A RECONSIDERATION OF RICHARD HALLIBURTON'S INTERVIEW WITH P. Z. ERMAKOV AS EVIDENCE FOR THE MURDER OF THE ROMANOVS

Early in the morning of July 17, 1918, Tsar Nicholas II, his wife Alexandra, their son Aleksei, their four daughters, Tat’iana, Ol’ga, Mariia, and Anastasia, plus four others, their physician, Dr. Botkin, the footman Trupp, the cook Kharitonov, and the maid Anna Demidova (a total of eleven people), were murdered by the Bolsheviks at Ekaterinburg in the Ural Oblast'. At the time, the Bolshevik government acknowledged only the death of Nicholas and indicated that the rest of the family was alive and in a safe place.1 By the end of July, White Guards took over the town and surrounding area, but it was not until the winter that a formal investigation into the murders was begun. Ivan Sergeev, the district commissioner, took depositions that he turned over to his successor Nikolai Sokolov. After a thorough investigation, Sokolov concluded that the entire family had been killed and explained his inability to find the bodies by the fact that they had been burned with gasoline and completely destroyed through the use of sulphuric acid at the mine shaft where the personal effects of the family had been found.2 The absence of bodies led to speculation that one or more members of the family had escaped. Recently,


the claim that the skulls and bones found at another location along the Ekater-

inburg-Koptiaki road are those of five members of the family, their doctor, and three servants has been generally accepted.\(^3\) As a result, a wealth of evi-
dence has appeared about the killings, but inconsistencies in the various sto-
ries have not been adequately resolved.

In 1935, Richard Halliburton, an American travel writer, published a dra-
matic interview with Petr Zakharovich Ermakov, one of the assassins of the

Romanov family.\(^4\) Since its publication, Halliburton’s account of the three-
and-one-half-hour interview with Ermakov has been either overlooked or ig-

nored or just dismissed out of hand. Among the doubts raised by those who

miss his account are whether Halliburton actually interviewed Ermakov or

obtained the information in some other way, and, if the interview did take

place, whether Ermakov gave Halliburton accurate information. The result has

been that the Halliburton interview is not well known, and those writing

about the events of July 1918 in Ekaterinburg have tended not to use it.\(^5\)

---


1992, A5(N), A9(L), col. 4; “Remains of Russian Czar, Czarina Positively Identified,” *Boston

Globe*, June 23, 1992, 2; “Royal DNA Matched with Russian Bones,” *Boston Globe*, Dec. 11,


Are Finally Confirmed,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1993, 2; Interview with Peter Gill of the Na-
tional Forensic Institute, Birmingham, England, National Public Radio, Feb. 1, 1994; *Nicholas &
Alexandra*, dir. Michael Beckham, Granada Television, 1994; and *Mystery of the Last Tsar*, dir.

not state when his interview with Ermakov occurred, but evidence in his letters to his parents
indicates it was sometime in mid to late November 1934. He wrote a letter from Moscow dated
Nov. 7, 1934, in which he states that he plans to go to Sverdlovsk “in a few days.” Richard
Halliburton, *His Story of His Life’s Adventure as Told in Letters to His Mother and Father*
(Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1940), 358–59. In his next letter, dated Dec. 2, 1934, from
Moscow, he states that his “Sverdlovsk expedition was a grand and glorious success, beyond
my wildest hopes.” He goes on to describe how he had interviewed “the actual assassin” and
writes: “I’m still a little weak over the melodramatics of the thing.” Ibid., 359–60. He wrote up
the story during the last two weeks of February 1935 in Athens, Greece. Ibid., 364.

5. For example, none of the following treatments makes mention of the interview or of any
tor’s Commentary,” in *The Sokolov Investigation of the Alleged Murder of the Russian
Ross (Frankfurt am Main: Possev-Verlag, 1987); W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of
the Russian Civil War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 149–55; Dmitrii Borovikov and