

PETER THE GREAT, GREAT BRITAIN
AND THE MODERNIZATION OF RUSSIA'S ARMED FORCES

THESIS

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By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Relations between Russia and the West have historically been strained. The hostility has many causes, including political, religious, economic, territorial and cultural rivalry. A consistently overlooked element in this ongoing strain is the difference in modernization between Russia and the northwestern European states. In this context, modernization simply means the development of technology, science and higher education. When Russia, then called Muscovy, freed itself from the Mongol occupation at the end of the fifteenth century, it soon discovered that it was far behind northwestern Europe in terms of technology, science, literature, education and architecture. While France and Great Britain were founding universities, producing the Renaissance, developing trade, building cities, fashioning labor-saving technology and exploring and laying claim to various parts of the world, the Russians were building absolutism and serfdom. Resentment, suspicion and confusion over Western superiority grew exponentially from the end of the fifteenth century onward. At the same time, admiration of Western technology, particularly military technology, soared, and the government determined that it had to have access to that technology not only to protect itself against Western incursions, but also to expand the writ of Russia against the Turks, Tartars,

Persians, Chinese, Poles, Swedes, Lithuanians and Germans. Ivan III began the process of recruiting Western engineers and architects into Russian service. His successors followed his lead. By the middle of the seventeenth century, Tsar Alexis had founded the famous *nemetskia sloboda*, or Foreign Quarter, in Moscow where Westerners in the service of the tsarist government lived. Peter the Great (1689-1725), the son of Alexis, virtually lived in the foreign quarter. He became an avid and enthusiastic backer of the drive to modernize Russia, and he was the one who, in 1721, changed the name of Muscovy to the Russian Empire.

The key state in Russia's modernization drive under Peter the Great was Great Britain. Although Peter borrowed from Sweden, Germany, Venice, France, the Netherlands and many other Western regions and nations, his main source of Western military knowledge was Great Britain. A study of Great Britain's role in the modernization of the Russian military during the reign of Peter the Great reveals a number of interesting facts that have been overlooked in earlier historiography. Peter was intimately involved in every aspect of the Russian effort to transport British military technology to Russia. It was only the technology which he sought; Peter was not interested in incorporating British culture, economic practices or legal system into Russia. The major source of technology transfer was in hiring and recruiting military technicians and leaders, who then taught the Russians. Perhaps the leading military genius was the Scottish Catholic, General Patrick Gordon. Peter was particularly interested in naval technology, and preferred British ships to any other kind of ship. Peter personally sent handpicked Russians to study military technology in Britain and he kept a firm hand on

them so that they would not be infected with British culture. Finally, Peter failed to import the engine of what made and continued to make the West the world's leader in military technology—the northwestern European system of individual incentive that allowed for and encouraged creative genius.

Peter's enthusiasm for British military technology virtually knew no bounds. The technology transferred during his reign was good for at least three generations, from Peter the Great to Alexander I, and served the Russians well in many wars. It only failed because the West continued to develop new technology and the Russians, lacking the individual incentive of the Westerners, fell behind. Russia could continue to borrow from the West, but they could never surpass the West, and given the fact that bureaucracies tend to rely upon the tried and true, the Russian military depended upon past ways of doing things, ultimately to their defeat in the Crimean War in the 1850s, the Russo-Japanese war in 1903-5, and World War I.

Great Britain was the key state in Petrine Russia's military modernization. There was a successful transfer of military knowledge and technique from Great Britain to Russia, and it showed its value in Peter's wars against Sweden, Turkey, Poland and Persia. It continued to bear fruit for Russia under Peter's successors, particularly Catherine the Great in her wars against Turkey, and in her son's (Paul I) and grandson's (Alexander I) efforts against the French, led by Napoleon. However, because the technology transfer was shallow, that is, the fruit of military technology was borrowed and perfected but the source of the military technology was eschewed—the Western incentive system—the Russia of Peter's successors eventually again fell behind the West and Great Britain.

Russian absolutism, in other words, although a focusing force of tremendous power, proved incapable of maintaining military leadership. This lag created new tension and animosity between Russia and the West and eventually led the Russians to adopt the Western ideology of Marxism, which held out the promise of modernizing Russia quickly and of surpassing the West. It is a recurring cycle in Russian history.

This thesis examines the immediate consequences of Peter's visit in 1698 to Great Britain. It aims to show the importance of Great Britain in Peter's modernization of the Russian military and, secondly, the role of Peter in the transfer of British military technology and science to Russia.

Surprisingly, historians have not stressed Russia's debt to Great Britain. Of course, there are monographs and articles on aspects of British-Russian relations during the reign of Peter the Great, and many of these studies describe the overall relationship between London and St. Petersburg, but none emphasizes the unique contribution that Great Britain made to Russia's military development and its rather sudden and dramatic emergence as a great military, particularly naval, power in the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, it is important to summarize the major historical works relating to Peter the Great and Great Britain. All of these works are available in English.

A collection of primary documents published in 1998 (the three-hundred-year anniversary of Peter's Grand Embassy to the West) serves as an extremely useful tool in research of this kind. British historian Simon Dixon edited this collection, entitled

Britain and Russia in the Age of Peter the Great: Historical Documents.¹ Many essential historians, including A.G. Cross, M.S. Anderson, Lindsey Hughes and L. R. Lewitter, contributed translation and editorial review to this compilation. Most of the 272 documents in Russian and English were previously unpublished. They are varied in topic, but united in their depiction of the bond between Peter's Russia and Great Britain in the years 1698-1725. These documents were eminently useful for this thesis, for they provided personal correspondence between Peter and the English monarchs, as well as other relevant requests, orders and details.

