a direct hit on [blockhouse] roof, we were thrown together by

concussion, 3 men killed and 5 wounded, out of a total of 9, a piece of shell went in my hand and

shoulder”.⁸¹ Scheu, wounded and dazed, managed to escape the destroyed blockhouse and crawled

to a nearby house, where he witnessed a sad sight: “the priest was decapitated and the entire

family killed outside of a little girl, [...] others were lying there seriously wounded, [...] another

shell hit the building as we [lay] huddled together”.⁸² Scheu was evacuated to the nearby

Beresnick, where he was informed of an Allied victory on November 15.

Scheu’s detailed account illustrated the ferocity of Bolshevik attacks after the Armistice.

The engagement had a psychological component, reminding the men of “B” and “D” Companies

that the Armistice had no bearing in North Russia.⁸³ According to a brief history of the expedition

⁷⁸ BHL: Scheu, 12 (11/2/18).

⁷⁹ Ibid., 13 (11/8/18).

⁸⁰ Ibid., (11/11/18).

⁸¹ Ibid., 14 (11/12/18).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 110.

compiled by the Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections, the battle at Toulgas “marked the beginning of a decline in American morale”.⁸⁴ Despite sustaining heavily casualties, the Americans had won the battle at Toulgas. Subsequent Bolshevik winter victories had even more deleterious effects on morale.

Sgt. Crissman fought the Bolsheviks at Ust-Padenga and Shenkurst in late January, 1919.

The engagement began on January 19:

Enemy opened up Artillery fire at 6:30 AM and continued all day. They attacked us from all sides. Our outpost at Ninji Gora was fired upon at daybreak and shortly after were surrounded and had to retreat [...] Out of 43 men there were 32 casualties [...] They continued firing all day and in the afternoon they fired on our billets with rifle and MG. Its [sic] a real war now.⁸⁵

During the engagement Crissman observed gruesome violence, with a peer being decapitated by an artillery shell.⁸⁶ Red artillery greatly impacted the AEFNR: “Shelling all day long with a little rifle fire. This shelling is getting the best of everybody”.⁸⁷ The shelling prompted a retreat from Ust-Padenga, the furthest the Allies would ever advance, to Shenkursk under the cover of darkness: “at 1:10 AM we left Ust Padenga under fire. The Bolos were right after us. They opened Artillery fire but could not locate us. We had to leave one piece of Artillery on the road. We hiked all night”.⁸⁸ Crissman and his comrades arrived in Shenkursk at 5pm on January 25 and had to retreat again that day: “About 11 PM we were told to get ready to leave, carrying nothing but overcoat, rations, gun and belt [...] All our things were left in Shenkursk, and all we have is what is on our backs”.⁸⁹ The defeat had a negative impact on Crissman’s, and American, morale: “Begins to look as if we were to stay here a while and not on our way home as we thought”.⁹⁰ As

⁸⁴ “History,” Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/polaread/history.html>

⁸⁵ BHL: Crissman, “Diary”, 8 (1/19/19).

⁸⁶ Ibid., (1/20/19).

⁸⁷ Ibid., (1/21/19).

⁸⁸ BHL: Crissman, “Diary”, 8 (1/22/19).

⁸⁹ Ibid., 9 (1/25-26/19).

⁹⁰ Ibid., (1/30/19).

the Bolsheviks gained momentum, the Allies turned to destructive scorched-earth methods to slow the advancing enemy forces. Such methods also had a harmful effect on morale.

Bolshevik military successes pushed the Allies to more brutal tactics, and the burning of towns resonated with the American soldiers as they reassessed the morality of the intervention.⁹¹ On November 15, Sgt. Parrish and his men were ordered to burn a small town near Toulgas. After taking enemy prisoners, they proceeded to light the houses on fire: “we took 16 enemy prisoners and killed 2 then we burned the village and my heart ached to have [a] woman fall down at my feet and grab my legs to kiss my hand and beg me [not] to do it.”⁹² 1st Lt. Cudahy wrote critically of these Allied tactics after the war:

Friendly intervention? All too vividly comes to mind a picturing during the Allied occupation of Archangel province [...] Military necessity demanded that another village far up the Dvina be destroyed. As the soldiers, with no keen appetite for the heartless job, cast the peasants out of the homes where they had lived their uncouth, but not unhappy lives, the torch was set to their houses [...] Why had we come and why did we remain, invading Russia and destroying Russian homes?⁹³

The incident near Toulgas was no isolated incident. Under British orders, American soldiers also burned the town of Kodish in January and observed Cossacks burning Shenkursk after their retreat.⁹⁴ The destruction of civilian property, only to deny its use for the Bolsheviks, undermined the principles many of the AEFNR had arrived with, eroding the sense of righteousness in an expedition that already “had no idealism [...] a free-booter’s excursion, depraved and lawless”.⁹⁵ The battles at Ust-Padenga and Shenkursk and subsequent scorched-earth tactics hurt American morale after the Armistice.

As the winter cold set in, Allied commanders pursued a defensive course of action. Knowing the terrain, the Bolsheviks opted for several strategic offensives. The Bolsheviks attacked with superior artillery and manpower advantages: “sometimes I wonder, why this

⁹¹ Such tactics also played into the Bolshevik propaganda narrative; See Chapter 3 for more.

⁹² BHL: Parrish, 18-19.

⁹³ Cudahy, 35-36.

⁹⁴ Willett, Kindle Location 1738/7303; BHL: Douma, “Diary”, 12 (1/26/19).

⁹⁵ Cudahy, 30.

expedition? One man has to do the fighting of ten, and we can't replace men when they fall".⁹⁶

The Americans correctly assessed that the Bolsheviks they fought before the Armistice were less organized and effective than those in the winter and spring. Some of the Americans felt disappointed in their failure in combat. Much of that blame was assigned to the British officers and the head of the American military in North Russia.

Confused Leadership, Declining Morale

Morale reached new lows as the Bolsheviks continued to make decisive gains. Universally, the men noted poor morale and many officers sued for relief. The predicament was no secret; Capt. Martin declared in an official report: "The morale of the American troops likewise underwent a steady decline after the signing of the Armistice".⁹⁷ The unimpressive leadership by Colonel Stewart, American Consul DeWitt C. Poole,⁹⁸ and the British commanders did little in the form of offering explanations to alleviate this. In a December lecture, Poole attempted to explain the reasoning behind the conflict only to conclude the lack thereof: "talk by Mr. Poole [...] His subject of course was "Russia, why are we here", the substance of this lecture was this: "we're here, because we're here".⁹⁹ This can partially be explained by the fact that the respective American and British governments were even more confused by the winter of 1918-1919 than they had been when they dispatched the expedition. The AEFNR wondered what they were fighting for as their AEF peers celebrated at home. The intervention's ambiguity had a disastrous impact on morale. Self-inflicted wounds (SIWs) and mutinous behavior surged as a result.

Some noticed an uptick in wounds to the hands or feet and thought them to be suspicious after the Armistice. Lt. Ryan, after initially holding the inferior Russian rifles responsible for SIWs, later suspected that the wounds were self-inflicted to avoid further combat and had to

⁹⁶ BHL: Scheu, 10 (10/20/18); Willett, Kindle Location 1186/7303.

⁹⁷ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, "Reports on Mutinies and on Morale of Allied Troops in North Russia by Capt H.S. Martin, Jul 1919", 10-11.

⁹⁸ American Charge d'Affairs in Russia, Poole was an anti-radical and pro-intervention official under Ambassador Francis.

⁹⁹ Ryan, "Diary", 64 (12/14/18).

“investigate about 10 cases of suspicious wounds”.¹⁰⁰ Medic Lt. Katz also became suspicious after observing six “cases of self-inflicted wounds” in six days, “[some of which] seemed intentional”.¹⁰¹ John P. Clock bluntly remembered the situation years later: “And Taylor had an SIW, self-inflicted wound, see? He shot his finger off to keep out of the fight”.¹⁰² SIWs were only one of the post-Armistice themes which reflected declining morale.

Collapsing morale resulted in mutinous activity. The first of such instances occurred in February and prompted discussions of court-martials for mutiny. Sgt. Silver Parrish led a group of “B” Company men to draft a resolution demanding explanations before they would fight, resulting in threats of court-martials. The resolution set a date on the demand for a cessation of fighting:

after this date we [...] refuse to advance on the Bolo lines [...] in view of the fact that our object in Russia has been accomplished and having duely [sic] acquitted our selfs [sic] by [sic] doing every thing that was in our power [and was asked] of us after 6 months of frequent and uncomplaining sacrifice after serious debate arrive at this [sic] conclusions and it is not considered unpatriotic¹⁰³

Sixty-six enlisted men signed the document in agreement.¹⁰⁴ Despite this behavior, no “action was ever taken in the case”.¹⁰⁵ Officers attributed the document to a disadvantage in artillery compared to the Bolshevik forces, but the petition had other implications.¹⁰⁶ The document penned by “B” Company emphasized that the Armistice annulled their presence in Russia: “we have accomplished the defeat of the Germans which was our mission and whereas further activity means interference in the affairs of the Russian people with whom we have no quarrel”.¹⁰⁷ The “B” Company petition was the first recorded instance of mutinous behavior and directly stemmed from the Armistice. A more egregious event occurred a month later.

¹⁰⁰ BHL: Ryan, “Diary” 77 (1/5/19).

¹⁰¹ BHL: Katz, (1/29/19).

¹⁰² BHL: John Clock, “Interview Transcript – “Polar Bears Remembered” June 25, 1978, Charlevoix, MI”, John Percey Clock Papers, 8; Charles Simpson, “Diary – 1919 and misc.”, Charles A. Simpson Papers, 25.

¹⁰³ BHL: Parrish, 48.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 50-57.

¹⁰⁵ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Reports on Mutinies and on Morale of Allied Troops in North Russia by Capt H.S. Martin, Jul 1919”, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ BHL: Parrish, 49.

On March 30, 1919, the members of “I” Company relaxed in Archangel. They had been away from the front for several days now and had time to think. Lingering questions, reiterated by Bolshevik propaganda, about their presence in Russia echoed around the barracks. Anger over the mistreatment by the British and the dwindling odds of military success against the surging Bolshevik forces boiled to the surface. A sergeant entered the station with orders to pack up for another trip to the front, to which the American soldiers refused. The sergeant reported to an officer, who “had to talk with [the men] for some time before they would stir. Even when they did so reluctantly and in a very bad spirit and one man continued to stand still”.¹⁰⁸ Tensions flared as the troops demanded answers for their role in the conflict. The officer appealed to Col. Stewart who, in an uncharacteristic display of leadership, corralled the soldiers who packed up their belongings and headed to the front in high spirits. The soldiers repelled a fierce Bolshevik attack on the front line several days later.¹⁰⁹ A multitude of firsthand accounts and hysterical reporting by the American media complicated the validity of the “I” Company mutiny.

Rumors of the “mutiny” spread in the American press. The *New York Times* claimed that “the refusal of troops at Archangel to go back to the front has no parallel since the mutiny of some starving Continentals in 1781” and publicized that “relatives of the men in the 339th Infantry [...] appealed to the War Department for leniency in dealing with American soldiers who mutinied March 30”.¹¹⁰ Many AEFNR men subsequently detested that the media “has caused a unit of Detroit men to be branded as mutineers throughout the world”.¹¹¹

The men of the AEFNR recorded varied accounts of the March 30 events. Despite several noting the events as a “mutiny” on March 30, most, like Pvt. McKenzie, amended their claims

¹⁰⁸ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Reports on Mutinies and on Morale of Allied Troops in North Russia by Capt H.S. Martin, Jul 1919”, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 13; Rhodes, 95.

¹¹⁰ “Mutiny at Archangel”, *New York Times*, April 12, 1919, accessed March 22, 2017, [http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D00E0DF1F3BE03ABC4A52DFB2668382609EDE;ASK LENIENCY FOR MEN.; Detroit Relatives of Mutinous Soldiers Appeal to War Department](http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D00E0DF1F3BE03ABC4A52DFB2668382609EDE;ASK%20LENIENCY%20FOR%20MEN%3A%20Detroit%20Relatives%20of%20Mutinious%20Soldiers%20Appeal%20to%20War%20Department%3A%20New%20York%20Times%2C%20April%2013%2C%201919), *New York Times*, April 13, 1919, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9905EFDD1F3BE03ABC4B52DFB2668382609EDE>.

