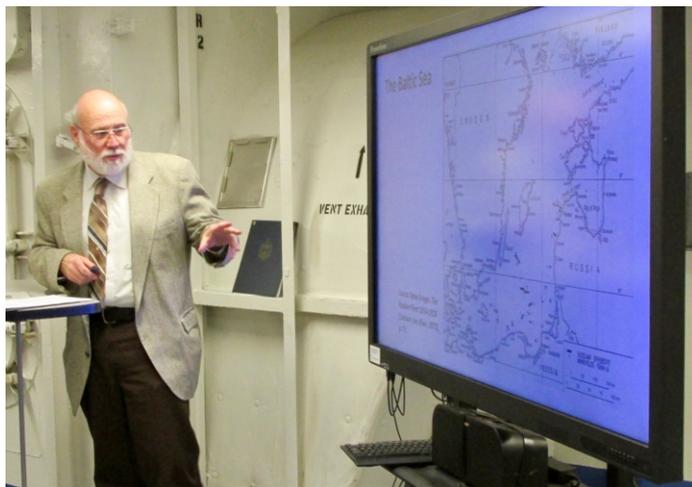


Newsletter Volume 2 No. 3 Fall/Winter 2020

This issue features the work of Stephen McLaughlin, one of the WNHA's co-founders. Steve co-authored *The Hybrid Warship: The Amalgamation of Big Guns and Aircraft* (Naval Institute Press, 1991), and is the author of *Russian & Soviet Battleships* (Naval Institute Press, 2003) as well as co-editor of *Jutland: The Naval Staff Appreciation* (Seaforth Publishing, 2016). He is a regular contributor to *Warship International* and the annual *Warship* (London: Osprey Publishing). He is currently writing a book on Russian and Soviet cruisers.

In his article, Steve writes about the evacuation of a White Russian army from the Crimea during the final months of the Russian Civil War.



Stephen McLaughlin speaking at the 2020 Symposium onboard USS *Midway*

Evacuations are, in many respects, the reverse of amphibious assaults. With the possible exception of the evacuation of British and French troops from Dunkirk in May 1940 evacuations do not receive much attention from naval historians, perhaps because they are generally considered a defeat, even when successful. Other famous 20th century naval evacuations include the withdrawal of 41,000 ANZAC troops, from the Gallipoli peninsula in 1915, and 10,600 Japanese troops from Guadalcanal in February 1943. These were highly successful, undertaken from under the enemy's nose, and with slight losses. Naval evacuations did not always go well, however The Soviets evacuated 40,000 troops and civilians from the Estonian port of Tallinn in August 1941 but as few as 28,000 reached safety. In 1945 German naval evacuations in the face of advancing Soviet troops evacuated 1.2 million (or more) German troops and civilians, although with many tragic episodes such as the sinking of the liner *Wilhelm Gustloff*. As many as 9,000 lives were lost on this one ship alone. Steve's article covers a little-known episode from a tragic time in a troubled land. As he concludes, it saved tens of thousands of lives and deserves to be better remembered.

Contact the WNHA

Email info@wnha.net for more information about the Association. Check out our web page at wnha.net.

WNHA Q&As

The WNHA has started a series of online events that we are calling WNHA Q&As. These are roughly sixty to ninety minutes in length and consist of an author or expert speaking on a subject and then fielding questions from the attendees. Jon Parshall, co-author of *Shattered Sword* discussed “Fuchida and the Flight Deck Myth” in August. In September we had Capt. James FitzSimonds (USN RET) whose topic was “Aircraft Carriers Versus Battleships in War and Myth.” On 24 October (Saturday 12 noon Pacific) we are looking forward to hearing Dr. David J. Ulbrich of Norwich University and author of *Preparing for Victory: Thomas Holcomb and the Making of the Modern Marine Corps 1936-1943*. Dr. Ulbrich's topic will be the U.S. Marine Corps and the Dawn of Amphibious Operations.

These events are held on ZOOM and there has been an opportunity for all to participate as they desire in the question portion of the program. The complete discussions are posted on the WNHA website (wnha.net). Our plan is to make these a monthly event. If anyone is interested in speaking, please contact Vince O'Hara.



JAMES R. FITZSIMONDS

Aircraft Carriers Versus Battleships in War and Myth
FitzSimonds argues against the popular myth of aircraft carrier dominance that emerged during World War II.



JONATHAN PARSHALL

Fuchida and the Flight Deck Myth
Jonathan Parshall, author of "Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway," discusses what his research challenging Mitsuo Fuchida's account of Midway.