Fortunately, there also are other primary sources from Peter's time which in one way or another deal directly with issues regarding the Western technological transfer to Russia. There were a number of foreigners in Russian service during Peter's reign who kept diaries or later wrote memoirs that describe their experiences with the tsar. Most notably, General Patrick Gordon's diary was published about sixty years after his death. While Gordon spent most of his years in Russia serving earlier Russian rulers, his time with Peter was meaningful. When Peter toured Europe in 1697-8, he left Gordon in command of the army stationed at Moscow. If nothing else, Gordon's passages illustrate Peter's capacity to trust and respect foreigners, a necessary characteristic for a tsar who would depend on foreigners to teach his country how to create a navy and to modernize his industry in other significant ways. Other military officers under Peter, such as Captain John Perry and Major-General Alexander Gordon, wrote additional histories of

¹Simon Dixon, ed. *Britain and Russia in the Age of Peter the Great: Historical Documents* (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1998).

their time, although once again, the focuses are more on military affairs and battles than on technological transfer.

Another major source for the study of Peter and England is J. S. Bromley, ed., *The Rise of Great Britain and Russia, 1688-1715/25* that was published as volume VI in *The New Cambridge Modern History*.² This volume is immense and was written by leading scholars on Russian-British relations. It also contains passages from primary documents. While some of the information is more general in nature, a number of chapters in this volume depict Peter's relationship with the West and stress that Great Britain played a pivotal role in the tsar's naval success. This work is generally considered one of the best English sources for Russian history.

Many Western scholars of Russia have written other works about certain aspects of Peter's reign in recent years. Lawrence Jay Oliva, for example, edited a collection of essays on Peter that has a wide range, and includes important analysis of Peter's character by historians over the preceding one hundred years.³ Many other twentieth-century writers, such as Marc Raeff, David Ralston and L. R. Lewitter, have also published numerous articles and books on independent aspects of Peter's relationship with the West, although their emphasis on military issues overwhelms any reader seeking to find a deeper connection between Peter and Great Britain. None of these articles, however,

²J.S. Bromley, ed., *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. 6, *The Rise of Great Britain and Russia, 1688-1715/25* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970).

³D. Jay Oliva, ed., *Peter the Great*, Great Lives Observed Series (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970).

address the question of Peter's debt to Britain in any detail.⁴

Perhaps the books most closely related to this subject were written by British historian A.G. Cross. He wrote two companion books that alternately analyze the lives of Britains in Russia and Russians in Britain during the eighteenth century.⁵ While the time period is broader than Peter's reign (which ended in 1725), these books do cover the specific themes of shipbuilders, officers, craftsmen and students, who tie in directly with the purpose of this thesis. Cross is also the editor of another work, *Great Britain and Russia in the Eighteenth Century: Contacts and Comparisons*, which is literally a transcript of the proceedings of a 1977 international conference on Peter the Great and England.⁶ His most recent effort, *Peter the Great Through British Eyes: Perceptions and Representations of the Tsar Since 1698*, is a superb collection of documents relating directly to Peter's time in and involvement with Britain.⁷ Cross is the leading authority on the Russian-English relationship during Peter's time, and his work is solid and

⁴See for example: Marc Raeff, "Russia's Perception of Her Relationship with the West" in *Slavic Review* Vol 23, Issue I (March 1964): 13-19. David B. Ralston, *Importing the European Army: The Introduction of European Military Techniques and Institutions into the Extra-European World, 1600-1914* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990). L. R. Lewitter, "Peter the Great, Poland, and the Westernization of Russia" in *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol 19, Issue 4 (October 1958), 493-506.

⁵A.G. Cross, *By the Banks of the Thames: Russians in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Newtonville: Oriental Research Partners, 1980) and Anthony Cross, *By the Banks of the Neva: Chapters From the Lives and Careers of the British in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁶A.G. Cross, ed. *Great Britain and Russia in the Eighteenth Century: Contacts and Comparisons* (Newtonville: Oriental Research Partners, 1979).

⁷A. G. Cross, *Peter the Great Through British Eyes: Perceptions and Representations of the Tsar Since 1698* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

accessible. While he demonstrates the important role that Peter played in the English-Russian relationship, and the multi-faceted extent of the British contribution to Russia's modernization, he does not provide an interpretive framework for his rich collection of documents.

The final significant genre of historiography that deals with Peter and his ties to Great Britain is biography. Peter is a bigger-than-life figure, who naturally lends himself to dramatic story telling, so it is not surprising that there are a number of excellent biographies of him. None of the biographies, however, stresses the essential tie between Great Britain and Russia's modernization that this thesis does. They also do not unravel and analyze the intertwined parts of Peter's modernization effort: his personal role, the British contribution, and the failure to import the Western value system, which made the British contribution and the whole modernization process somewhat superficial and ephemeral.