¹¹¹ BHL: Colburn, “Article”, 1.

later on: "I Co.'s reputed mutiny all bunk".¹¹² Upon returning home the soldiers disputed the label, citing the fact that "no one was ever courtmartialed [sic] for mutiny".¹¹³ Some proposed that the soldier who defied orders after the officer arrived was a recent immigrant who spoke poor English.¹¹⁴ Several veterans cited a report from Brigadier General Wildst Preston Richardson who wrote that he "found, upon arrival later at Archangel [in April 1919], that the conditions had been somewhat exaggerated, especially in respect to the alleged mutiny".¹¹⁵ As such, the label is controversial. Despite the veterans of "I" Co. claiming that "we kicked like Hell but we didn't mutiny," the events illustrated deteriorated fighting spirit.¹¹⁶ Sgt. Colburn, who served in "I" Co., linked the cause to confused leadership: "It should be noted here that Colonel Stewart did not explain why Americans were fighting in Russia. The Colonel could not explain this, because he himself did not know, He had asked the authorities in Washington and they couldn't tell him".¹¹⁷ Colburn was not alone in his assessment, and this trend was pervasive beyond "I" Company.

The AEFNR's leadership had a negative effect on morale. In France too, Kennedy argued that "American resentment of martial authority could be found in all ranks".¹¹⁸ Sgt. Clark penned a long essay titled "What Ails the A.N.R.E.F.?" that detailed these issues in Russia. Clark proposed that the British high command and behavior of both British and American officers created the present conditions. He alleged that officers took nicer accommodations and food for themselves, at the expense of the men. Clark utilized even stronger language, calling the officers "liars, whore-mongers, booze-fighters, who absolutely fear to venture near the front, much less under fire, knowing certainly that a well deserved bullet in the back would be the messenger of justice and

¹¹² BHL: Colburn, "Diary", 7 (3/30/19); Clark, "What Ails the AEFNR?", 19; McKenzie, "Diary", 52 (3/30/19); Colburn, "Article from the Literary Digest, July 12, 1919", Cleo M. Colburn Papers, 2; Bell, "Scrapbook", 7; Kenneth C. Adams, "Chicago Tribune, 'Part of the 339th out of Russia arrive at Brest,'" June 13, 1919", John Boren Papers, 1; Cudahy, 100; Moore, Mead, Jahns, 187, 230.

¹¹³ BHL: Adams, "Part of the 339th out of Russia arrive at Brest", 1.

¹¹⁴ BHL: Colburn, "Article", 2.

¹¹⁵ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, "Brig. Gen. Wilds P Richardson's 'Notes on the War and on the North Russian Expedition', n.d.", 37.

¹¹⁶ BHL: Adams, "Part of the 339th out of Russia arrive at Brest", 1.

¹¹⁷ BHL: Colburn, "Article", 2.

¹¹⁸ Kennedy, 210.

death upon their first appearance”.¹¹⁹ While Clark’s opinion of the “gilded aristocracy of British and American officers” is extreme, similar emotions pervaded the enlisted men and exacerbated the situation in North Russia after the Armistice.¹²⁰ Clark was not alone in these sentiments; 1st Lt. Cudahy also echoed the overuse of supplies at the expense of enlisted men.¹²¹ While some soldiers proposed that AEFNR leadership was a key catalyst of morale problems, these claims largely appeared after the Armistice.¹²² Instead, poor conditions and propaganda intensified the soldiers’ preexisting attitudes toward their officers. The leader of the American military in Archangel bore the brunt of this criticism, but the blame trickled down to lower ranking officers.

Colonel Stewart and his officers ineffectually led the American military in North Russia. It is significant that Stewart, a colonel, was the highest-ranking American in North Russia until the arrival of Brigadier General Richardson in April 1919. The enlisted men portrayed Stewart as a cowardly leader who preferred to lead from the comforts of Archangel.¹²³ The Americans resented how British officers outranked all American officers and blamed Stewart for his lack of zeal in defending them. Stewart was not solely culpable, however. Some veterans remembered Major Young’s ineffectual leadership and recalled a Polar Bear reunion where someone hit the major in the head with a projectile brick.¹²⁴ While in Russia, Lt. Ryan noted the struggles of an unnamed American major: “an American major is like the 5th wheel to the wagon”.¹²⁵ Even official dispatches criticized some officers: “I have never come into contact with a more disgruntled, discouraging set than I found in the officers of [“D” Company] [...] [one] is the poorest specimen of an officer I have ever seen. I am convinced that he [...] has done more, wherever he has been,

¹¹⁹ BHL: Clark, 18.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Cudahy, 97.

¹²² BHL: Clark, “What Ails the AEFNR?”, 19; McKenzie, “Diary”, 34; Colburn, “Article”, 2.

¹²³ Rhodes, 62-63.

¹²⁴ BHL: Clock, “Interview”, 17.

¹²⁵ BHL: Ryan, 80.

to lower the morale of our troops”.¹²⁶ As such, morale problems can be attributed to the American military leadership as an intensifying factor at minimum.

Leisure Time

During the spring, many American soldiers retreated toward the relative safety of Archangel as the rumored Bolshevik offensive failed to materialize. Instead of preparing defenses and fighting Bolsheviks, the AEFNR had spare time. This free time had dual effects, improving morale through sports and YMCA-organized activities but also allotting time for thinking. In some cases, spare time may have accentuated morale problems rather than alleviating them as the men reflected on the intervention. Still, enjoyable activities comprised a large share of this time.

Those remaining near the front lines graciously welcomed relief from the intense violence and found ways to pass the time. Boxing, tug of war, basketball, baseball, theatrical productions, sledding, gambling, bathing in the Russian baths, and films helped the Americans pass the time as they waited to withdraw (Photographs 2.vi & 2.vii).¹²⁷ The men found innovative ways to expand on other games, including a “blindfolded [boxing match] between Private Guthrie and myself” and a “Stripping & assembling contest”.¹²⁸ Russia also presented opportunities for outdoorsmen including hiking, fishing, and hunting. As Sgt. Crissman relaxed near Archangel in May he remarked: “Nothing much to do [...] Hunt duck and play base ball [sic] quite often”.¹²⁹ The men invented a novel fishing method with their ample time: “I have been fishing 2 times instead of throwing my grenades at Bolos I am throwing them at fish”.¹³⁰ As the manpower needs on the front waned due to the shift in strategy, many soldiers had opportunities to visit Archangel for training.

¹²⁶ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Reports on Mutinies and on Morale of Allied Troops in North Russia by Capt H.S. Martin, Jul 1919”, 14.

¹²⁷ BHL: Ryan, “Diary”, 71; Colburn, “Diary”, 5; Rasmussen, “Diary”, 26; Colburn, “Diary”, 3; Riordan, 3; Crissman, “Diary”, 7 (12/15/18); Arkins, “Diary”, 27 (4/10/19).

¹²⁸ BHL: Colburn, “Diary”, 5; McKenzie, “Diary”, 52 (3/29).

¹²⁹ BHL: Crissman, “Diary”, 11 (5/14/19-5/25/19).

¹³⁰ BHL: Parrish, 25; McKenzie, “Diary”, 63 (6/3); Colburn, “Diary”, 7 (3/4).

Archangel, the city housing the polyglot armies' headquarters and the White Russian capital of North Russia, offered ample opportunities for the soldiers to blow off steam. The experience of Pvt. McKenzie, who spent much time in Archangel due to sickness, was emblematic of the city. McKenzie spent his time between the library, YMCA, Church, lectures, dances, and movies, where he went on dates with local Russian and American girls.¹³¹ Soldiers who visited the city for wounds, rest, or training had similar experiences.¹³² Corpl. Colburn, on a January visit, had a typical Archangel experience: "Met nice Drasky (Drozhka) girl", "Went to dance at the convalescent hospital" and "went to Edison Theater to see Russian movie".¹³³ Not all activities in Archangel were appreciated by the American military commanders.

Prostitution and excessive drinking were commonplace in the city.¹³⁴ Clarence Scheu described the experience of his first, and only, trip to the city since landing in September 1918: "Managed to get a pass and slipped to Archangel, met canadian [sic] friend who came up with relief forces, had lots of rum, we celebrated all night".¹³⁵ Lawrence Montgomery jokingly prided himself on his actions in Archangel: "we was the best whiskey stealers there was [...] the old captain came up to the front and he took Mac and I. He knew if there was whiskey in Archangel, we'd get it".¹³⁶ Drunken antics were not confined to Archangel; alcoholism appeared a unanimous thread amongst the Allied soldiers. The soldiers wrote tales of drunkenness, stealing British alcohol, and on some occasions fighting the Bolsheviks while drunk.¹³⁷ The arrival of the adored YMCA provided alternatives to drunken debauchery.

¹³¹ BHL: McKenzie, "Diary", 40, 46-48.

¹³² BHL: Ryan, "Diary", 52; Andrews, "Letter from Hospital, Archangel", 1 (5/13/19); Lawson, "Letter", Babicki Collection, 1 (5/3/19); Rasmussen, "Seeing the Land of the Midnight Sun", (9/11/18); Douma, "Diary" 18 (4/8/19 – 4/13/19); Costello, 54.

¹³³ BHL: Colburn, "Diary", 3.

¹³⁴ BHL: Kooyers, 14; Bonnell, "Reminiscence", 1; Smith, "Diary" 9 (1/15/19).

¹³⁵ BHL: Scheu, 37 (6/12/19).

¹³⁶ BHL: Montgomery, "Interview", 23.

¹³⁷ BHL: McKenzie, 35-39; Ryan, "Diary", 44; Kooyers, 6, 9; Arkins, "Diary" 20; Bonnell, "Reminiscence", 1; Trombley, 22-24; Douma, "Diary", 10; Crissman, "Diary", 2 (9/6/18), 6 (11/2/18).

The YMCA proved instrumental in organizing activities to stave off boredom, improving morale as a result.¹³⁸ The organization coordinated films and theater, food and refreshments, and lectures and Russian classes.¹³⁹ The YMCA building in Archangel had a piano, to the delight of some men: “The YMCA here is a dandy [...] They give a lot of entertainments and have a good piano”.¹⁴⁰ The YMCA was based in Archangel but had satellites in other population centers in North Russia, such as Shenkursk, Emetskoe, and Onega. These outposts boosted spirits amongst the men on the front lines: “Arrived at Emetskoe and saw our first Y.M.C.A. They gave us some hot cocoa and cookie which surely made a hit with us”.¹⁴¹ The organization also played a role in organizing holiday celebrations. With the help of the YMCA and American Red Cross, many soldiers feasted on the best food they had had in months on Thanksgiving and Christmas.¹⁴² The organization not only provided food to the hungry and demoralized men, it also made soldiers think of home. Pvt. Rasmussen described the feeling: “I am doing two things at once this afternoon, sitting in the Y.M.C.A. room writing this letter and listening to the phonograph which makes us feel at home”.¹⁴³ As Rasmussen alluded, some men reflected on homesickness and other aspects of their situation during leisure time.

Free time gave the men of the AEFNR space to contemplate the expedition. Sgt. Clark, who penned the long essay on AEFNR morale issues, wrote the piece in May while away from the front. The late March “I” Company mutiny also occurred in Archangel as the company, which was on leave, was ordered back to the front. The variety of accounts of the “mutiny” commonly described that the men had been discussing their situation before refusing to return to the front.

Ironically, spare time in the spring of 1919 gave the AEFNR time to debate their predicament and

¹³⁸ BHL: Arkins, “Forging ahead after Bolsheviks”, 3; Lawson, “Letter”, Babicki, (5/4/19); John Wilson, *Arctic Antics*, 34; Moore, Mead, Jahns, 255.

¹³⁹ BHL: Andrews, “Letter”, 4 (12/25/18); Crissman, “Diary”, 8 (1/10/19); Arkins, “Diary”, 27 (4/10/19); Crissman, “Diary”, 6.

¹⁴⁰ BHL: Schade, “Letter 2 from Archangel”, (9/23/18).