Memberships dues are due

The WNHA is a non-profit membership association for the study and promulgation of naval history. We are open to all individuals with an interest in naval history through academic or

professional affiliation, publications, interests in ship modeling, naval war gaming, or association with family or veterans, or through personal interest. We try to run a tight ship and provide our members with services that are of value. However, this comes at a cost. 2021 Membership dues of \$50 (\$25 for students) are now due. Please send your check payable to WNHA and in care of Vincent O'Hara, 631 E J Street, Chula Vista, CA 91910.

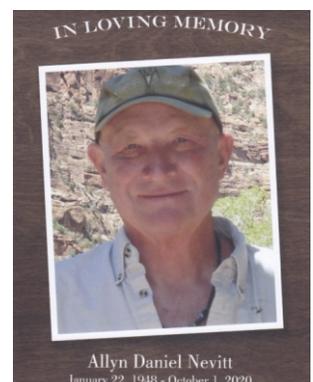
WNHA Annual Symposium

The activities of the WNHA have been affected by the COVID 19 restrictions and their impact on travel and group meetings. The board has concluded that a live symposium as held in 2019 and 2020 will not be possible this year due to the ongoing restrictions and uncertainty. While the USS *Midway* Museum has generously agreed to allow us to use its facilities in 2021, we will be limited to no more than a dozen people inside the meeting space at any one time. Thus, we are designing a half day event that may be attended remotely, but which will allow participate by remote as well as live participants. This process is underway and we hope to have the format and agenda finalized before the end of the year. Complete details will be in the next newsletter.

Members who would like to publicize any recent activities, or who wish to share research or who are looking for help in their research may contact the WNHA at info@wnha.net.

Allyn Nevitt 1948-2020

It is with grief and sadness we recognize the passing of our member Allyn Nevitt. Allyn was a good friend and outstanding historian whose contributions to the study of the Japanese navy in WWII are profound. Please see his article in our newsletter, V1 #2. This can be found on WNHA.net.



Refugee Fleet: The Crimea, November 1920

by Stephen McLaughlin

In the spring of 1920 the White (anti-Bolshevik) cause was on the brink of collapse. One by one, White armies had been defeated – in October 1919 General Yudenich's advance against Petrograd had been turned back; in February 1920 the Siberian regime of Admiral Kolchak was finally defeated and the admiral executed, and in March 1920 the remnants of General Denikin's Volunteer Army and his Cossack allies had been evacuated in great disorder from Novorossiisk to escape the advancing Reds; thousands of soldiers and civilians had been left behind in the chaos, and many were subsequently executed by the Bolsheviks. The days of the last remaining White bastion – that of General Baron Pyoter Nikolayevich Wrangel in the Crimean Peninsula – seemed numbered as the Red Army's Southern Front massed against it.

Then on 25 April 1920 Wrangel's exhausted troops were granted a stay of execution when Polish forces under Marshall Pilsudski invaded the western Ukraine; the Red Army hastily shifted forces away from the Southern Front to counter this new attack. Wrangel was able to rest his men and gather his strength, and in June he launched an offensive into the southern Ukraine, with some hopes of linking up with Polish forces. But the attack came at a heavy diplomatic cost: the British, who had played an important role in aiding the Whites, now withdrew their support, believing that Wrangel's actions had destroyed any hope for a negotiated settlement.

Worse was to follow. On 12 October the Poles signed an armistice with the Soviet government, and soon the Red Army was shifting the balance of its forces back to counter

Wrangel. This time there would be no reprieve – by early November the Whites were in full retreat, having suffered heavy losses. The survivors took up positions on the old “Turkish Wall,” an eighteenth-century line of fortifications across the eight-mile wide Perekop, the isthmus linking the Crimea to the mainland. But they had little hope of holding out for long. What lay in prospect was a bloodbath.