The most recent, and the best, biography of Peter's life is by Lindsey Hughes.⁸ In this brief yet thorough work, the personal life of the tsar is explained with enthusiastic detail. A smaller-scale version of her earlier work, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*, Hughes focused on what she calls the "visual legacy" of Peter for the biography.⁹ It reads very easily, and is targeted to a wide audience with general interest of Peter's life. For the larger work, Hughes explored the world before, during and after the time Peter was tsar.

⁸Lindsey Hughes, *Peter the Great: a Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁹ Ibid., xiv. The larger volume is Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

She described Russian history and its international relationships with neighbors, friend and foe. The growth of St. Petersburg and the impact of Peter's reforms on the population of Russia in general are also discussed in this comprehensive volume. It is Hughes' ability to fully explain the historiography of her topics that makes her work so readable. While Hughes provides an enormous narrative on Peter's world, and extensively makes use of the Russian archives, she presents little if any new information regarding Peter's debt to Great Britain.

The most well-known biography of Peter during the twentieth century was written by Robert K. Massie.¹⁰ This book won a Pulitzer Prize and became a television miniseries. Massie's book reached a very broad audience, and it reads more like a novel than a historical work. Events in this book are described in chronological order, in tremendous detail, but without much depth as to their historical consequences. Massie doesn't approach the subject matter as one to be interpreted or defended; his work covers a massive amount of information, but the material is only related to Peter in a very general sense. His descriptions of Europe at the time are quite tedious and detract from the subject of the tsar. His information on Peter and England is useful, but not comprehensive.

M.S. Anderson's biography of Peter precedes Massie by just two years.¹¹ This very short biography covers a wide variety of topics, from military to diplomatic to personal

¹⁰Robert K. Massie, *Peter the Great: His Life and World* (New York: Knopf, 1980).

¹¹M.S. Anderson, *Peter the Great*, Profiles in Power Series, 2nd ed. (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 1995).

aspects of the tsar's life. Anderson includes a lot of information in a brief amount of space, but there is not much that is strikingly new in his work. Its virtues are that it is clear and concise. Anderson is not new to the topic of Russian history; he is the author of a number of other books and articles on the subject and is considered a leading authority on Petrine Russia and Great Britain. One of his articles published in 1956, entitled "Great Britain and the Growth of the Russian Navy in the Eighteenth Century," supported the thesis of the influence of Britain on the Russian navy under Peter and his successors.¹² Anderson described the significance of British shipbuilders, workers and naval officers who were employed in the Russian navy. He also discussed the training of Russian officers and seamen by their British counterparts — men who helped to develop and improve the status of Russia as a naval power. Anderson, however, did not tie together the role of Peter in Britain's contributions to Russia's modernization. He also did not delve into the issue of the British incentive system and Russia.

Ian Grey published a biography that focused primarily on details of the Great Northern War and Russian foreign policy under Peter.¹³ While it is a thorough and documented scholarly work, there is not much information on the linkage between Russia and the West in terms of developing trade or military relationships. Grey based his work on the scholarship of Russian historians, which is a strength, but it is also a weakness for it is too narrowly focused and lacks balance.

¹²M.S. Anderson, "Great Britain and the Growth of the Russian Navy in the Eighteenth Century" in *Mariner's Mirror* 42 (1956): 132-146.

¹³Ian Grey, *Peter the Great: Emperor of All Russia* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1960).

Russian historian Vasili Klyuchevsky's biography covered the social and economic issues of Peter's reign.¹⁴ Klyuchevsky is undoubtedly Russia's greatest historian and his work is a thorough and sound biography, but it is also an apology for Russian nationalism. Klyuchevsky was a keen observer of the Russian scene and he appreciated the fact that Russia's modernization under Peter I was an act of violence. Klyuchevsky is the chronicler of Russia's autocracy, but he does not write on the unique role of England's contribution to Russia's modernization. His book includes an excellent bibliography on Peter I.

Peter was a fascinating topic for historians during the nineteenth century as well. The very best work at this time was a two-volume biography by historian Eugene Schuyler.¹⁵ At its publication, this extensive work was the best English resource on Peter the Great. He dealt competently with the importance of Britain on Peter's reforms in Russia, including some impressive primary documentation on numbers of shipwrights, but he does not emphasize the special role of Britain on Russia's modernization. The biography is also dated.

Finally, K. Waliszewski wrote a decent biography of Peter the Great in French in the nineteenth century. The work was soon translated into English.¹⁶ This book is unique in

¹⁴Vasili Klyuchevsky, *Peter the Great*, trans. Liliana Archibald (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969).

¹⁵Eugene Schuyler, *Peter the Great, Emperor of Russia* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884).

¹⁶K. Waliszewski, *Peter the Great*, trans. Lady Mary Loyd (Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1897; reprint, New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968).

that most of the sources used are French and therefore, provides material on Peter that has not been consulted by earlier English and Russian historians. The author described the navy, but did not show the importance of Peter's relationship with Great Britain in importing technology heretofore unknown in Russia. Relevant in general, this biography also falls short of making the British-Russian connection.

CHAPTER II

THE STATE OF RUSSIA'S MILITARY BEFORE PETER I

The Russian military in the seventeenth century was an evolving institution. It had strengths and weaknesses, which became apparent in war with Tartars, Turks, Poles and Swedes. After the harrowing nightmare of the Time of Troubles between 1605 and 1613, which saw Poles and Swedes advance far into Muscovy and, in the case of the Poles, actually occupy the Kremlin, the Russians determined to strengthen and modernize their military forces.