¹⁴¹ BHL: Douma, “Diary”, 8 (10/25/18); Crissman, “Diary”, 6 (11/18/19).

¹⁴² BHL: Rasmussen, “Diary”, 13; Ryan, “Diary”, 57, 72; Robins, “Correspondence”, (12/26/18); Trombley, 20; Moore, Mead, Jahns, 257.

¹⁴³ BHL: Rasmussen, ““Russians Can’t Feed Themselves” letter”, 1 (11/5/18).

to read Bolshevik propaganda. As American media reached the men in letters from home, they also had time to read about the domestic controversy over the intervention in the spring. As such, leisure time provided an opportunity to digest the expedition and indirectly hurt morale.



The Armistice marked a shift in momentum in North Russia. After the ceasefire, the Americans found themselves in a country with which the United States was not at war. They fought in the cold, outmanned and outgunned, under detested British officers.¹⁴⁴ Stewart and the AEFNR officers, who were unaware themselves of the policy, did little to clarify the situation as the subsequent morale crisis unfolded. Defiant activity, whatever the label, illustrated collapsed American fighting spirit. The exacting conditions were not the only forces wearing down the men. The AEFNR was also besieged by British and Bolshevik propaganda and demoralizing news from home. The Bolshevik propaganda, which initially seemed ridiculous, gained credibility as it posed answers to questions that American officers and Stewart could not themselves answer. The Armistice magnified the poor conditions, present since September, and in the spring the men had time to read Bolshevik propaganda and American newspapers. Ultimately, these reading materials proved a critical amplifier in the collapse of morale.

¹⁴⁴ The expedition certainly changed the Americans' perspectives on the British, as some harbored resentment into the 1970s.

Photographs

2.i



Source: BHL: Print No. 161113,
February 21, 1919, US Army Signal
Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL.

161113 American soldiers on patrol wearing white capes to reduce the chance of discovery while operating in the snow-blanketed forests which lie on the Vologda R.R. line on each side. The picture shows the character of the forest in which the American forces live and fight. Left to right Buglar Chas. Metcalf, Co. I. Pvt. Harold Holliday, Co. M. and Sgt. Maj. Ernest Reed, 3rd Bn. 339th Inf. 85th Div. Verst 455 Vologda R.R. Front, Russia. Feb. 21, 1919.

2.ii: *Shackleton boots*



Source: BHL: Print No. 161115, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL in BHL: Primm, 88.

2.iii: "Russian, English, and Cossack soldiers, crew of one of the armored cars. Obozerskaya, Russia"



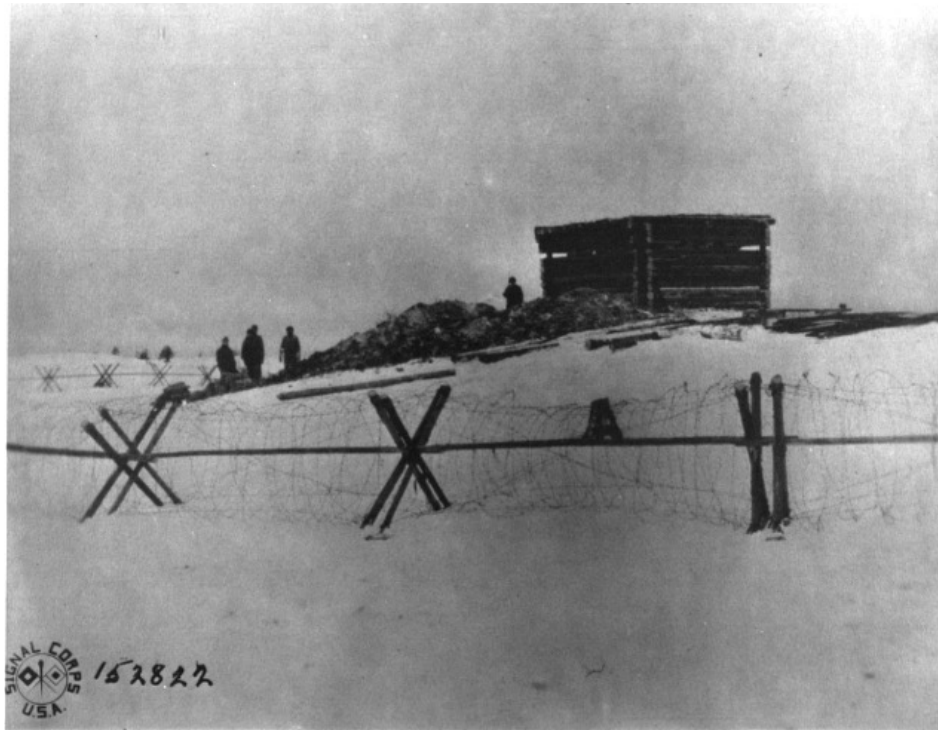
Source: BHL: Print No. 32067, September 24, 1918, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL.

2.iv: "Groups of Russian soldiers leaving Alexandria Barracks to surrender to American and British troops who had fired on the building when the Russians had mutinied"



Source: BHL: Print No. 152770, December 11, 1918, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL

2.v: "A blockhouse and dugout now in course of construction surrounded by barbed wire [...] When completed it will be equipped with a Vickers machine gun. One non-commissioned officer, two Vickers men and six privates will be on duty. Visorka Gora, Ust Padenga, Front, Vaga River Column, Russia."



Source: BHL: Print No. 152822, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL

2.vi: "Men of Company A, 339th Infantry, watching a boxing bout in their quarters. Boxing has been one of the chief forms of amusement during the long winter evenings [...] [near] Ust Padenga"



Source: BHL: Print No. 152820, January 7, 1919, US Army Signal Corps Photograph Collection, UMBHL

2.vii: July 4, 1919: Photo taken near Soroka, the base for the Transportation Corps, who served over North Russia to work on railroads for tactical purposes.



SPAR FIGHTING JULY FOURTH

This soldier had successfully met all comers until an American Tar appeared on the scene with the above results

Source: John Wilson, *The Arctic Antics of the North Russian Transportation Corps of the U.S. Army*, Hathi Trust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015071183761>, 55.

Chapter Three: Propaganda & American Media

There was an assault from within and without our lines by insidious propaganda as well as the usual weapons of warfare¹

-Lt. Harry Costello

American soldiers faced adversity in North Russia. This fact was noted by their commanding officers and also by the enemy, who sought to use circumstances to their advantage. Bolshevik propaganda targeted English-speakers as well as the numerous Slavic Americans in the AEFNR in an organized drive to demoralize Allied troops. Colonel Stewart, in a February report, highlighted how the Bolshevik propaganda played into the larger narrative of American discontent: “[the] American troops constitute the bulk of the actual fighting forces, a fact which has been taken advantage of by the Bolsheviks”.² Stewart noted the double-pronged effect of such propaganda: it both garnered Russian civilian distrust of the Americans as the materials “assert that the Allied expedition was inspired by American capitalism” and called attention to the issues fanning Anglo-American tensions.³ Although ineffective at first, both the Allies and Bolsheviks honed their propaganda techniques over the span of the intervention.

The usage of propaganda during the Great War was not peculiar to North Russia.⁴ Peter Kenez, in a detailed study of the developing Soviet propaganda state, focused on intervention era Bolshevik propaganda. He stated that as “we have no precise definition” of propaganda, such analysis “must accept the broadest possible definition: Propaganda is nothing more than an attempt to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people’s thinking, emotions, and thereby behavior”.⁵ By this definition, both the Allies and the Bolsheviks used propaganda

¹ BHL: Costello, 7.

² Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Situation Reports on the Efficiency and Morale of the AER, North Russia, Dec 1918-Mar 1919”, 7.

³ Ibid., 7-8.

⁴ Kennedy, 63, 66.

⁵ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 1, 4.

extensively during the WWI era. In the U.S., the Wilson administration launched a campaign to convince the public of the war cause and combat years of anti-war sentiment. Contemporary Americans realized the trending propaganda usage; Walter Lippmann's 1922 *Public Opinion* expanded on the increasingly large role of propaganda by arguing that modern society had become too complex for everyday people to fully understand.⁶ During the intervention, the Bolsheviks continued to experiment with "new and unconventional methods" to disseminate and construct propaganda aimed at Russian civilians and the Allied invaders.⁷ The Americans in North Russia found themselves directly in the crosshairs of these new realities of modern society and warfare.

The American media inadvertently influenced the AEFNR experience and negatively impacted morale. Unlike in France, the intervention was widely derided by American politicians, citizens, and advocates of Bolshevik ideology. Domestic media, in the form of newspaper clippings and news of the controversy, reached the AEFNR through letters from home. Such media deleteriously affected morale by raising awareness of the domestic unpopularity of the intervention and intensifying confusion over its goals.

This chapter explores the experience of Americans fighting in North Russia with specific attention to the role propaganda and the American media played in the conflict. British and Bolshevik factions attempted to influence the AEFNR's perceptions of the political climate and their ideological beliefs. The conditions discussed in Chapters One and Two provided a powder keg of distrust and skepticism, and propaganda exploited the situation to sow discontent. While several officers preferred to believe "that the men of the 339th were also immune to Allied [and Bolshevik] propaganda," the records of enlisted men paint a different picture.⁸ American media had an even more prominent impact, further eroding patriotic confidence in the expedition and questioning its purpose.

⁶ Kennedy, 46, 91.

⁷ Kenez, 15.

⁸ BHL: Costello, 54-55.

British Propaganda

The Allied operations in North Russia confronted British command with a problem from the outset. Before British Brigadier General William Edmund Ironside took control of the intervention, General Poole commanded the Allied forces. With British, Canadian, Australian, Serbian, Polish, American, French, and White Russian troops under his command, Poole believed that he needed to unify his fighting force. Consistent with his disdain for non-British troops and the lingering British-imperialist sentiment noted by the AEFNR, Poole used fear-mongering propaganda to attempt to unite the factions.

The British effort was three-pronged, aiming to convince Russians of the Allies' good intent, keep Russian civilians from joining the ranks of the Reds, and bolster Allied fighting spirit. At Poole's suggestion, the British military in Archangel spread disinformation in an attempt to demonize the Bolsheviks.⁹ British propaganda highlighted purported rape, murder, and torture at the hands of the Bolsheviks while appealing to anti-German and anti-Semitic inclinations.¹⁰

British stories recounting Bolshevik atrocities appeared in the writings of American soldiers.¹¹ Poole regularly published and disseminated materials to the Allied battalions emphasizing "dubious atrocity stories" and Bolshevik cooperation with the Germans.¹² Some veterans recalled one of Poole's published orders: "The enemy. Bolsheviks. There are soldiers and sailors who, in the majority of cases, are criminals [...] Their natural, vicious brutality enabled them to assume leadership [...] The Germans usually appear in Russian uniform and are impossible to distinguish".¹³ The veterans also noted the aims of, and their disdain for, such memos: "The writer remembers the sense of shame that seized him as he reluctantly read a general order to his troops, a British piece of propaganda, that recited gruesome atrocities by the

⁹ Antony Lockley, "Propaganda and the first cold war in North Russia, 1918-1919," *History Today*, 53, 9 (September 2003), 46.

¹⁰ Lockley, 47; Moore, Mead, Jahns, 219.

¹¹ BHL: Smith, "Diary", 6 (9/18/18); Arkins, "Diary", 7 (9/16/18); Trombley, "Diary", 16 (9/29/18); Rhodes, 40.

¹² Rhodes, 73.

¹³ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 219.

Bolsheviks, a recital that was supposed to make the American soldiers both fear and hate the enemy”.¹⁴ The Americans realized the British propaganda’s deceit as the campaign continued.

The British propaganda aimed to demonize the Bolsheviks but had negative ripple effects. Officers Moore, Mead, and Jahns recognized that mutilations of Americans did occur, but “it was not one-tenth as prevalent a practice by the Bolos as charged” and that by the end of the campaign, as the enemy turned into an effective fighting force, the mutilations all but disappeared.¹⁵

Ironically, the stories created negative backlashes that decreased Allied fighting prowess. Some Americans recalled that Allied soldiers became so afraid of Bolshevik atrocities that they would rather commit suicide than be left to the Reds: “Cossack Colonel, it is rumored, kills himself when surrounded by Bolsheviks”.¹⁶ Tales of Bolshevik war crimes also inspired American retribution.