The Bolsheviks would show little mercy to the White forces or those who had supported them, or were even suspected of supporting them. Wrangel had recognized from the moment he took power that the chances of defeating the Reds were slim, and as early as April or May 1920 he had begun planning an evacuation of his army and government in the event of defeat. He was



General Baron Pyoter Nikolayevich Wrangel, one of the leading figures of the White (anti-Bolshevik) movement. Wrangel began the First World War as a captain and ended it as a major-general. He took over the remnants of the White cause in the Crimea, and organized the evacuation in November 1920. (Wikimedia Commons)



The painting *Flight of the bourgeoisie from Novorossiisk* by Ivan Vladimirov. Although a Soviet propaganda piece, it shows the chaos of the March 1920 that Wrangel was determined to avoid. (Wikimedia Commons)

determined to avoid a repeat of the Novorossiisk debacle. His navy, although little more than a ragtag collection of former tsarist warships and commandeered civilian vessels, nevertheless far outmatched the weak Red naval forces. Its commander, Vice-Admiral M.A. Sablin, was an experienced officer of the old imperial navy; although suffering from terminal liver cancer, he began the planning process; when he finally succumbed to his disease in October another officer of the old navy, Vice-Admiral M.A. Kedrov, took over the job. Coal and provisions were stockpiled, and as many ships as possible were made seaworthy. Meanwhile Wrangel's army staff was working out how to get the troops to the ships – the various units were assigned to different ports, their lines of retreat mapped out. The order of embarkation was carefully scheduled – the sick and wounded, the civilian officials and rear echelons, with their families, would board first, covered by the retreating army, which would board last. Sufficient tonnage was available, Kedrov calculated, to embark 75,000 people.

Now even the weather seemed to turn against Wrangel: unusually strong winds literally

pushed the water out of the shallow Sivash Salt Sea, while the cold weather firmed up the newly exposed ground. On the night of 7–8 November Red troops used this unexpected invasion route to get around the Turkish Wall's eastern flank. The Whites fell back to a second, weaker line of defense, the lushun Line. But this was overwhelmed in turn on 11 November. The entire Crimea was now wide open to the Red Army.

But Wrangel had already set his evacuation plans in motion. On the 10th he had ordered Kedrov to prepare every available vessel for sailing; foreign merchant ships in the Crimean ports were detained for possible use. Workers were desperately loading coal aboard the ships. Wrangel also ordered that the available shipping be disposed among

the ports, based on estimates of the numbers of people that would need to be evacuated: 4,000 from Evpatoriia, 20,000 from Sevastopol (where most of the rear echelons and government would board), 13,000 from Feodosiia, and 20,000 from Kerch, at the far eastern tip of the Crimea, for a total of 57,000.

At this point the Whites received an unexpected present – on the evening of 11 November, M.V. Frunze, the Red commander, offered relatively generous surrender terms in a radio message addressed to Wrangel. No reply was given, but on the following day the Red Army's advance slowed. The retreating Whites were able to disengage and head for their designated ports without pursuit, although the cavalry units nevertheless screened the retreat.

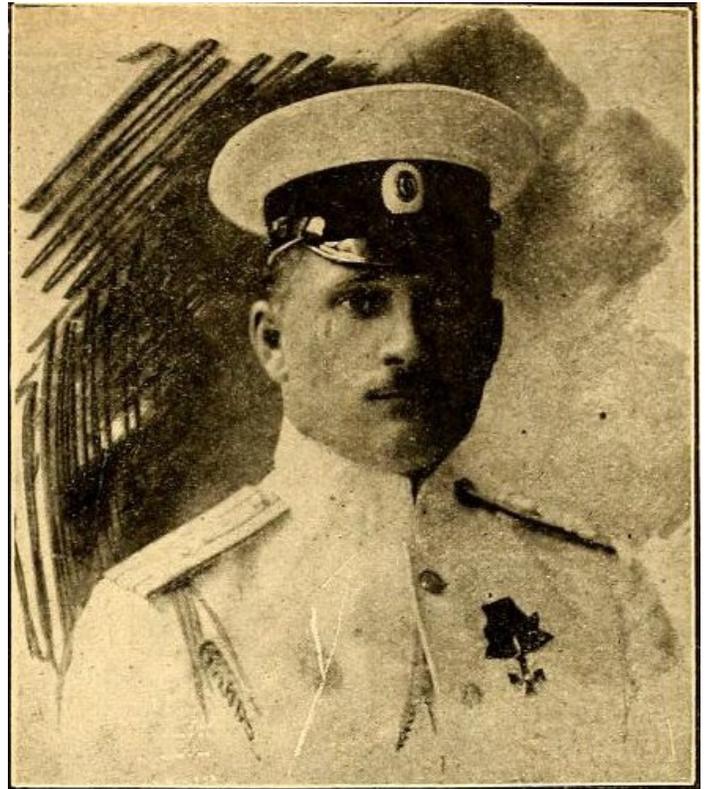
On that same day Wrangel met with French representatives, the Count de Martel and Rear-Admiral Charles Henri Dumesnil, aboard the latter's flagship, the armored cruiser *Waldeck-Rousseau*. He asked for French protection for his people, and he offered all of the Russian vessels, warships and merchant vessels alike, to France as

compensation for whatever expenses this protection would entail. The French representatives were sympathetic, and after consulting Paris, these terms were accepted on 13 November. Meanwhile, Wrangel issued a notice to the population of the Crimea:

I now order the evacuation and embarkation at the Crimean ports of all those who are following the Russian Army on its road to Calvary; that is to say, the families of the soldiers, the officials of the civil administration and their families, and anyone else who would be in danger if they fell into the hands of the enemy....