The Romanovs became the rulers of Muscovy in 1613 and they led the effort to modernize the Russian military forces. Their job was exceedingly difficult. Part of the problem for the Romanovs was that the central government, although claiming to be absolute, was divided and lacked a seamless administrative structure. The governing bureaucracy that had evolved was made up of a series of administrative departments or *prikazy* that had formed in an ad hoc fashion out of some pressing need and then continued afterward “capricious in their powers and uncertain in their jurisdiction, often functioning in outright opposition one to another.”¹⁷

A second challenge for the Romanovs was that Muscovy lacked a highly trained,

¹⁷Ralston, *Importing the European Army*, 15.

regular military force. The heart of the army was made up of service nobility who fought only during times of war and whose loyalty to the tsar was mainly tied to the fact that he gave them a grant of land and control over the lives of the peasants. These peasants who worked the land are more accurately described as serfs since the tsar removed their right to leave the land in a series of rulings during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The means by which these Russian servitors waged war was primarily on horseback using bows and arrows, followed by foot soldiers wielding sabers and eventually muskets. This way of engaging in warfare proved effective against Muscovy's traditional enemy, the Mongols. It proved less effective against the Poles and Swedes, who had muskets and cannon, and in the case of the Swedes, naval forces. In addition, the service nobility only came together as a fighting force when there was an immediate threat to Muscovy and a call to battle. Otherwise, they remained at home on the land that they had been given to provide them with sustenance in return for their military service. Each man was expected to maintain his own military equipment, except in a few rare engagements where the central government provided a small payment at the beginning of a campaign. Large landowners provided and equipped additional noble soldiers. Lines of command and authority were often confused, and many of the noble cavalymen proved "incapable of taking orders and consequently of winning victories."¹⁸ The lack of permanent, continuous threats also meant that the cavalymen often participated in battle with little interest or training. Their very existence was to serve the ruler in time of battle, but this

¹⁸Voltaire, *Lion of the North: Charles XII of Sweden*, trans. M.F.O. Jenkins (East Brunswick: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1981), 37.

duty meant little to an individual soldier, who often abandoned the field in an extended campaign.

In any event, because the number of service nobility eventually proved insufficient for the increasing demands upon the armed forces, a new force called the *streltsy* (shooters), newly organized in the sixteenth century, grew into a semi-standing army of some 20,000 by the late seventeenth century. The *streltsy*, however, who were mainly the sons of boyars or other servitors related to princely families, also held other jobs to maintain themselves and thus were not a focused and sharp fighting force. In addition, they were a drain on the economy because they did require some state maintenance, and even more worrisome, they acted as a source of unrest during times of internal instability, particularly during the delicate period of political succession. They were garrisoned in Moscow and other major cities. Increasingly, they looked upon themselves as king makers and were often used as pawns in the bloody struggles that were a basic part of Muscovy's political life.

The Romanovs also used Cossack forces, who were cavalry from the southern reaches of the river systems that drained into the Black Sea. The Cossacks were not reliable, however, and sometimes failed to show up for battles or defected to the enemy. The Cossacks were excellent horsemen and an intimidating force, but they valued their freedom and resented the encroaching autocratic government of the Romanovs.

The Romanovs also used foreign mercenaries, but they generally proved ineffective, so this policy was quickly abandoned. Muscovy was remote and its climate severe. These realities meant that it was not in constant contact with the major centers of military

innovation, particularly those in Western Europe, and that foreign mercenary troops found Muscovite conditions too harsh. The xenophobic Russians also deeply distrusted foreigners and refused to share important military information with them.

One level of the military bureaucracy where foreigners were used, with increasing frequency, was in command. The Russian government in the seventeenth century did not want foreign mercenary troops, but it did desperately desire Western military officers and specialists who could train and lead Russian soldiers. On the eve of Peter's reign, there were so many Western military recruits in Muscovy that they were organized into their own little community called the *nemetskia sloboda* or Foreign Quarter, which will be described below.

Finally, the Romanov tsars in the seventeenth century before Peter organized regiments of Russians who were drilled and led by foreign officers in times of war, but these forces were quickly demobilized when the crisis passed. In a real emergency, peasants, who were the lifeblood of the society because they provided the labor on the farms, could be drafted, but the normal Muscovite army consisted of service nobility. Needless to say, the Russians lacked a naval force for use on either the open seas or the vast rivers that crisscrossed the Eurasian plain. They also lacked the military technology and science of the West, specifically in weapons development, but more broadly in terms of the impetus to improve on traditional practices of haphazard soldier formation and leadership. In summary, the Russian military, in the time before Peter the Great, was poorly equipped, confusingly organized and very expensive. Some scholars estimate that

over fifty percent of Muscovy's budget was spent on the armed forces.¹⁹

On the other side of the ledger, Muscovy did have certain military advantages. The government was increasingly autocratic and in a military command situation, this was a major benefit. The central government could bring forces together to accomplish a specific goal at a specific time. Tsar Alexis, father of Peter the Great, who ruled Muscovy from 1645 to 1676, led a powerful Russian army against Poland in the 1650s and forced the Poles to turn over to Muscovy the left bank of Ukraine and the city of Kiev, which was on the right bank.