In his diary, Sgt. Edward Trombley summarized the prevailing feeling: “God knows [the Bolsheviks] deserve no mercy the way they mutilate and torture our men”.¹⁷ Ralph Albertson, a YMCA worker, noted that American officers commanded their men “to take no prisoners, to kill them even if they came in unarmed”.¹⁸ Rhodes emphasized that, later on, many “found that the accusations [of Bolshevik atrocities] were mostly groundless, and [there was] no evidence that the Bolsheviks shot prisoners as did the Allies”.¹⁹ By matching the Bolshevik cruelty alleged by British propaganda and then realizing its dishonesty, the British memos inadvertently decreased morale by undermining the morality of the expedition and aggravating Anglo-American distrust.

Rather than unifying the Allies, Poole’s strategy eroded feelings of Allied unity among the Americans and spurred demoralizing atrocities. As the expedition progressed, Americans grasped that the British claims were exaggerated or unfounded. Lee Ward revealed his suspicions in a letter: “we hear all kinds of rumors [...] and we can’t believe a thing we hear and only half what

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ BHL: Arkins, “Diary”, 22; Moore, Mead, Jahns 219.

¹⁷ BHL: Trombley 21.

¹⁸ Albertson, *Fighting Without a War*, 86 in Rhodes, 73.

¹⁹ Rhodes, 74.

we see”.²⁰ Halliday also noted that, once the men realized the nature of British propaganda, it made the soldiers angry and suspicious: the “British War Office methods of stimulating enthusiasm in the campaign against the Bolsheviks was a miserable failure”.²¹ The British propaganda spurred American Major J. Brooks Nichols to protest directly to the British commanders to end their propaganda effort.²² Ironside noted Poole’s failure as he assumed command, ending the development of new propaganda materials and ceasing distribution in October 1918.²³ American materials were different, as domestic media constituted the most effectual source of discontent among the AEFNR.

American Propaganda and Media

American media and propaganda greatly influenced the AEFNR. The sole source of American propaganda, by Kenz’s definition, was *The American Sentinel*, a newspaper published for the AEFNR in Archangel. Domestic media impacted the AEFNR more so. This media, in the form of official memos, newspaper clippings, letters, and petitions from home, furthered the decay of American morale more than all foreign forms of propaganda, according to several officers’ estimates.

The American Sentinel, a weekly periodical concerning matters ranging from Russia to the Western Front to the United States, was a key source of information for the American soldiers and presented a biased viewpoint.²⁴ Sgt. George Robins mentioned the paper in a letter home: “you can talk of your New York World, Chicago Tribune, Detroit Free Press, and all the rest of the leading journals of the States but this one paper beats them all [...] nobody ever misses one word

²⁰ BHL: Lee Ward, “Letter from Archangel”, Lee J. Ward Letter, 2 (1/22/19).

²¹ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 220; Halliday, Kindle Location 2088/4001.

²² Moore, Mead, Jahns, 220.

²³ Lockley, 47; Sir Edmund Ironside, *Archangel, 1918-1919*, (London: Constable, 1953), 58.

²⁴ American Red Cross, “The American Sentinel,” Hathi Trust Digital Library, accessed January 28, 2017, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/003241550>.

of what it has to say”.²⁵ There is evidence of widespread *Sentinel* readership; many poems were originally published in the paper and soldiers then transcribed them into their diaries. Published under the auspices of DeWitt C. Poole, an ardent anti-Bolshevist, the *Sentinel* also printed anti-Bolshevik and anti-radical propaganda. Over the course of 25 issues the paper called the Bolsheviks “radical” and “violent”, praised the Siberian and North Russia provisional governments by featuring letters from President Tchaikovsky of Provincial Government of North Russia, spread fear-mongering tales of the Bolshevik regime with headlines such as “Dog Meat Diet in Bolshevik Russia; Refugees From Interior Bring Out Stories of Death, Famine, Terror”, and even ran stories regarding moderate labor advocate Samuel Gompers on why radical labor parties were malevolent.²⁶ As the chief media inlet for the AEFNR, the paper had influence with the men and used it to pursue anti-radical anti-labor ends. The *Sentinel* was the most significant American propaganda noted by the AEFNR. Domestic non-propaganda materials had a distinct impact as well.

News from home had a profoundly deleterious effect on morale. This domestic media contained denunciations of the expedition, information about domestic leftwing movements and characters like Eugene Debs, stories of their comrades returning from France, and coverage of the Congressional outcry against the intervention. These non-propaganda materials had an unmistakable impact on AEFNR soldiers’ perceptions of the intervention’s motivations. While soldier correspondences sent back to the United States were heavily censored, letters from home went unregulated. Corpl. Cleo Colburn wrote in his diary about the information flowing both ways: “Clippings from Detroit papers came in stating that the home folks were unsatisfied with the conditions of American troops in Russia. Lieutenant Fistler up for court martial for sending news

²⁵ BHL: George F. Robins, “Correspondence”, 1-2 (5/17/19).

²⁶ *Sentinel*: Vol. 1 Page 2; Vol. 1 Page 4; Vol. 2 Page 2; Vol. 2 Page 4; Vol. 3 Page 4; Vol. 14 Page 4.

concerning conditions in Russia, which was forbidden”.²⁷ The newspapers had an especially pronounced effect as the men accepted American newspapers’ credibility, especially with those of their home towns.

News of domestic confusion concerning the intervention only furthered the Polar Bears’ suspicions over their role in Russia. In an April letter, Lt. Keith Chriswell of “F” Company summarized the AEFNR’s awareness of the controversy over poor conditions in Russia: “I see the people in the states are pretty wild because we do not come back and I hope they do something pretty soon. and [sic] the clippings that I saw in the papers from the states about us here are true”.²⁸ Pvt. Kenneth Skellenger reinforced Chriswell in his diary: “we have heard about Detroit yelling about 339 in Russia”.²⁹ Such news added tension to the already questionable role of the AEFNR. Colburn, in an article concerning the purported “I” Co. mutiny, wrote that his men had “received copies of the speech of Senator Hiram Johnson, of California, asking why the troops were in Russia, and had received also newspaper clippings asking the same question, and letters from their parents asking why the men themselves did not ask”.³⁰ Officers claimed that these articles increased confusion and unrest among the soldiers: “press articles and the roars of certain congressmen [...] that filtered in through the mails to our front line campfires [...] caused trouble and heart-burnings among the men. It seems incredible how much of it the men fell for”.³¹ Some American newspapers unknowingly reinforced Bolshevik propaganda with incorrect reports: “The Americans only laughed at Bolshevik propaganda which they clearly saw through [...] But when a man's own home paper printed the same story of the million men advancing on Archangel with bloody bayonets fixed [...] the doughboy's spirit was depressed”.³² Other domestic articles,

²⁷ BHL: Colburn, “Diary”, 6 (2/11/19).

²⁸ BHL: Keith Chriswell, “Letter to cousin, Mrs. Thomas Dittrich”, Keith Chriswell Papers, 1 (4/1/19).

²⁹ BHL: Skellenger, “Diary”, 10 (4/11-16/19).

³⁰ BHL: Colburn, “Article from the Literary Digest, July 12, 1919 [photocopy]”, 2.

³¹ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 224.

³² Ibid.

regarding the Industrial Workers of the World movement and radical figures like Eugene Debs and Victor Berger, also had demoralizing consequences.

Several officers grimly noted the information exchange regarding domestic Bolshevik-sympathizing groups to the soldiers in Russia as these materials presented the AEFNR with an increasingly complex situation. Some papers glorified left-wing movements and argued that the Bolsheviks were allies of a global labor movement. Such coverage offered enlisted men, most of whom were working class, an anti-intervention viewpoint and contended that they were fighting a pro-working class revolution. Lt. Costello remembered, shortly after returning home, that the soldiers' mail "carried lengthy reports of the speeches of Victor Berger and Eugene V. Debs and even more radical persons".³³ Costello continued to portray the divisive nature of such mail:

On September 29, 1918, for instance, when Americans were giving their lives for a cause which they at least didn't understand, Americans who were fighting because they actually believed they were preventing Germany establishing a submarine base on the White sea, Debs, so the newspapers from our home city told us, was in Detroit delivering a speech telling of the wonderful work of the Russian brethren-the very men who were taking American lives [...] Debs was praising in this speech, which was widely published in the locality where most of the 339th men had their homes, the so-called workingmen of Russia. [...] Didn't he know that American workingmen were being killed and in some instances tortured by these so-called brethren in Russia? [...] it was difficult for us, away up there in isolated and frozen swamps and dense forests, to realize how such a thing as permitting Debs to speak as he did was possible [...] If men were struck by any propaganda in North Russia it was the dilly-dallying tactics of people responsible for allowing such as Debs and Berger to run rampant in our own "God's country" that was to blame.³⁴

Several officers stated that these materials had more serious effects than British or Russian propaganda. Lt. Costello even claimed that "newspaper items from home" induced the "sort of fit of group hysteria" that caused the potential "I" Co. mutiny in March 1919.³⁵

These "yellow articles, which appeared in United States papers and magazines which call themselves reputable and which were mailed to the forces in North Russia" further confused the ordinary American soldier who was already trying to make sense of a complex political and

³³ BHL: Costello, 52.

³⁴ Ibid., 52-54.

³⁵ Ibid., 80.

ideological situation without much guidance from the American government.³⁶ The American media and the *Sentinel*, trusted sources of information, greatly influenced the AEFNR. While the *Sentinel* offered a vehement anti-Bolshevik perspective, domestic materials countered its claims. The controversy over the expedition in this domestic media eroded the Americans' dwindling faith in the intervention and accentuated their confusion over the situation. As such, demoralizing American literature played a key role in the moral crisis.

Bolshevik Propaganda in Russia

Bolshevik disinformation bombarded American soldiers in North Russia constantly. Smele argued that the Bolsheviks honed these skills during the Civil War: “propaganda – especially on the Red side – became an art”.³⁷ During 1918 and 1919 the Bolsheviks experimented on American soldiers with a variety of materials to some success. The methods and efficacy of this propaganda can be broken into pre and post-Armistice stages. Just as the Red troops were less organized and efficient early on, so too was their propaganda.

After receiving news of the intervention, the communists had retreated from Archangel, but not without leaving spies and agents to spread desired messages. Unlike on the Western front where trenches defined the front lines, vast swampy expanses with few patrols or trenches characterized the fighting in North Russia, leaving a large unsecured border between the Allies and Bolsheviks.³⁸ Lt. Primm noted that, “consequently there was always in Archangel and scattered throughout the north a dangerously large number of enemy sympathizers and active agents. Although some of these were apprehended almost daily, the facilities of the General Staff for this work were so slender that there was a constant feeling of great insecurity”.³⁹ Early

³⁶ BHL: Primm, 114; Moore, Mead, Jahns, 221.

³⁷ Smele, 4.

³⁸ Ironside, 58; Halliday, Kindle Location 2797/4001.

³⁹ BHL: Primm, 117.

Bolshevik propaganda consisted mostly of stories and dropped leaflets.⁴⁰ Pre-Armistice Bolshevik propaganda had less varied forms and a consistent message as well.

Initially, Bolshevik propaganda inspired fear in the Allied troops.⁴¹ This method coincided with British disinformation by also portraying the Reds as a mercilessly violent fighting force. While the British tried to use such sentiment to garner fighting prowess, the Bolsheviks desired the opposite. Hoping to strike fear in their enemy, the Bolsheviks left “leaflets aimed at terrifying Allied soldiers and undermining morale,” through tales of torture and mutilation.⁴² Antony Lockley, a writer for *History Today*, noted that Bolshevik propaganda took more forms, improved in efficacy, and reoriented its message to match Allied grievances in the post-Armistice period.⁴³

After November 11, the Americans noticed altered enemy propaganda. On Armistice Day itself, the Bolsheviks launched a massive offensive on the Dvina River front, near Toulgas.⁴⁴ While the offensive did not drastically change the military balance, it reminded the Americans “that they were still fighting while the rest of their comrades in Europe were at peace”.⁴⁵ Pvt. Edwin Arkins, in an unfinished poem, reflected this sentiment: “This is the night of the Armistice; / The World has gone mad with delight. / Naught for us but misery mid snow and ice / With nothing but fighting in sight”.⁴⁶ After the Armistice, the Bolsheviks identified preexisting tensions among the Allied forces.

