

General Denikin - Pirate of the Revolution?

The Russian Revolution and the Volunteer Revolutionary Army of South Russia by Tony James



*General Denikin and staff. Date unknown.
Image: Library of Congress LC-DIG-ggbain-29429*

A banknote with a skull and cross bones on it! This 50 kopek note (below) is catalogued as being issued in South Russia in 1918-1919 by the government of General Anton Denikin, in particular by the Northern Caucasus Region Committee of the Volunteer Revolutionary Army. For anyone who did not grow up learning the subtleties of

the Russian revolution, (and that would be many students of modern history) the whole subject of the Russian Revolution and the Russian Civil War that followed is a maze of bewildering facts, figures and often folklore. This small change-note led me to examine just a small portion of the events surrounding the anti-Bolshevik resistance in Southern

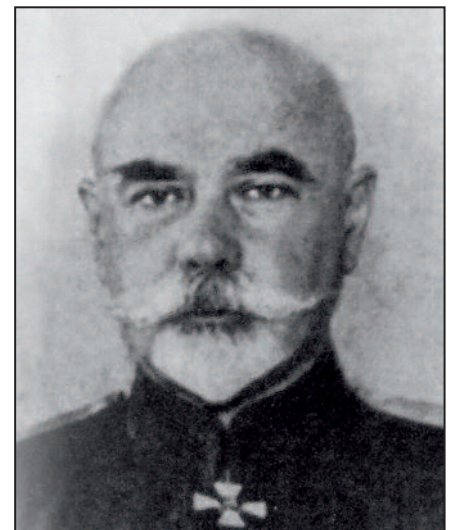
Russia, particularly during the period that General Denikin was in command of the Volunteer Revolutionary Army and investigating if the piratical motif of the note was indeed applicable to Denikin.

Russian Red, White, Black and Green

The Russian revolution of October 1917, with the fall of the Tsarist monarchy and establishment of the communist state, was the watershed event of Russian



50 Kopeks Northern Caucasus Region Committee of the Volunteer Revolutionary Army, Issued in South Russia in 1918-1919 by the government of General Anton Denikin.



*Anton Ivanovich Denikin 1872-1947
photograph taken in 1918. Image Wikipedia.*



50 Karbovanets Pick 6b with serial numbers from 210 (issued by Denikin and labeled as false by the Ukrainian government).

history. Nor, due to the many partisan and breakaway groups that evolved were the opposing forces limited just to “Us and Them”. Principally there were the Reds or Bolshevik Forces of the revolution, and the Whites, or— the anti Bolshevik Forces, comprising landowners, republican conservative middle class who were pro monarchist and united in opposition to the new Bolshevik regime. There were the Greens – originally troops who hid in the forests in the Caucasus and Crimea to avoid mobilisation into the army, or deserters from both Red and White armies such as the non political Ukrainian nationalists, most of whom eventually joined up with the Red, Bolshevik, forces. Then there were the Blacks - anarchist groups like the Anarchist Black Army, led by Nestor Makhno, who were instrumental in halting Denikin’s White Army offensive march towards Moscow during 1919.

Denikin

Anton Ivanovich Denikin 1872-1947 was a senior commander in the Imperial Russian Army, rising to Lieutenant General by 1916, he led Russian troops during the last Russian campaign in

Romania during WWI. He was also one of the most important generals of the White Army in the Russian Civil War. After the Russian Revolution he was chief of staff firstly to General Mikhail Alekseev, then Aleskei Brusilov and finally Lavr Kornilov. He supported the failed coup by Kornilov to sabotage the Bolshevik leadership of Alexander Kerensky in September 1917 and was imprisoned.

He was in prison for only a month, however for after the revolution in October, Denikin escaped to Novochechensk in the northern Caucasus with Kornilov and other Tsarist officers and formed the anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army under the command of Alekseev. Command passed to Kornilov and then to Denikin in April 1918. He resigned after increasing criticism of his leadership in April 1920 in favour of General Baron Pyotr Wrangel, and left the Crimea for London via Turkey. In 1926, he and his family moved to live in France from where he continued to criticise the Russian government and write his voluminous memoirs of the Civil War. When France fell to the Germans in 1940, he was imprisoned and even though he

refused to be co-opted into the Nazi anti-Soviet propaganda program, he was later allowed to live in rural exile, presumably because of his seniority. In 1945 he moved to New York where he remained until his death in 1947.