The Romanovs also had the advantage of using the Russian Orthodox Church as a unifying force among the disparate Russians and East Slavs, including Ukrainians and Belorussians, who shared the Orthodox faith with the Russians. The Russians were a religious people, and when the leadership of the Orthodox Church blessed a campaign and when the self-proclaimed divinely-elected tsar called upon them to make a sacrifice to protect Holy Russia, they responded. Church and state ties were strong throughout Europe at this time, and in this regard, the Russian experience was not unique. Clearly, the Russians had an early form of religious nationalism that brought them together in the face of a common danger.

Russia's natural defense provided another advantage in the vastness of its land and the cold temperature of its climate. The Russians usually retreated in the face of a superior force, burning crops and vegetation in their wake. Invading armies thus could

¹⁹Anatole G. Mazour, *Russia, Tsarist and Communist* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1962), 101.

not live off of the land. Few armies from the West dared pursue the retreating Russians, because it meant extending supply lines, which then became vulnerable to attack from guerilla forces and exposure to the Russian climate. The Russians were hardy, capable of immense sacrifice, and used to the cold climate. Foreign armies were not used to such obstacles, and, thus, the vast plains and extreme climactic zones abetted Russia's natural defense. Even without a modernizing military force, the brutal geography and climate of the Eurasian plain protected the Russians from the likes of Charles XII, Napoleon, and, in modern times, Adolph Hitler.

Finally, Tsar Alexis opened Muscovy to the influence of the West and prepared the way for the innovations and trends that Peter the Great achieved. Tsar Alexis (1645-76) knew that in order for Russia to survive, his armies must be modeled along Western lines. Early in his reign, he issued a number of commands to set this plan in motion. These commands included, as mentioned, introducing foreign military specialists to the Russian army leaders for training, purchasing foreign munitions and supplies, and fundamentally transforming the Russian military in terms of regimental formation and tactics.²⁰ Alexis was quite aware of the problems with the *streltsy*, and he moved to create new soldier regiments to replace them.

By the end of Alexis' reign, there were a considerable number of foreigners in Russian service. He recruited Dutch engineers in 1658. He also sent for foreign colonels and military instructors, firearm and grenade makers, and fortification experts. Like his

²⁰Joseph T. Fuhrmann, *Tsar Alexis, His Reign and His Russia*, vol. 34, *The Russian Series* (Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press., 1981), 106.

son Peter after him, Alexis also was interested in importing “artful things,” which he heard about or dreamed of.²¹ Alexis was also hands-on, much like Peter would be, and he sketched designs of new weapons from his own imagination. He was fascinated watching weapons testings and attending military parades, and he kept up with reading military reviews. He also required periodic updates on the number of men, horses and military supplies available throughout Muscovy.²²

The iron factories in the Urals, which would be so important to Peter the Great’s military improvements, were supported by Alexis. During his reign, lighter flintlock muskets with a striking hammer were produced in Russia for the first time. Also, pistols and carbines made in the Urals were as reliable as those produced in the northwestern Europe, with the only drawback being the limited amount that was available.

Alexis also had his sights on building a Russian navy. His plan was to create a naval fleet on the Caspian Sea to protect trade with Persia and also to contain the Cossacks, who engaged in piracy. Dutchmen were commissioned to work on a small fleet at Dedinov in 1667-68. This effort cost 9,000 rubles.²³ Five ships from this effort were transported to Astrakhan, and launched there in early 1670. Stenka Razin led a Cossack rebellion of 200 small boats against Astrakhan, which they took in June.²⁴ There, the Tsar’s boats were burned and destroyed. Alexis never again attempted to build a naval

²¹Ibid., 109.

²²Ibid., 114.

²³Ibid., 111.

²⁴Ibid.

fleet.

Alexis also started to modernize the bureaucracy to perpetuate his changes. He set up the Cavalry Bureau, Bureau of Artillery Barrel Manufacturing Affairs, and the Grain Bureau, which had the job of feeding the army during the Thirteen Years' War against Poland and Sweden in the 1660s.²⁵ (The idea of maintaining supply lines through a government-supported effort was new for Russia, and also borrowed from the West.)

There were problems with Alexis' military progress, however, which foreshadowed concerns that would beset Peter's quest for military modernization. Following the Thirteen Years' War, Russia didn't have enough money to maintain the large army that Alexis had created. Only around 25,000-30,000 soldiers remained in "active" service in the later part of his reign.²⁶ The foundation of the army also deteriorated because some of the foreign officers lost their focus. As one historian notes, "They came to Moscow to teach Russians what Russians did not know, but ended by learning how easygoing life in Russia — as led by some Russians — might really be."²⁷

²⁵Ibid., 113-4.

²⁶Ibid., 115.

²⁷Ibid., 116.

CHAPTER III

PETER THE GREAT: THE LURE OF THE WEST

Peter the Great spent most of his adolescence outside the Kremlin walls in the town of Preobrazhenskoe, a suburb of Moscow. Out from under the watchful eye of his mother and his tutors, Peter was free to associate with whomever he chose. While he was still surrounded by sons of boyars, Peter also chose to befriend numerous Russian commoners and also foreigners.