Bolshevik propaganda became more influential after the Armistice as its content shifted from mutilation stories to instead address post-Armistice anxieties.⁴⁷ Bolshevik writers realized three characteristics of the Allied troops and reoriented their propaganda as such. Firstly, the ceasefire annulled labeling North Russia as a sideshow of WWI and Allied military leaders had

⁴⁰ Lockley, 47.

⁴¹ Ibid., 46.

⁴² Ibid., 47.

⁴³ Lockley, 47; Kenez, 15.

⁴⁴ Lockley 47; BHL: Douma, “Diary”, 9.

⁴⁵ Lockley, 47.

⁴⁶ BHL: Arkins, ““In Retrospect,” an unfinished poem about the 339th Infantry in Russia”, 1 (11/11/18).

⁴⁷ Lockley, 47.

not provided their men with reasoning for their continued presence into the harsh winter months.

A report from Capt. Hugh S. Martin summarized the predicament:

Before the signing of the armistice it was easy to say that we were fighting the allies of Germany. After the armistice, however – when the heaviest fighting of the North Russia campaign took place – we were left in the embarrassing attitude of trying to interpret the policies of our respective governments so as to justify our military activities in Russia [...] The Bolsheviks lost no opportunity to take advantage of this state of mind and flooded us with propaganda in the language of the particular unit to which it was directed, in which they asked our soldiers these very questions.⁴⁸

The Armistice weighed on the AEFNR and the Bolsheviks capitalized on the situation by never letting the men forget it: “Bolsheviki almost daily tried out their post-armistice propaganda”.⁴⁹

Secondly, tensions between the working class enlisted men and their upper-class officers were poor. In a speculative essay written in April 1919, Sgt. Roger Clark claimed that “the gilded aristocracy of British and American officers in particular” eroded morale.⁵⁰ The Bolsheviks acknowledged this sentiment, as “hierarchy and subordination chafed against ingrained American values of equality and individualism”, and used these anxieties to prod at class tensions.⁵¹ Lastly, most enlisted men were working class. The fact that working class Americans were in Russia, fighting Russian workers and peasants in a military intervention decided upon by wealthy and powerful Americans, played into the Bolshevik narrative. Some soldiers openly stated their backgrounds, like Sgt. Silver Parrish, who viewed the Russian situation while “being a working man my self [sic]”.⁵² The occupational knowledge section of ordinary troops’ enlistment records usually stated roles such as “laborer”, “farmer”, or similar skill-level jobs like “warehouse worker” and reinforce the working class character of the men.⁵³ Kennedy wrote of how military

⁴⁸ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Report of Capt H.S. Martin, American Military Mission, on his Personal Observations Concerning the American Intervention in North Russia, Aug 20, 1919”, 6.

⁴⁹ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 127.

⁵⁰ BHL: Clark, “What Ails the ANREF?”, 18.

⁵¹ Kennedy, 210.

⁵² BHL: Parrish, 26.

⁵³ BHL: Bentley Historical Library Polar Bear Project Collection.

intelligence testers were “unsettled by the meager educational background of the recruits” as well, confirming the socioeconomic composition of AEFNR enlisted men.⁵⁴

The directing of propaganda towards working class troops is especially evident in a publication which several Americans mention: an English-language paper published in Moscow named *The Call*.⁵⁵ Kenez specifically mentioned *The Call*, describing how the Bolsheviks “were particularly interested in reaching the soldiers of the interventionist armies,” and claimed that Allied soldiers “were willing listeners” to such propaganda.⁵⁶ The December 7, 1918 edition of *The Call* addressed its target audience immediately: “Of the workers and peasants of Russia, to their English speaking fellow workers”.⁵⁷ The publication gave a rendition of world events while emphasizing an upcoming global proletariat revolution. The paper denounced the bourgeoisie, sometimes by utilizing humor. For example, one section told a comical fable of J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and an undefined member of the Rothschild family eating “common people” as food.⁵⁸ The No.13 edition called upon Allied soldiers to desert: “the most hearty welcome of all to those English and American soldiers, who have the courage to leave the armies of their Imperialist warlords and come over to the side of the Russian labour Republic”.⁵⁹ Pvt. Walter McKenzie brought back an issue of the paper, and although his diary does not address it, the fact that he chose to bring the paper home reflected some degree of interest.

Other Bolshevik propaganda appealed to the soldiers’ emotions and ethnic backgrounds. “It is the capitalist governments of your countries, who compel you to undergo the horrors of war, and who keep you away from your loved ones who are yearning for your return,” claimed one

⁵⁴ Kennedy, 188.

⁵⁵ BHL: Costello, 96.

⁵⁶ Kenez, 47; Kenez also remarked that Bolshevik propaganda may have directly caused “the resounding fiasco of French intervention in Southern Russia by further undermining the morale of the foreign soldiers”, in Kenez, 47.

⁵⁷ BHL: “The Call”, Walter I. McKenzie Papers, 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

pamphlet.⁶⁰ Bolshevik propaganda attempted to incite ethnic mutinies amongst the Americans of Russian descent. One article described its complexity and targeting after the Armistice: “This isn’t the old propaganda that the Russians tried. They would leave printed posters tied to the trees whenever they retreated. These called upon the Americans of Russian descent to rebel. But they only served to make the American Russians more bitter toward the “Bolos””.⁶¹ Papers directed American soldiers to disobey officers, further distribute the propaganda, and educated them about the origins and purported successes of communist revolution.⁶² The propaganda brought simmering issues out into the open, as no commanders had given American soldiers a concrete reason for their presence. While the content did not vary largely, the dissemination methods did.

The Bolsheviks used more methods and increased materials to propagandize the Allied soldiers after the ceasefire in France. The dropped pamphlet approaches continued post-Armistice but increased in ferocity: “[Bolshevik] propaganda was hurled at us with a force as great as their shells and their bullets. Trains of box cars actually loaded with propaganda matter were sent to the front lines. Trails were strewn with the stuff at night. We found it scattered on the ground, hanging to the branches of trees”.⁶³ The fact that the Bolsheviks placed such an emphasis on propaganda, during a time when Kenez noted a severe paper shortage in Russia, showed its importance to the Bolsheviks and hints at its efficacy.⁶⁴

Soldiers described alternative Bolshevik approaches as well. The Red troops preached communist ideology and constructed large bulletin boards to spread their message across the front lines. Sgt. Gordon Smith wrote an anecdote of one Bolshevik method: “Bolo came down to bridge under white flag and gave us a lecture on Bolshevism, and said they did not want to fight the

⁶⁰ Exhibit XXVII in U.S. Congress, House, Committee, “Charges Against the Department of Justice”, 498.

⁶¹ BHL: “Scrapbook”, Leon Bell Papers, 7.

⁶² Exhibits in U.S. Congress, House, Committee, “Charges Against the Department of Justice”, 498 – 513.

⁶³ BHL: Costello, 45 – 46.

⁶⁴ Kenez, 44 – 45.

Americans”.⁶⁵ Pvt. McKenzie, who had kept a copy of *The Call*, also kept a Bolshevik pamphlet. The pamphlet was an English version of the “Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic”, published in Moscow in 1918 and intended to educate English readers with a rosy vision of Bolshevism.⁶⁶ In some cases propaganda exchanges went both ways. Corporal James Sibley recorded that his “Capt. Had an interview with the Bolos officers on the bridge and gave them some propaganda, they also gave us some”.⁶⁷ One of the most peculiar attempts to sway Allied morale was the POW experience.

Contrary to the messages in early propaganda, the Bolsheviks treated Allied prisoners extremely well, providing good accommodations while attempting to indoctrinate them with ideology. On one occasion, an Irish priest captured behind enemy lines was permitted to return after attending lessons on communism in Moscow and agreeing to pass along pamphlets.⁶⁸ Several Americans experienced longer prisoner tenures, but the “prisoner” title barely recreates the experience. In a description of his POW experience, George Albers remembered how “the Reds tried their best to make [them] comfortable”.⁶⁹ While the POWs did partake in forced labor, they were given free reign of Moscow before a 9 p.m. curfew. Albers and his fellow POWs attended weekly lectures on Bolshevism, incentivized by bountiful meals as a reward for listening.⁷⁰ Pvt. Earl Fulcher was also captured and, in a statement of his experience, remarked that “we received enough to eat and were not mistreated in any way [...] the interpreters told us that that they did not blame the soldiers in the Allied Armies for being up here”.⁷¹ American POWs had firsthand impressions of the Bolshevik regime and were taught Bolshevik ideology.

⁶⁵ BHL: Gordon Smith, “Diary”, 7 (9/26/18), Costello, 46 – 47, “Scrapbook”, Leon Bell Papers 7; Moore, Mead, Jahns, 127.

⁶⁶ BHL: Department of Foreign Political Literature of the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, “Russian Revolutionary pamphlets, Constitution (fundamental law) Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, 1918”, Walter I. McKenzie Papers, 1.

⁶⁷ BHL: James Sibley, “Diary”, 7 (12/22/18).

⁶⁸ BHL: Costello, 53.

⁶⁹ BHL: “339th Men Forced to Bury the Dead: Released Prisoners Tell of Their Moscow Experience”, George Albers Papers.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ BHL: Earl Fulcher, “Statement of his experience as a POW (typescript)”, Earl Fulcher Papers, 1-2 (5/7/19).

Bolshevik propaganda, aimed at the English-speaking armies, took a variety of forms which shifted throughout the intervention. From pamphlets to lectures across the front lines to attempts to indoctrinate POWs, the Bolsheviks tried a plethora of tactics during the Civil War years. The “most vicious and deadly of all the enemy weapons--Bolshevik Propaganda” improved in effectiveness after the Armistice, concretely altering AEFNR morale in the second stage of the expedition.⁷² Some veterans speculated that the propaganda was so well targeted that the “Bolos must have known something of our unwarlike and dissatisfied state of mind”.⁷³ The fact that Americans were exposed to such propaganda is known, but the efficacy of such propaganda is nuanced and unexplored.

American interpretations of Bolshevik propaganda varied widely by rank due to differences in education and socioeconomic backgrounds. Almost unanimously, officers disregarded the propaganda and assumed their men could do the same. The views of enlisted men were more subtle. Many did not record Bolshevik propaganda interactions, yet those who did called it a powerful tool against Allied morale. Unlike officer statements, the official reports from Archangel noted the pervasiveness of Bolshevik propaganda. Scores of soldiers read the propaganda and wrote about it.⁷⁴ By using enlisted men and official documents, the influence of post-Armistice Bolshevik propaganda is clear: it amplified preexisting poor conditions such as the cold, military hierarchy, and the ceasefire. While the AEFNR records show that Bolshevik propaganda adversely impacted American morale, the documents do not imply ideological acceptance of Bolshevism.

The officers of the AEFNR universally denounced Bolshevism. Lt. Costello wrote of the ideology in hardline terms, stating that “Bolshevism today [is] the chief menace to the world-a

⁷² Moore, Mead, Jahns, 196.

⁷³ Ibid., 221.