Volunteer Army

The Volunteer Army was the name given to the anti-Bolshevik army in South Russia during the Civil War. It included Tsarist officers, cadets, students and Cossacks. The Cossacks were members of democratic semi-military communities in the Ukraine and the Don River region of southern Russia with a fearsome reputation as fighters. The initial number of recruits, 3,000 in November- December 1917 rising to 4,000 in January 1918 and by September, the army had 30-35,000 men. These numbers are in marked contrast to the hundreds of thousands mentioned in the report of the 1918 British Military Mission to Denikin and the Volunteer Army.

Ice March

The White forces managed to recapture the city of Rostov on the Sea of Azov in early December 1917. However as the Bolshevik forces became better organised, they put pressure on the White garrison and on February 23 the Red Army re-entered Rostov and the White General Kornilov began marching his army through the Russian winter southwards in a military withdrawal towards the Kuban region where it hoped to gain the support of the Don Cossacks. The Ice March is infamous for several reasons: the death of Kornilov and succession of Denikin as commander of the White Army in southern Russia and the Red Terror – indiscriminate mass executions, brutality and looting on the part of the Reds which drove the Cossacks, who might have been hostile to the White Army, to now support them. This increased the number of soldiers in the anti-Bolshevik army.

White Terror

The part that the counter-revolutionary White Terror played in the Russian Civil War can be interpreted in several ways. The kindest is that armies of this time and origin had little financial backing and support and therefore they were forced to march and live off the land. Not too much of a strain for a village who hosts a group of 10 soldiers but an army of 5,000 lays waste to the local economy to the point of starvation.

Another way shows the barbarity of the army commanders. Kornilov, is recorded as saying during the Ice March “I give you a very cruel order: do not take prisoners! I accept responsibility for this order before God and the Russian people – the greater the terror, the greater our



1,000 Roubles issued in Rostov by General Denikin Pick S418a South Russia High Command Currency tokens 1919

victories" and, if needed, "to set fire to half the country and shed the blood of three fourths of all Russians." Casualties during the war are estimated at 125,000 Reds and 175,500 Whites. In southern Russia, the Red Terror - Cheka executed an estimated 250,000 and some 300-500,000 Cossacks were killed or deported out of around three million.

During the period of Denikin's command, the anti-Semitism of many of his troops became a problem, with the White Army, engaged in looting, rape and murder, used the old slogan "Strike at the Jews and Save Russia." When they retreated southward at the end of 1919, they vented their rage on Jewish communities along the way.

Although the Allies put pressure on the White Army as a price for their support which tempered hostility against the Jews, there were still numerous pogroms carried out and it has been estimated that by the time the Civil War was over, about 2,000 pogroms left an estimated 100,000 Jews dead and more than half a million homeless.

Volunteer Army finance

A well- documented report of finances of Denikin's Volunteer Army is available in "The Report on visit of British

Military Mission to the Volunteer Army under General Denikin in South Russia November – December 1918" based on the personal observations by Colonel Blackwood of the British General Staff of the War Office. A concise summary on page 6 of the report declares that "finances of the Volunteer Army and the country generally are in the most chaotic state due to:-

- Separatist tendencies of every district
- The absence of credit
- The absence of any form of common coinage or currency
- The total absence of any fixed rate of exchange

The Volunteer Government is noted as having no means of issuing notes and no credit to back them. Local notes have been issued and guaranteed by prominent commercial magnates in certain districts such as Kislovodk and Petrovsk, but these have no value outside a very limited area."