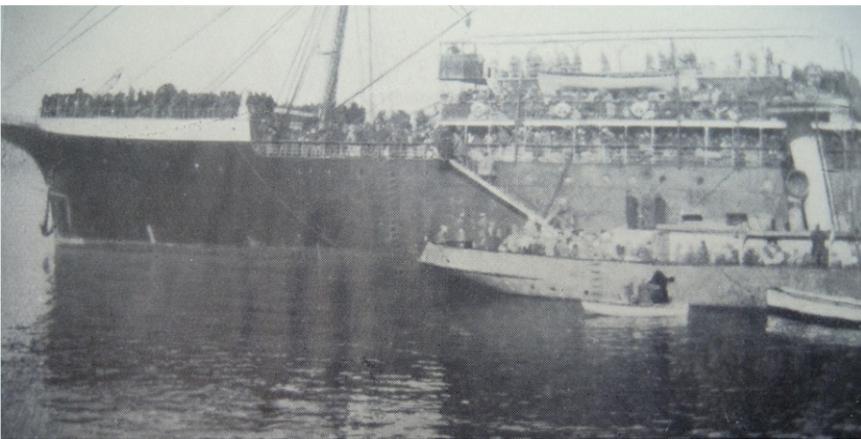
*We have no other territory than the Crimea. We have no money. Frankly as always, I warn you all of what awaits you....*¹

The embarkation began on the morning of 13 November, and for the most part it went smoothly. At 1400 hours the ships sailed from Evpatoriia, the northernmost and smallest of the embarkation ports. With Red troops now flooding into the Crimea, there was no time to lose, and on 14 November Wrangel ordered that the embarkation in Sevastopol be completed by noon. Despite the need for haste, on that morning Wrangel toured the city and found everything calm – almost all the refugees had already boarded. At 1440 he left the town by motorboat, reviewing his refugee fleet. It included merchant vessels of



Vice Admiral Mikhail Aleksandrovich Kedrov, naval leader of the evacuation. Kedrov had served in the imperial navy during the First World War, reaching the rank of rear admiral; he was promoted to vice admiral by Wrangel. (Wikimedia Commons)

every description flying a variety of flags – Russian, French, American, British, Italian. There were also warships, ranging from gunboats to battleships – the modern dreadnought *General Alekseev* (ex-*Imperator Aleksandr III*) side by side with the old ironclad *Georgii Pobedonosets*. Most sailed under their own power, but some were under tow because their engines no longer worked. As his flagship Wrangel had chosen the cruiser *General Kornilov* (formerly the tsarist *Kagul*).



Soldiers of the 1st Army Corps aboard the transport ship *Saratov*. This photo gives some idea of the crowded conditions on many of the refugee vessels. (Wikimedia Commons)

The ships then departed Sevastopol's immense harbor, flying both the Russian flag and the Tricolor to show that they were under French protection. The first leg of their journey was a short one – they anchored in Streletska Bay, only a few miles east of Sevastopol, where more

people were embarked. That process lasted until 0230 on the morning of the 15th; putting to sea, the fleet rounded the southern tip of the Crimea and anchored off Yalta at about 0900. Here more soldiers and refugees had gathered, and these were taken aboard the ships. Wrangel went ashore to see for himself that the process was completed; again he found a quiet, orderly town.

Now General Kornilov set a northeasterly course for Feodosiia, escorted by Admiral Dumesnil aboard the *Waldeck-Rousseau*. They encountered the transport ship *Don*, loaded with Lieutenant-General M.A. Fostikov's Kuban Cossacks. Wrangel went aboard to interview Fostikov, and was less than pleased with what he heard – in Feodosiia the embarkation had been poorly managed, and 4,500 Kuban soldiers and 5,000 civilian refugees had been left behind due to lack of shipping; Fostikov had ordered them to march to Kerch, about 60 miles to the east. Wrangel radioed the commander at Kerch to make sure they were all picked up, and sent the icebreaker *Gaidamak* to Kerch with Rear-Admiral

N.N. Mashukov aboard, to ensure that all measures had been taken to save the people there. At about 1400 on 16 November Mashukov reported that the embarkation was completed, and Wrangel, still aboard the *General Kornilov* at Feodosiia, was finally satisfied that everyone who could be evacuated had been taken aboard the refugee fleet.