⁷⁴ BHL: Andrews, “Letter”, 4 (3/12/19); Arkins, “Diary”, 25 (2/22/19); “Scrapbook”, Leon Bell Papers, 7; Costello, 51; Sibley, “Diary”, 7 (12/22/18); Moore, Mead, Jahns 221; Lockley 46; Kenez, 47.

menace not alone from a military standpoint, not alone from the standpoint of a threatened social and political order, but from the standpoint of the very safety of humanity itself”.⁷⁵ Lt. Primm and Lt. Cudahy agreed with Costello, and Primm wrote that “Relations with [Bolshevism] were not complicated, but were sufficient to indicate to thoughtful minds the menace possibly involved to world peace and to civilization itself”.⁷⁶ Some officers, like Capt. Moore, Lt. Mead, and Lt. Jahns, had less aggressive stances: “We say candidly that we think Bolshevism is a failure. But we do not condemn everyone else who differs with us,” still, “we want nothing to do with the Bolo agitator in this country who would make another Russia of the United States”.⁷⁷ AEFNR officers expressed a mindset opposing Bolshevism with varied ferociousness. The officers were unanimous in denying propaganda’s influence on their men.⁷⁸

Officers claimed that the AEFNR was immune to propaganda, sometimes by making arguments that reflected ignorance about the true composition of the men. Unlike the soldier diaries, many of the officer records were written in the year following their withdrawal from Russia. The climate in which these materials were produced, the Red Scare, may have pushed the writers to the extreme, as Lt. Costello claimed: “they are all united on one point. They hate Bolshevism and all that it stands for”.⁷⁹ Costello also highlighted the role of religious objection: “I personally have listened to a dozen conversations among the enlisted men and [...] each of these conversations bewailed the fact that the forces of religion in the western world little realized that this movement called Bolshevism was reaching out at the heart of Christianity”.⁸⁰ Moore, Mead, and Jahns noted the same, remembering that “Soldiers were quick to punch holes in any

⁷⁵ BHL: Costello, 93.

⁷⁶ BHL: Primm, 112; Cudahy, 20-21.

⁷⁷ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 247, 254.

⁷⁸ The Bentley Historical Library collection is the most comprehensive archive for studying the AEFNR, however, the collection is slightly skewed towards officers. Despite this, the records at Bentley and the National Archives still illustrate a more nuanced depiction of the Polar Bears regarding Bolshevism than that described by AEFNR officers, See Introduction for discussion.

⁷⁹ BHL: Costello, 89-90.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 93-94.

propaganda”.⁸¹ Some argued that a lack of English-language materials lessened potential effects of Bolshevik propaganda. Lt. Primm specifically noted the language barrier:

There was plenty of propaganda all through North Russia, but most of it was in Russian. That which was translated into English impressed the Americans chiefly by its bombastic exaggeration and its simplicity, so that they laughed at it. It is doubtful if any Bolshevik propaganda, which came north from central Russia, had the slightest effect on American troops or in any way was accountable for any thought, statement or action by American soldiers, which could be criticized.⁸²

The official military reports and cables tell a different story regarding the efficacy of Bolshevik propaganda.

Contrary to Primm’s claim, many AEFNR soldiers were of Slavic ethnicity and this became a contentious point regarding Bolshevik propaganda.⁸³ Early on in the campaign, General Ironside applauded the Americans for their bilingual abilities, making the case that the large amounts of ethnic Russians and Poles from Detroit gave troops ample interpreters.⁸⁴ In a later cable Ironside retracted this sentiment, instead arguing that Russian-Americans were prone to Bolshevik propaganda and disseminated English translations amongst peers.⁸⁵ Capt. Prince reported the opposite, claiming that there “is absolutely no evidence to prove that foreign born soldiers are apt to make trouble, to the contrary in most cases [...] the most persistent knockers and trouble makers have been native born citizens”.⁸⁶ Still, Prince and Ironside were in agreement – trouble was afoot in the AEFNR. Overall, the commanding officers in Archangel provided more realistic assessments of the impact of propaganda on enlisted men than their officers at the front. Many official reports directly contradict the statements from officers at the front.

The military leadership in Archangel recognized Bolshevik propaganda as a realistic tool of psychological warfare but did not observe an ideological acceptance of Bolshevism among the

⁸¹ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 221.

⁸² BHL: Primm, 114.

⁸³ In his history of the Great War, Kennedy estimated that one out of five draftees was foreign-born, in Kennedy, 157.

⁸⁴ Ironside, 28.

⁸⁵ Rhodes, 61.

⁸⁶ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Reports on the Morale of the AEF, North Russia, by Capts Jacob A Harzfeld and Eugene Prince, American Military Mission to Russia, Feb 2-20, 1919”, 9.

men. A February 1919 report from Archangel stated that “the effects of in some cases of Bolshevik propaganda have produced a low state of morale in the American forces”.⁸⁷ A separate report by Capt. Eugene Prince found that a “very large amount of trouble has to be credited to the effects of the Bolshevik propaganda, particularly to the booklets [...] and the copies of the “Call” the bolshevick [sic] propaganda newspaper”.⁸⁸ Even hardliner Lt. Primm contradicted himself and noted the influential abilities of the propaganda concerning POWs: “only the small number of such prisoners prevented that form of propaganda from becoming powerful in favorably influencing the general American attitude toward Bolshevism”.⁸⁹ As such, the officer literature published during the Red Scare incorrectly downplays the efficacy of Bolshevik propaganda.

American soldiers’ views regarding Bolshevism are largely missing from the record but the few entries which exist range widely. Anti-Bolshevik opinions comprised one end of the enlisted man and NCO spectrum. Ernest Andrews, in a March 1919 letter to his family, pledged to continue to “fight the “bolos” if they try to gain a foothold at home”.⁹⁰ However, in the same letter, Andrews acknowledged the quality of the propaganda: “their propaganda [...] makes fools of some you could not call ignorant”.⁹¹ Corpl. Hugo Salchow, in an interview conducted in 1971, recalled: “I don’t think that [Bolshevism] was considered a threat to the American system [...] But we knew pretty well that Communism wasn’t something that we would like to live with”.⁹² As such, several AEFNR men professed anti-Bolshevik opinions while acknowledging the efficacy of their propaganda.

Other troops expressed a general ambivalence towards the Bolsheviks. Sgt. Clark wrote that “in Northern Russia the Bolshevik appears merely as a half-starved and not unlikeable fellow

⁸⁷ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Situation Reports on the Efficiency and Morale of the AEF, North Russia, Dec 1918-Mar 1919”, 7.

⁸⁸ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Reports on the Morale of the AEF, North Russia, by Capts Jacob A Harzfeld and Eugene Prince, American Military Mission to Russia, Feb 2-20, 1919”, 9.

⁸⁹ BHL: Primm, 115.

⁹⁰ BHL: Ernest Oliver Andrews, “Letter from Archangel, 6 (3/12/19).

⁹¹ BHL: Andrews, “Letter from Archangel, 4 (3/12/19).

⁹² BHL: Salchow, 5.

who frankly disavows any quarrel with America” and that “there is no great hatred for the Bolsheviks in the rank and file of the American army”.⁹³ During the American evacuation, Sgt. Gordon Smith rooted for the Bolsheviks due to his greater hatred of the British despite denouncing the Reds several weeks earlier: “Our new relief who came up here to finish the job had to give up Toulgas to the Bolos yesterday. English will be driven back into the White Sea soon. Hurrah! I hope so”.⁹⁴ Only a few soldiers expressed radical sentiments.

Although rare, some soldiers articulated pro-Bolshevik beliefs. Pvt. Kenneth Skellenger, in the back of his diary, wrote a note “To the Bolshevik soldiers” in March of 1919. Skellenger wrote that “We would join hands with you to down crowned heads. It is all for the majority of human beings” as “We U.S. soldiers hear many stories about the inhuman “Bolo” but we do not believe all we hear”.⁹⁵ The letter ends with a nearly mutinous request: “We won’t make an attack [sic] on you. If you wait 2 ½ months we will be out of Russia”.⁹⁶ A petition circulated “B” Company in February 1919 that demanded an end to patrols.⁹⁷ Sgt. Silver Parrish, the NCO behind the almost-mutinous resolution, sympathized with the Bolshevik cause and wrote in his diary: “I am 9/10 Bolo my self and they all call me the Bolos leader and my platoone [sic] the Bolos platoone because every man in my platoone signed that [document]”.⁹⁸ Propaganda cannot be the sole cause of Parrish’s leanings, however. In one of his first entries upon arrival in Russia, he wrote of his distaste for the slang term “bolo”, for “I know better they are [working] men trying to through [sic] off the yoke of Capitalism”.⁹⁹ Also, while Parrish harbored communist feelings, his military

⁹³ BHL: Clark, “What Ails the AEFNR?”, 7.

⁹⁴ BHL: Smith, “Diary”, 17.

⁹⁵ BHL: Skellenger, “Diary”, 38 – 39.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 39.

⁹⁷ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Reports on Mutinies and on Morale of Allied Troops in North Russia by Capt H.S. Martin, Jul 1919”, 11.

⁹⁸ BHL: Parrish, 42 – 43.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 1.

record was impressive amongst sergeants in North Russia, earning him military decorations and respect.¹⁰⁰

Analyses of enlisted men's records suggest that their perceptions of the Bolsheviks were varied, yet the majority did not identify with the goal of eradicating Bolshevism. Kenneth Adams, who covered the AEFNR for the *Chicago Tribune*, accurately summarized the aggregate feeling: "These men who were hemmed in all Winter, ignorant of why they were fighting, close to the founts of Bolshevik propaganda [...] They feel it is a sort of unlawlessness in which they are not concerned in Russia but in which they would be patriotically concerned in Detroit or Chicago".¹⁰¹ The AEFNR records support a general ambivalence toward Bolshevism in Russia but refute a widespread acceptance of Bolshevik ideology. Willett, who largely ignored the propaganda aspect of the AEFNR experience, still confirmed that the "Canadians and Americans often expressed sympathy for, and even a certain closeness to, the Bolsheviks".¹⁰² While enlisted men did not widely support the Bolshevik cause, official military reports and newspapers correctly connected Bolshevik propaganda to collapsing American morale.

Some reports and American newspaper articles raised the question of Bolshevik propaganda's connection to the mutinous events in "I" Company in March 1919. The "mutiny" was attributed to Bolshevik propaganda, as an official "dispatch states that it is worthy of note that the questions that were put to the officers by the men were identical with those that the Bolshevik leaflets advised them to put to them".¹⁰³ Prominent newspapers ran with the claim. An April 1919 *New York Times* article detailed: "Official reports to the War Department, made public today [...] show that the mutiny among the American troops at Archangel was directly due to propaganda

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 22, 43.

¹⁰¹ BHL: Adams, "Part of the 339th out of Russia arrive at Brest", 2.

¹⁰² Willett, Kindle Location 3178/7303; Willett only used the term "propaganda" 4 times.

¹⁰³ BHL: "339th will reach Detroit Thursday; Mutiny tale 'bunk'" in Scrapbook 2, Hugh D. McPhail Papers, 24; "Letter" in Scrapbook, Leon Bell Papers, 13.

circulated among the men by Bolshevik sympathizers”.¹⁰⁴ Despite the relabeling of the mutiny later on, the report released by General Peyton C. March (Army Chief of Staff) and the subsequent media outcry highlighted the Bolshevik propaganda’s impact.

The men of the 339th were eager to portray the incident as a misunderstanding and dismissed the role of Bolshevik disinformation. A *Chicago Tribune* correspondent present in Russia at the time, Frazier Hunt, flatly rejected the role of propaganda on the “mutiny” upon returning home: “certainly Bolshevik propaganda had nothing to do with it”.¹⁰⁵ While no soldiers were court martialed, soldiers initially disobeyed a direct order and were accused of being influenced to do so by propaganda. The fact that the question was raised reflected the pervasiveness of the Bolshevik propaganda.

Disinformation was an essential theme of the AEFNR experience. Propaganda and American media were catalysts of deteriorating morale and mutinous activity after the ceasefire in Europe. British propaganda exacerbated Anglo-American enmity while encouraging violent treatment of enemy POWs. A comprehensive view of the enlisted men’s records suggests that the Bolshevik propaganda aided, to some degree, in the erosion of American morale after the Armistice. The Bolshevik propaganda did not fabricate new worries but prodded the existing qualms analyzed in Chapters One and Two. These qualms went unaddressed by American military leadership and AEFNR officers, allowing the questions posed by Bolshevik propaganda to take root.¹⁰⁶ Domestic American materials which found their way to the front lines had the most pronounced impact, as soldiers were more likely to believe a hometown paper. This media brought news of the domestic controversy over the intervention to the AEFNR and hurt morale by

¹⁰⁴ “MARCH EXPLAINS MUTINY; Says Our Men in Russia Were Influenced by Red Sympathizers. REPEATED PRINTED QUERIES Worked Upon by Constant Propaganda Signed by a Former British Journalist. LEADER IS UNDER ARREST”, *New York Times*, April 12, 1919, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9A06E1DD1F3BE03ABC4B52DFB2668382609EDE&legacy=true>.