The young tsar spent his time from a very early age living out his dreams of amusing himself with military and naval pursuits. He organized groups of boys to play war games. What was significant about Peter's games, however, was that he was able to provide them with real weapons from the Moscow armory.²⁸ He started out ordering wooden cannon, but graduated soon to real cannon, tons of gunpowder, muskets and pistols. Peter even outfitted his boy soldiers in uniforms he designed himself. Peter had his warriors live in barracks, behave like real soldiers, and he even arranged for them to receive soldier pay.²⁹ Always a demanding disciplinarian, Peter served as a soldier in his mock army just as he did in the real army once he became tsar. He insisted on rising through the ranks, as was

²⁸James P. Duffy and Vincent L. Ricci, *Czars: Russia's Rulers for Over One Thousand Years* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1995), 194.

²⁹Massie, *Peter the Great*, 68.

the case with his men, and he never promoted himself out of rank until he felt he had earned the next level. This drilling and mock fighting eventually developed into the Preobrazhensky Regiment, which was to be the first regiment of the Russian Imperial Guard. It was soon joined by another Regiment called the Semenovskiy, which was drawn from a neighboring village.

The small town of Peter's boyhood provided him with the opportunity to interact with many foreigners. From them he learned about the world outside Russia, and he even employed Germans and Dutch instructors for his boy troops.³⁰ The influence of foreigners would be a trademark of Peter's reign in many respects.

At age sixteen, Peter befriended a Dutchman named Franz Timmerman, who had agreed to instruct the young tsar on how to use an astrolabe, which had just been brought over from France as a gift.³¹ First, Peter had to learn basic principles of arithmetic and geometry, which he did with enthusiasm. In fact, Peter was so taken with learning new concepts that he didn't stop there: he immediately plunged into other topics such as ballistics and geography.³²

This friendship proved invaluable to Peter. Timmerman was many years older than Peter, and he had spent his time traveling the world. He patiently explained how things worked and described foreign lands to the curious tsar. They traveled together throughout

³⁰Duffy and Ricci, *Czars*, 194.

³¹An astrolabe was a device used to calculate distance prior to the invention of the sextant.

³²Massie, *Peter the Great*, 72.

villages and towns in Russia. One such trip would have a tremendous effect on Peter. In 1688, the pair went to the village of Ismailovo. There, Peter discovered a small boat locked away in an old musty storehouse. The boat was unlike those he had seen on Russian rivers. This one had a rounded hull and pointed bow. Peter was ecstatic at the sight of this boat, which Timmerman explained was English. Another Dutch craftsman was called in to repair the boat and create a new mast. The result was that Peter was able to sail this boat on the Yauza River against the current of the wind. This was impossible with the flat-bottom, barge-like boats made in Russia at this time. Perhaps it is overly dramatic to suggest that this boat itself was the key link between Peter and England, but definitely the tsar was very impressed and made it his mission years later to learn everything he could about English shipbuilding in order to incorporate it into a Russian Navy.³³

The discovery of this boat led to Peter's obsession with building his own fleet. His father had shown an interest in navies, and perhaps this interest was passed on to Peter as well. But the discovery of the small "English" boat was the immediate catalyst in Peter's devotion and life-long love affair with ships. Very soon after finding the small boat, Peter began work on building a fleet on Lake Pleschev. Peter had Timmerman recruit a number of Dutch shipwrights to oversee the project. This was the first time Peter

³³Massie, *Peter the Great*, 74-5. Massie notes that the exact origin of this boat is disputed, but states that it was definitely "of Western design." Peter deemed this ship the "Grandfather of the Russian Navy." It sits to this day in the Navy Museum in St. Petersburg.

requested foreigners to be sent to Russia as teachers.³⁴ The tsar and his men cut timber, sawed and hammered furiously. They produced two small frigates and three yachts. Peter's royal duties called him away before the ships were finished, but he left explicit instructions for their rapid finish. Peter was forevermore obsessed with the sea, with sailing, and with the things he could learn from northwestern European naval craftsmen.

During the early 1690s, Peter focused on his shipbuilding project, using the soldiers from his Preobrazhensky Regiment as carpenters. In 1693, Peter commanded a warship that he helped build at Archangel.³⁵ The next year, he ordered a large frigate from Holland. This vessel sparked the beginning of a massive-scale search for foreign craftsmen of different types of shipbuilding. Peter first saw the open sea in 1693 and was forever changed as a result. His passion is described in this way:

As yet he had little or no clear idea of how such a navy might be used or how it might benefit Russia. To him, it was still no more than a gigantic and costly toy; but it was a toy which he desired almost frantically to possess. This passion, largely irrational and in a sense childish, was henceforth to be one of the dominant aspects of his life.³⁶

On the road between Moscow and Preobrazhenskoe was the Foreign Quarter, which was described above. It was a village of various foreigners, including Germans, Dutchmen, Englishmen and Scots.³⁷ The occupations of the foreigners ranged from military service to physicians, craftsmen and artists. The Foreign Quarter was unique for

³⁴Anderson, *Peter the Great*, 30.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Massie, *Peter the Great*, 111.

foreigners in Russia during this time, for only within its boundaries could they maintain their traditional homes, languages, food and customs without discrimination. Another way to describe this unique village is to say that these foreigners were “required to live there in order to avoid contaminating the Russians with their vile western heresies and habits.”³⁸ The Russians were notoriously shy around and suspicious of foreigners; for this reason, Tsar Alexis had created this suburb to contain them.