The first ships reached Constantinople on the 16th, and the rest filtered in over the next several days. For many, the voyage had been a difficult one; the ships were grossly overcrowded – Wrangel and Kedrov had counted on evacuating 75,000, but in fact there were almost 146,000 people aboard the ships, not counting the crews. Food and water were scarce, and some ships were so packed that there wasn't even room to sit down or move around. One author writes:

Many of these wretched people were half crazy with thirst, having received no food and little water for several days; most had to defecate in place. Americans who boarded the



The dreadnought battleship General Alekseev (ex-Imperator Aleksandr III ex-Volia) at Constantinople in November 1920. The largest ship in the refugee fleet, she was subsequently interned at Bizerte in French Tunisia, and was finally sold for breaking up in 1934. The great mosque of Hagia Sophia can be seen in the background. (Sergei Vinogradov)

ships reported that the crowding and filth were indescribable. (2)

Yet despite the dilapidated condition of many of the vessels, only one was lost – the old destroyer *Zhivoi*. She had been taken under tow, but in rough seas the towline parted and she disappeared during the night with more than 250 people aboard.

There were other incidents. On the morning of the 16th the cruiser USS *St. Louis*, which had already taken aboard 83 refugees at Yalta the previous day, sighted the big Russian transport *Rion* flying a distress signal; the over-loaded ship – there were six thousand souls aboard – had run out of coal sixty miles short of her destination and was now drifting helplessly. *St. Louis* took her in tow until a tug arrived to take her to Constantinople. Several other American and French warships took refugees aboard, as did the British destroyer *Seraph*; despite orders that Royal Navy vessels were not to assist in the evacuation, she had picked up a troop of cavalymen.

By Wrangel's calculations, 126 vessels had ferried 145,693 people across the Black Sea to Constantinople. That was not the end of their trials, however; after their arrival the refugees were dispersed among holding camps where conditions were difficult, and this internment in some cases lasted many months, even years. Bit by bit, however, the refugees scattered across Europe, joining other exiles to form Russian communities in Paris, Prague, Berlin and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the Bolshevik Revolutionary Committee in the Crimea undertook a campaign of reprisals against suspected White sympathizers; the minimum estimate places the toll at 12,000 deaths, and other estimates run to as many as 50,000.

After Dunkirk Winston Churchill famously said, "Wars are not won on evacuation," and he was certainly correct. But it is safe to say that the evacuation of the Crimea so brilliantly organized by General Wrangel and his naval leaders saved tens of thousands of lives, and that is an accomplishment that deserves to be better

remembered.

Notes

1. Wrangel, *Always with Honour*, 318.
2. Shenk, *America's Black Sea Fleet*, 70.

Sources

Krest'ianinov, V.Ia. *Chernomorskii flot (1856–1920) [The Black Sea Fleet (1856–1920)]*, vol II. St. Petersburg: Galeia Print, 2014.

Mawdsley, Evan. *The Russian Civil War*. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987.

Rutykh, N. *Biograficheskii spravochnik vysshikh chinov Dobrovol'cheskoi armii i Vooruzhennykh Sil Iuga Rossii [Biographical Reference Book of the Higher Ranks of the Volunteer Army and the Armed Forces of South Russia]*. Moscow: Regnum – Rossiiskii arkhiv, 1997.

Shenk, Robert. *America's Black Sea Fleet: The U.S. Navy amidst War and Revolution, 1919–1923*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012.

Smele, Jonathan D. *The "Russian" Civil Wars 1916–1926: Ten Years that Shook the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Weeks, Charles J., Jr. *An American Naval Diplomat in Revolutionary Russia: The Life and Times of Vice Admiral Newton A. McCully*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1993

Wrangel, Alexis. *General Wrangel: Russia's White Crusader*. London: Leo Cooper, 1990.

WNHA Board of Directors

Vincent P. O'Hara, Chula Vista, CA
Sam J. Tangredi, Coronado, CA
Stephen McLaughlin, Richmond, CA
Karl Zingheim, San Diego, CA
Jeremy Mazur, San Diego, CA
Cynthia Watson, Annapolis, MD