¹⁰⁵ BHL: “Grand Rapids to Protest Holding Troops in Russia” in Scrapbook 2, Hugh D. McPhail Papers, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Halliday, Location 2095/4001 (Kindle).

verifying the men's confusion. Ironically, the American press had the largest negative effect on the morale of the AEFNR.

The AEFNR experience did not end after boarding the *Menominee* and departing for Brest, France, and later the United States. They returned home to the Red Scare United States with new ideas and changed perceptions, especially on the subjects of Russia, Bolshevism, and America's role in the world.

Conclusion

Returning Home

*Life will always be a crazy thing to the soldier of North Russia; the color and the taste of living have gone from the soldier of North Russia; and the glory of youth has forever gone from him*¹
-Lt. John Cudahy

As morale deteriorated in Russia, domestic pressures mounted to bring the soldiers home. Despite being forbidden to send news of the situation in North Russia back to the United States, some avoided censorship and alerted the Detroit papers of conditions.² Citizens related to the soldiers sent a document to Congress in February to “petition for the withdrawal of the American soldiers from the entire country of North Russian [...] or failing this, we urge that they be properly housed, fed, clothed, munitioned, and given proper hospital facilities”.³ State representatives from the Midwest led by Wisconsin Governor E. L. Philipp, Michigan Governor Robert Sleeper, Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette, and California Senator Hiram Johnson sued for an end to the conflict – an expedition in a sovereign country which Congress had not declared war on.⁴ Wilson, who had little enthusiasm for the expedition in the first place, did not need persuading.

By February 1919 the American government had decided upon a withdrawal as early as weather would permit.⁵ Colonel Stewart circulated a memo on April 9 that announced the withdrawal and commended the AEFNR on faring through compromising conditions: “the hardships of service under Arctic conditions is well recognized”.⁶ Still, even as the AEFNR mobilized toward Archangel, not all of the men rejoiced. Some on the Onega and Dvina fronts continued to fight until June and, when relieved by White Russians, despaired in the lack of

¹ Cudahy, 29

² BHL: Colburn, “Diary”, 6 (2/11/19); Colburn described Lt. Fistler, who consequently was “up for court martial for sending news concerning conditions in Russia, which was forbidden”.

³ BHL: “Petition for withdrawal of troops from Russia” Michael J. Macalla Papers, 1.

⁴ Rhodes, 102.

⁵ Ibid., 101.

⁶ BHL: George Stewart, “Memo – “General Order No. 15””, John Crissman Papers, 1 (4/9/19).

results: “The Bolos attacked Tolgas this morning. A White Russian Regiment was stationed there and they plotted with the Bolos and deliberately gave up the town [...] Six months of hard work gone to the devil”.⁷ Sgt. Smith too lamented the late fighting: “Our government promised to get us out of here by the 1st of June but we are still on the front line”.⁸ Despite Douma and Smith’s worries, they pulled back to Archangel to join their peers soon after.

In June, troops filtered in from the various fronts of the Archangel area as the Polar Bears assembled in Economia to prepare for the journey home. The Doughboys spent several nights packing by day and playing baseball in the midnight sun on the sandy banks of the island.⁹ In mid-June the vast majority of men departed aboard the *Menominee* or the *Porto* (Photograph C.i). They left with some additions: ample medals bestowed by the British military and eight Russian brides.¹⁰ Even during the jubilant departure the Anglo-American antagonism continued to stir. According to Rhodes, General Richardson “sensed condescending overtones of British imperialism” in the large amount of bestowed awards.¹¹ During their evacuation from North Russia the Americans met incoming British reinforcements who verbally mocked their fighting spirit.¹² Before departure “incipient melees arose in the streets of Archangel” between British and Americans troops.¹³ While aboard the *Menominee* and docked at Kola, a “battle of words and coal occure[ed] between yanks and british”, resulting in an American being “hit by bottle thrown from opposite [British] ship”.¹⁴ Despite enduring hostility, the AEFNR rejoiced during the passage to Brest, France where after a brief stay “back in civilization” they again departed for the United

⁷ BHL: Douma, “Diary”, 19 (4/25/19); Smith, “Diary”, 17; George Pepin, “Diary”, George E. Pepin Papers, 18.

⁸ BHL: Smith, “Diary”, 16 (6/1/19).

⁹ BHL: Kooyers, 14; Parrish, 45 (5/26/19); Moore, Mead, Jahns, 290.

¹⁰ Willett, Kindle Location 2863/7303.

¹¹ Rhodes, 107.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, “Brig. Gen. Wilds P Richardson’s “Notes on the War and on the North Russian Expedition”, n.d.”, 52.

¹⁴ BHL: Scheu, 38 (6/17/19); Arkins, “Diary”, 31 (6/17/19).

States via Boston or New York.¹⁵ The men complained little about the continually awful conditions aboard the transports.

The men celebrated as they arrived in the United States. Clarence Scheu explained the feeling of the men upon seeing Boston harbor from *SS President Grant*: “sight Revere beach [...] a mighty cheer goes up from the ship, its all over now, were [sic] home”.¹⁶ Corpl. Fred Kooyers travelled on a different ship, the *Von Steuben*, and described the scene upon landing in New York: “About 4A.M. we were met by a party from Detroit. They had a band with them followed us into the harbor and furnished music all the way to the dock”.¹⁷ The AEFNR returned to Michigan, and even the non-locals were treated “as good as the home people”.¹⁸ The men were discharged and free to continue their prewar lives by late July.

The story of the Polar Bears did not end in July 1919, however. The veterans returned home to muted celebrations due to the controversy surrounding the failed expedition. A Grand Rapids paper explained that “there is an apparent desire among officials here to get the outfit demobilized as quickly and quietly as possible; particularly it appears they do not relish the idea of the regiment being discussed”.¹⁹ Despite largescale ignorance of the AEFNR’s return in the United States, the Detroit area rejoiced. Many men were home for July Fourth celebrations and the 339th paraded around the area (Photograph C.ii).²⁰ Still, the widespread dismissal of the AEFNR’s return, who “returned home almost unnoticed, forgotten” left some disheartened.²¹

The AEFNR also returned to a different country than the one they had left in 1918. The atmosphere had turned from patriotic to a toxic manhunt for radicals and anyone who chose to criticize the United States, a period referred to as the Red Scare. As Robert K. Murray described,

¹⁵ BHL: Scheu, 39 (6/26/19).

¹⁶ Ibid., 42 (7/11/19).

¹⁷ BHL: Kooyers, 15 (6/30/19).

¹⁸ Ibid., (7/3/19).

¹⁹ BHL: “Last of Yankees, except engineers, out of Archangel” in “Scrapbook 2”, Hugh D. McPhail Papers, 7.

²⁰ BHL: “Scrapbook 2”, Hugh D. McPhail Papers, 25.

²¹ BHL: Lester Mathews, “Aid to Russia”, *The Democrat and Chronicle Sunday Magazine*, August 31, 1941 in “Newspaper Article”, Michael J. Macalla Papers, 2.

“the year 1919, rather than being remembered for its great hopes and its promise, remains on the pages of American history as one of the most futile and tragic”.²² Detroit, the home of the 339th and also a center for the IWW, experienced large government raids with roughly 800 suspected leftwing sympathizers imprisoned under harsh accommodations for days.²³ The men of the 339th returned during the height of the Red Scare after prolonged exposure to Bolshevism, often in the form of propaganda.

After months of contact with Bolsheviks, many of the AEFNR had strong feelings about Bolshevism in a domestic setting. Veteran officers Moore, Mead, and Jahns wrote a chapter on the subject in their 1920 book because “the writers have an idea that the veterans of the North Russia Expedition would like a short, up-to-date chapter on Bolshevism”.²⁴ The officers commented on the Red Scare climate:

In Russia, as in America, many false accusations and false assumptions are made. We now know that of certainty the Bolshevik, or Communistic party of Russia was aided by like-minded people in America [...] but we became rather hysterical in 1919 over those I.W.W.-Red outbursts, and very nearly let the conflict between Red propaganda and anti-Red propaganda upset our best traditions of toleration, of free speech, and of free press.²⁵

As noted in Chapter Three, most officer documents were published during the Red Scare and the anti-radical sentiment in 1919 may have skewed their perceptions of the expedition. Lt. John A. Commons elaborated, writing that the experience “made damn good Americans out of our soldiers [...] And, if you should care for a very exciting five minutes at any time, just mention Bolshevik or I.W.W. to a member of the 339th”.²⁶ Despite an overwhelming postwar condemnation of Bolshevism by AEFNR officers, no Bentley records captured the opinions of veteran enlisted men. While the Bentley collection largely ends after the AEFNR’s 1919 return, some documents illustrate the men’s longstanding interest in Russia and their communal experience.

²² Robert Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 4-5.

²³ Murray, 215.

²⁴ Moore, Mead, Jahns, 247.

²⁵ Ibid., 222.

²⁶ “John A. Commons to Professor Carl Russell Fish, 21 May 1919”, Carl Russell Fish Papers, State Historical Society of Washington in Rhodes, 122.

AEFNR veterans founded the Polar Bear Association in 1922 and kept in touch after the war. The “Constitution and By-Laws of the Polar Bear Association” stated that its goals were “to preserve and strengthen comradeship amongst its members” and “to perpetuate the history of our expedition and the memory of our dead” (Photograph C.iii).²⁷ Many AEFNR members attended Polar Bear Association gatherings to keep in touch (Photograph C.iv). Some remained friends through correspondence, oftentimes commenting on matters in Russia. In a 1920 letter from Sgt. Thomas Kernan to Sgt. Trombley, Kernan remarked: “I was reading in the paper where Mr. Bolo has taken Archangel and Murmansk and it makes me mad enough to fight to think of the men we lost and for no purpose”.²⁸ The Polar Bear Association printed annual materials and eulogized deceased members. A 2014 *Collections* article, published by Bentley, noted that “another goal [of the Association], if not explicitly written in the charter, was to recover the bodies of American soldiers lost on the Russian battlefield”.²⁹

The continued comradeship fostered by the Polar Bear Association spurred a 1929 trip to the Soviet Union to recover AEFNR bodies. Five veterans made the trip which was heavily documented by the Polar Bear Association and the American media.³⁰ In 1965 veteran Michael Macalla, who had joined the 1929 trip, commented on the enduring confusion among veterans: “this is the least that those living who survived the campaign could do for those buddies who made the supreme sacrifice for a cause they never did understand”.³¹ The publicized 1929 trip repatriated eighty-four deceased Polar Bears, most of whom were buried in the Polar Bear Plot of

²⁷ BHL: “Polar Bear Association publication, title page missing”, Edwin L. Arkins Papers, 4.

²⁸ BHL: Thomas B. Kernan, “Letter from T. B. Kernan to Trombley, Feb.26, 1920”, Edward Trombley Papers, 2.

²⁹ Lara Zielin, “Michigan's Polar Bears,” *Collections*, Fall 2014, accessed March 30, 2017, <http://bentley.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Fall-2014-Collections-final.pdf>.

³⁰ BHL: “Scrapbook 1 Part 1”, Hugh D. McPhail Papers, 15; “Honors Here Await War Dead on Arrival”, *New York Times*, November 27, 1929, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9F06E7DD173BE23ABC4F51DFB7678382639EDE&legacy=true>.