After Patriarch Joachim died in 1690, Peter was able virtually to move into the Foreign Quarter. He had desired to mingle with the residents for years, and when the circumstances changed, the young tsar quickly availed himself of the opportunity to establish a permanent residence among the foreigners. This community (estimated population of 1,500 by this time) was literally isolated from the rest of Russia, and yet it was “the one substantial element of relatively advanced technical and professional knowledge in the country.”³⁹ It was in this magical, mysterious community that Peter took lessons in dancing, fencing and riding, although there is no evidence that he engaged in “any formal education or serious reading.”⁴⁰ The young tsar found many ways to educate himself there. It was also in the Foreign Quarter that Peter met General Patrick Gordon.

Gordon was born in Scotland. He served in the military of Germany, Sweden and Poland before coming to Russia. In Russia, he had been employed by Tsar Alexis and

³⁸Oliva, *Peter the Great*, 4.

³⁹Anderson, *Peter the Great*, 15.

⁴⁰Hughes, *Peter the Great*, 30.

Regent Sophia. When Sophia's throne was crumbling in 1689, Gordon wisely aligned his military troops with Peter. A prominent Scottish figure in the Foreign Quarter, Gordon was much older than Peter. The two had very different dispositions for sure, yet there was a bond between them that led to a tremendous friendship. Peter had paid Gordon the ultimate compliment by dining in the Scot's home in the Foreign Quarter.⁴¹ No previous tsar would have considered such an action acceptable. Gordon had traveled the world and was extremely intellectual. This made him a perfect candidate for an informal teacher of the eager tsar. It was Gordon who taught Peter all about military and political issues, as well as discussing fireworks, which became another of Peter's interests.⁴² When Gordon died in 1699, Peter was right next to his bed. The tsar personally arranged and participated in the funeral procession and oversaw Gordon's burial in Moscow's first stone chapel of the Roman Catholic church.⁴³

Another foreigner who Peter met in the Foreign Quarter was Franz Lefort. Lefort, who was Swiss-born, became Peter's closest friend and confidant. Although Lefort had worldly knowledge far surpassing Peter's, his real use to the tsar was his intense interest in raucous behavior and hearty drinking. The tsar built him a grand palace in Moscow and deemed him an admiral, although Lefort had no qualifications beyond his ability to

⁴¹Anderson, *Peter the Great*, 31.

⁴²Hughes, *Peter the Great*, 29.

⁴³*Passages from the Diary of General Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries, A.D. 1635--A.D. 1699* (Aberdeen: The Spalding Club, 1859), 193.

drink heavily and exude other gregarious social behaviors.⁴⁴ Lefort remained with Peter through his Grand Embassy tour of Europe, but he also died in 1699.

Peter and his friends behaved in jolly fashion, flitting between the Foreign Quarter and Archangel to watch the ships, when the weather permitted. This conduct continued for several years, to the chagrin and constant complaint of Peter's mother, Natalia. While Peter dearly loved and respected his mother, he did not agree with her position that Muscovite traditions had to be respected. Natalia was not a dyed-in-the-wool conservative; she was intelligent and interested in different cultures, particularly the West. But she thought Peter was going overboard on his fascination with the West, and she wanted to rein him in. When Natalia died in January 1694, Peter did not attend her funeral, although he grieved terribly for the loss.

At Archangel in the late summer of 1694, Peter arranged the first official display of his "boy" troops (now they were quite grown men). The "Kozhukhovo manoeuvres" was a mock campaign involving 30,000 guardsmen and *strelety*.⁴⁵ This battle involved use of real explosives, which resulted in twenty-four deaths and fifteen injuries.⁴⁶ Peter himself participated in this display at the rank of "ordinary bombardier."⁴⁷ It was becoming clear to all what Peter's intentions were in terms of maintaining his relationships with foreigners, as well as his interests in the military.

⁴⁴Anderson, *Peter the Great*, 31.

⁴⁵Hughes, *Peter the Great*, 34.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 35.

The Foreign Quarter and its residents, many of whom befriended and advised Peter the Great, had a great impact on the young tsar. These relationships, along with the discovery of northwestern European advances in science and technology, particularly military and naval information, deeply impressed him. Peter was a naturally curious young man with a sharp intellect and penchant for learning by doing. By 1694, when he took control of government, he was firmly convinced that Russia's future development was tied to northwestern Europe, and particularly to the major seafaring powers of England and Holland, which were both under the rule of William III.

CHAPTER IV

GREAT BRITAIN: PETER'S ANSWER TO RUSSIA'S MILITARY BACKWARDNESS

When Peter took full power in 1694, he inherited backward armed forces. Except for his Guard Regiments, the Russian military had not advanced much beyond the languid state of disorganization and confusion that prevailed under the earlier Romanovs in the seventeenth century. Russia's military weakness, particularly its lack of a naval force, was on grim display in an ongoing war with Turkey that had started before Peter became sole tsar in 1694. His half-sister, Sophia, and her reputed love, Basil Golitsyn, could not make any headway against the fortified port of Azov where the Don River estuary flows into the Sea of Azov north of the Black Sea. Eventually Peter found the key to victory by building a small flotilla of armed river boats, a skill that he had learned in the Foreign Quarter outside of Moscow. The river boats laid siege to Azov from the Don River estuary while he and his Scottish commander, General Patrick Gordon, who was a British subject, attacked the fort from land. Azov fell in July 1696. Peter decided shortly thereafter to travel to the West, particularly to Great Britain, to learn, among other things, about their military technology, science and weapons.