In the Appendix B – Report on the Financial Situation made by M. Heymann Minister of Finance in the Provisional Volunteer Army Government, he says that "in order to obtain the necessary quantity of coinage the High Command of the Volunteer Army sent a mission to Persia to obtain credit from the Allies which could be used for the purchase of Russian banknotes as a large quantity



100 Roubles issued in Rostov by General Denikin Pick S417b with watermark. South Russia High Command. Currency token 1919



500 Roubles. Bolshevik Russian Government Treasury Token Issue PS440. Never issued due to the 1920 evacuation of Sevastopol

of Russian coinage had accumulated and could be bought at a low rate." The mission was unsuccessful and the report goes on to state that the sum of 163,308,700 roubles as well as a necessary monthly expenditure of 37,652,861 roubles was needed to continue military operations. Men of the Volunteer Army already received lower rates of pay than other combatants involved in the conflict and it was estimated that "225 million roubles would be needed before the end of the year (1918) either in Russian roubles or in Allied values which can be easily realized."

Thus it was proposed that a bank of issue be created, that would supply "a common coinage for the whole of the region liberated from the Bolsheviks." It noted at the same time that most of the branches of the State Bank (Imperial Bank of Russia) were already issuing their own token coinage and this combined with "a large variety of every kind of substitute for coinage has caused confusion and difficulty in the financial situation." The bank of issue was to unite all branches of the Government Bank and issue banknotes while withdrawing all present money tokens and substitutes from circulation. This needed a guarantee behind it and the British report advised that it should take the form of Allied credits in various foreign banks as well as gold that belonged to the Russian State. This pillaged gold, held by Bolshevik agents in Germany, should now be returned to the State Bank.

What really happened?

The detail in regional histories of the time, never satisfy the hunger of numismatists and the administrators of territory held by the Whites were unreliable, often incompetent and left few records, the exception being, those military commanders who had gained experience during WWI. Unfortunately these military commanders were allowed to have no control over judicial, banking and state administrative functions.

These are a just a couple of examples of the mention of currency that I have come across relating to Denikin:

A retired engineer K.F. Kirsta who had been a labour leader in 1905 returned to aid the White Army in the Ukraine. He founded the Organisation for the Unification of all Trade Union Workers in Kiev, repudiated strikes as a weapon and was of course highly critical of the Bolsheviks. Kirsta was given a printing press and allowed to publish a newspaper "Put rabochogo" and authorised by the Army to exchange Soviet money for the workers.

As Peter Kenz says in his book "Civil War in South Russia: The defeat of the Whites"

"The ability to draw up lists of workers eligible to receive money was a powerful instrument for agitation."

Next in the list of off-beat currencies is the one that inspired this article, the 50 kopek note authorised by General Denikin and issued by the "North Caucasus Region Committee of the Volunteer

Revolutionary Army" and "For Formation of Shock Battalions."

The common design was issued in 10 kopeks brown and black, 50 kopeks green and black and 1 rouble blue and black. The Ryabchenko Russian catalogue quotes reference numbers as

Rj 3179r (5502) and Rj 3180r (5503) for the 10 and 50 kopek notes. These small change coupons also translate as "official battalions of the North Caucasus Region." Significant for their pirate style, skull and crossbones motif, these coupons link with the lack of small change available to the occupying White Army when it held much of the territory in Southern Russia.

The southern currency campaign

The *Standard Catalogue of World Paper Money, Specialized Edition*, lists the scores of issues made by both sides of the conflict. Many are available in some quantity and will not be very expensive, although the current Russian demand for items of historical interest is driving prices higher.

The South Russia issues include the Don Cossack Military Government, the issues of General Anton I. Denikin and those of General Baron Peter Wrangel, together with a guide as to which cities issued which notes.

The Treasury Token Issue dated 1919 for 100 and 500 roubles was not issued due to the retreat of the White Army into the Crimea during October 1920 - most of the troops were over the Taganach Bridge by November 2. The Red Army attacked Perkop on November 7 and on the 11th General Kutepov ordered a general retreat as the evacuation of Sevastopol and the Crimea continued and the Red Army took control of Odessa.

By November 14 the evacuation organised by General Wrangel was completed using 126 vessels including ships from America, France and Britain.

Denikin the Pirate, as I have chosen to call him, had already left Russia in April, having turned over command of a Corps of just 5,000 to General Kutepov. Both the Volunteer Army of South Russia and of the North Caucasus - later the Kuban Army, were no more.

References

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