³¹ BHL: Michael Macalla, “Write-up about the Michigan Commission to Russia in 1929”, Michael J. Macalla Papers, 2.

the White Chapel Memorial cemetery in Troy, Michigan.³² Memorials in Troy continue to this day, with the most recent service in May 2011 and another planned for 2017 (Photograph C.v).³³

The Polar Bear Association sought to memorialize the men of the AEFNR who did not return from Russia. Another goal was to educate people about the expedition. This desire was apparent in a 1924 Polar Bear Association pamphlet, with the opening title “Who Are the Polar Bears and the 310th Engineers?”. The article described the paradoxical nature of the AEFNR in a text that is characteristic of twentieth-century American military interventions with unclear strategic purposes:

[The] causes for warring on Russians have never been made clear to anyone – much less to American soldiers. But war we did in an intensive bitter struggle about Archangel that reads like a melodrama [...] If one looks for heroism and moral grandeur, and noble self-negation, then there is much of victory in the campaign of North Russia. If one thinks of burning villages – sending homeless [Russian peasants] adrift on Arctic snows, butchering people with whom we had no quarrel, deserting a loyal generous ally when the battle was at its height [...] then there is naught but burning shame in the chapter of North Russia. The only precedent for comparison is the war with Mexico.³⁴

The lingering ambivalence displayed in the Polar Bear Association materials illustrated how AEFNR veterans, years later, still struggled to define their own soldier experience. They had fought bravely in brutal conditions against a better-equipped enemy. Allied atrocities, enduring confusion over why they had fought the Bolsheviks, and the military failure of the expedition still tinged their memories. Propaganda and domestic media had amplified the already poor conditions and helped collapse morale. The effects of the AEFNR’s morale crisis were still apparent five years later in this ambivalent text. Ultimately, the soldier experience still burned bright in the memories of the AEFNR after they departed Russia in 1919, and the decades of Polar Bear Association documents reflect this.

³² Ibid., 2.

³³ Mike Grobbel, "The 81st Memorial Day Service Honoring the "Polar Bears" of the U.S. Army's American North Russia Expeditionary Force, 1918-1919," "Detroit's Own" Polar Bear Memorial Association, June 4, 2011, accessed March 30, 2017, http://pbma.grobbel.org/ceremony/2011/2011_Memorial_Day_Service_photos.html.

³⁴ BHL: “Polar Bear Association publication, title page missing”, Edwin L. Arkins Papers, 4.

By 1924, members of the Polar Bear Association already placed the North Russian intervention in the category of twentieth century American interventions. By comparing it to the military mission in Mexico, the Polar Bear Association made a connection decades before the conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East further completed the picture. The AEFNR experience is an early and obscure case study in the complex intervention subgenre of twentieth century American soldier experiences.

The Polar Bears left for Russia in 1918 with high hopes for the war in France. They were not mistaken in this belief; Kennedy quoted an American soldier in France who “never enjoyed life as much as I have since I have been over here” to illustrate how “the season and the terrain [and] the lateness and the brevity of American belligerency” endowed many in the AEF with a “cheerful attitude”.³⁵ Neither the weather, terrain, nor length of service in Russia benefited the AEFNR like their counterparts in France. The ill-fated trip from England to Russia, struck by the Spanish Flu and subsequent health and supply issues, cast an ominous tone over the early months. The men experienced brutal violence with little sleep or food. Their changed perspectives, as many came to admire Russian civilians, was a silver lining. Ultimately, because of the fervor the Great War instilled, morale remained high in the fall compared to the later months.

The Armistice fundamentally changed the mindsets of the AEFNR. The soldiers felt confused and military leadership did little to alleviate the men’s perplexity. Conditions worsened after the Armistice as well: cold weather ended the rainy season but brought new dangers, growing animosity between the Allied armies undermined communality and trust, and the Bolsheviks coalesced into an intimidating enemy. Despite the efforts of humanitarian organizations like the YMCA, the AEFNR’s morale declined until mutinous activity surged. Even as most of the men enjoyed baseball games in the midnight sun during the spring retreat, some fought until June. The

³⁵ Emery Diary, Aug. 5, 1917, Emery Collection in Kennedy, 212; Kennedy, 215.

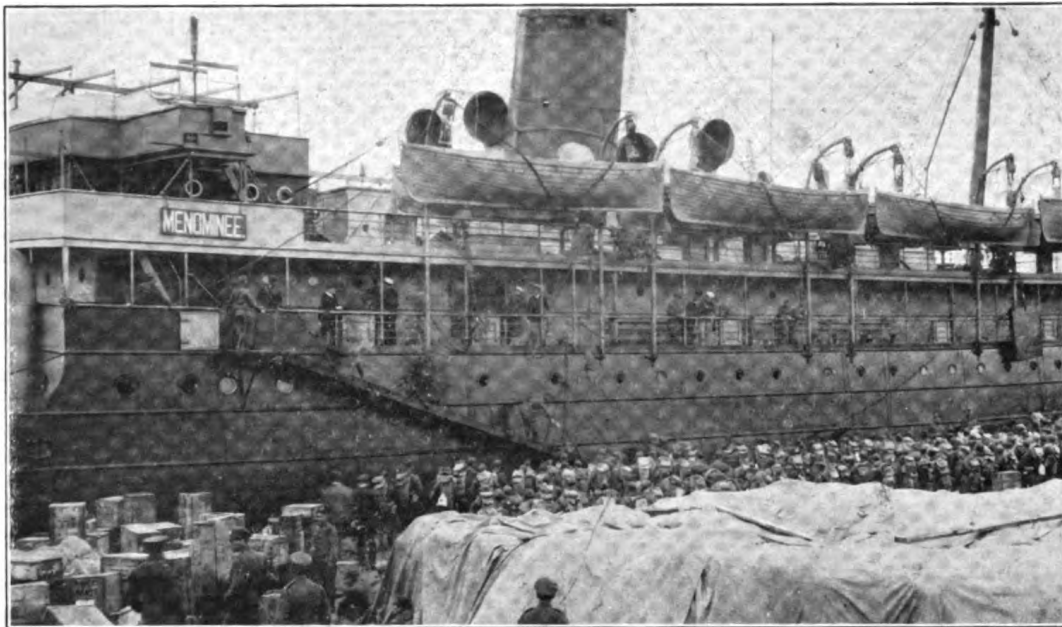
Polar Bear's story, while relatively unknown, has been described by Benjamin Rhodes, E.M. Halliday, and Robert Willett. One key aspect of the AEFNR experience that had not been documented to the same degree was the impact of information and disinformation.

Propaganda and American media played a significant role in the AEFNR's psychological experience. Despite denials that Bolshevik propaganda caused the precipitous decline in morale, the number of documents claiming otherwise illustrated that the materials had influence. While the archives do not fully support the claim that Bolshevik propaganda solely instigated mutinous activity, the propaganda in conjunction with demoralizing American media impacted morale. The erosion of public support for the intervention in the United States seeped over the Russia and effectively undermined the already-dwindling confidence in the expedition.

The AEFNR fought bravely in a difficult situation with a confusing and misguided political purpose. The American intervention in North Russia is a case study of soldiers in a twentieth century American intervention. First, the intervention reorients the timeline of American missions that lacked a defined political purpose. While Vietnam, the Middle East, and Korea come to mind in recent history, the similarly confused intervention in North Russia extends the timeline. Second, adding the AEFNR experience to those of more recent interventions illuminates the many chronic issues discussed in this thesis. Last, North Russia presents an early instance of enemy propaganda and domestic controversy negatively impacting soldiers' morale. As such, a study of the Polar Bears contributes to the growing American soldier experience genre. A new analysis of the AEFNR experience, highlighting the pivotal Armistice and emphasizing the role of propaganda and American media, adds an unexplored piece to a larger canon.

Photographs

C.i:



READY TO BOARD THE MENOMINEE AT MURMANSK
A day the men longed to see

Source: John Wilson, *The Arctic Antics of the North Russian Transportation Corps of the U.S. Army*, Hathi Trust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015071183761>, 576.

C.ii: "Postcard, Polar Bear units marching"



Source: BHL: Walter I. McKenzie Papers.

C.iii:



Source: "Polar Bears Honor their Heroic Dead", *Detroit Free Press*, May 30, 1932 in "Scrapbook 1", Hugh D. McPhail Papers, 30.

C.iv: "Group photograph, Polar Bear Post No. 436, June 23, 1945"



Source: BHL: Walter I. McKenzie Papers.

C.v: 2011 Memorial Day service



Source: Grobbel, "The 81st Memorial Day Service".

Appendix

A: Casualties¹

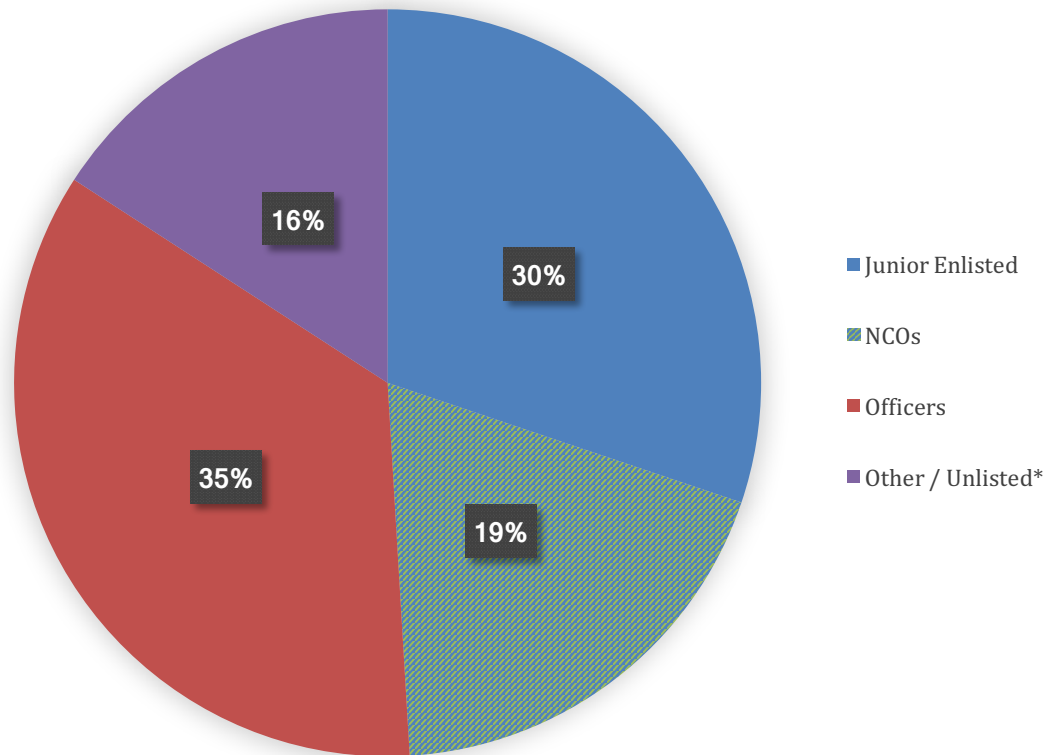
DEATHS AND MISSING IN ACTION.
AMERICAN E. P., NORTH RUSSIA.
SEPT. 5, 1918 - JUNE 15, 1919.

CLASSIFICATION
CANCELLED
By authority of the Adjutant General
17 MAR 1947
1921-8 334 (27 Jan 48) 2 July 48

	OFFICERS	ENLISTED MEN	TOTAL
Killed in Action	5	79	85
Died of Wounds	3	26	29
Total	9	105	114
Killed by Accident		6	6
Died of Disease	2	70	72
Suicide		1	1
Total	2	77	79
Missing in Action			
Later reported dead		2	2
No information		36	36
Heard from as prisoners		3	3
Later released by enemy.		4	4
Total		45	45
GRAND TOTAL	11	227	238

H. F. in R. (North Russia)
Casualties
23-12-3

¹ Historical Files Relating to North Russia, "Memorandums and Reports on Casualties and Disposition of Dead in North Russia, 1918 and 1919", 1.

B: Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections Analysis by Rank²**Bentley Personal Directory Rank Breakdown**

*Includes Engineers, Cooks, Wags, Mechanics, Surgeons, etc.

**Sample consists of 224 men, with 42 who had unspecified ranks.

² "Roster Search," Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://bentley.umich.edu/legacy-support/polarbear/index.php?Submit=Search.>; "Finding Aids – Personal Names," Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/polaread/browsebyname.html>.

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Babicki, Andrew. Collection. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

Ballensinger, Richard. Papers. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

Bartels, Levi. Interview 1978. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

Bell, Leon. Papers. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

Billeau, Ewald. Papers. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

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Fulcher, Earl. Papers. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

Granville, Robert. Correspondence. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

Katz, Henry. Papers. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

Kooyers, Fred. Diary. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

Lewis, Charles E. Papers. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

Macalla, Michael. Papers. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

McKenzie, Walter. Diary. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

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Pepin, George. Diary. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

Piers, John J. Diary. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

Rasmussen, Roy Paul. Papers. UMBHL. Ann Arbor, MI.

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