

A Century Ago, the Romanovs Met a Gruesome End

Art/Bks/Film

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Investigating the murder of the Russian Imperial Family, Helen Rappaport embarks on a quest to uncover the various international plots and plans to save them, why they failed, and who was responsible. Photo: The Romanov family on the steps of the Alexander Palace in 1917 (Photo from the author's collection)

A review by [Anna Diamond](#) for the Smithsonian Magazine, July 2018 On the night of July 16, 1918, seven prisoners, and their four attendants, were led into a basement by roughly the same number of guards. There, they were shot, bayoneted and clubbed. Their bodies were first disposed of in a mine shaft, then retrieved and deposited into a shallow grave in the Koptayki Forest. By the time the sun rose on Yekaterinburg, Russia, the next morning, "nothing less than ugly, crazed and botched murder" had taken place, writes Helen Rappaport. Overseeing the messy execution was Yakov Yurovsky, a Bolshevik commandant. The victims were the former Tsar, Nicholas II, his wife, Tsarina Alexandra, their five children and four loyal servants. Rappaport, a British author who's written extensively about the former Imperial Family and the Russian Revolution, became obsessed with the question, "Did this have to happen?" Her new book, [*The Race to Save the Romanovs: The Truth Behind the Secret Plans to Rescue the Russian Imperial Family*](#), out this week, sets out to answer that question. She spoke with Smithsonian.com about what she discovered. **Your book covers a few different actors trying to and ultimately failing to save the royal family. Could anyone have saved them?** The Germans had the best shot when they negotiated the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Bolsheviks in March 1918. It was a separate peace [agreement] during the First World War between Germany and Russia. At that point, the Germans could have insisted, as part of the deal for making peace with Lenin's Bolshevik Government as it was then, that the Romanovs should be part of the deal. **Would the Romanovs had left if someone came to rescue them?** I don't think they would have accepted the Germans' help. The Romanovs thought their place was with the Russian people. It would have been hard for them to leave. What they really wanted was to go and live in obscurity, quietly in Crimea. But the provisional government, which was trying to bring in some kind of democratic constitutional form of government, could not risk having them stay within Russia because they could have been a rallying point for a town's revolution. For the complete article and instructions on how to acquire the book, link below: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history...9336/#22V25qT2dJbUMBqZ.99>