Peter's interest in Britain represented a long-standing proclivity among the Russian tsars. Ever since Richard Chancellor accidentally arrived in the White Sea near the port

of Archangel in 1553, Russian rulers determined to develop trade, military and technology ties with the English.

Armed with a letter from King Edward VI “to all the rulers of the world,” Chancellor quickly made friends with the Russians and began to inquire how his company could proceed inland to Moscow to meet the tsar.⁴⁸ News of their arrival traveled to Moscow as the expedition impatiently awaited their invitation on the coast. Tsar Ivan Vassilivitch (Ivan IV) was very receptive to the idea of meeting the English visitors, and once the welcome was made official, Russians all along the journey accommodated the foreigners with enthusiasm. Once they arrived at the capital, Ivan put on a lavish banquet in their honor. Chancellor and Ivan immediately became personally fond of one another, which would pave the way for a positive diplomatic relationship between the two countries. When Chancellor set out for London in the spring of 1554, his pocket was filled with letters of reception for the British throne to send many English merchants back to Moscow.⁴⁹ The “Muscovy Company” was born as the first official English trading expedition set out, led by Chancellor, in 1555. Sadly, he was lost in a storm at sea in 1556, “but not before he had laid the foundation of Anglo-Russian friendship and pointed the path to the overseas expansion of English trade.”⁵⁰

The early part of English-Russian trade had another key figure whose role was pivotal

⁴⁸Foster Rhea Dulles, *Eastward Ho!* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931), 17.

⁴⁹By the time Chancellor reached London, Mary Tudor had been crowned Queen of England.

⁵⁰Dulles, *Eastward Ho!*, 35.

in cementing relations in the early stages. Anthony Jenkinson replaced Chancellor as the English diplomat to Russia under Queen Elizabeth I. Ivan made fast friends with Jenkinson as he had with Chancellor. In 1567, Ivan sent Jenkinson to London with a request for some English shipbuilders and seamen to be sent to Moscow, with the explanation that the Queen would find their presence comforting should she ever need to take solace outside her kingdom.⁵¹ The true intention of this carefully-worded letter was a marriage proposal from Ivan IV to Elizabeth I. The Queen ignored the request and continued to conduct trade business as though no mention of a proposal had been made. She also decided to engage Jenkinson elsewhere in royal service in an attempt to avoid any future compromising requests. Furious at her indifference, Ivan verbally insulted Elizabeth, demanded that Jenkinson be returned to Moscow, and ultimately cut off the Muscovy Company's trade charter. Elizabeth didn't want to bend to the will of this tyrant, but England was in need of the lucrative trading opportunities Muscovy provided at the time. The Queen sent Jenkinson back to pacify the tsar in 1571. Jenkinson was able to calm Ivan and convince him of the benefits of reinstating the trade charter. By 1572, Jenkinson had "single-handed[ly] saved England's trade in Muscovy."⁵²

For Russia, the English nexus was a gift from heaven. It opened up a direct and heretofore unknown route between Russia and the West, principally with England, which was emerging as the leading center of Western military technology, particularly in the realm of naval science. From the time of Chancellor's visit to the end of the reign of

⁵¹Ibid., 67.

⁵²Ibid., 72.

Peter the Great, Russia focused on England as the main source for its military development.

By the time of Peter's reign, the British-Russian relationship had developed to a high point. Great Britain was Russia's major trading partner. The trade revolved around tar, flax, hemp, timber, wool and fish from the Russian side. From the British side, the Russians obtained finished products. The Russians were intrigued and amazed at the variety, sophistication and seemingly inexhaustible supply of British goods. But Peter wanted to go to Great Britain and see first-hand this nation of shopkeepers and inventors. Above all, he desired to expand the trade to British military technology and to borrow and copy British military science, weapons and know how.

After the Azov campaign, Peter shocked his countrymen by announcing a major embassy to be sent from Russia to England and the Netherlands. Even more astonishing was the rumor, which quickly spread, that Peter himself intended to accompany this expedition, and to do so incognito. At six-foot-seven, that would prove to be a challenge indeed. Peter's diplomatic reason for the trip known as the Grand Embassy was to accumulate support for his war against the Ottoman Empire. But his main motivation, as indicated above, was to learn about military technology and creativity, particularly in England. He also loved a challenge and was always looking for something new to keep his hands and mind busy.

Peter's mission included finding "capable shipwrights and naval officers, men who had reached command by merit and not through influence" and to purchase technical

instruments that could be reproduced in Russia.⁵³ The search for shipbuilding techniques first took Peter to Holland. As he had promised, the tsar tried to travel incognito under the name of Peter Mikhailovich, but it proved to be quite difficult. The tsar first went to the city of Zaandam, which was notorious for its shipbuilding speed. From start to finish, Zaandamers could finish a ship in just five weeks.⁵⁴ In just two short days of working hard as a carpenter side by side with Zaandamers, Peter's identity was no longer a secret. Throngs of onlookers crowded him everywhere. His extreme height and other physical features gave him away. Within a week, having had to seclude himself indoors for two days to avoid the crowds desperate to catch a glimpse of the Russian tsar, Peter reluctantly left Zaandam. Without the tsar around to attract attention, a number of men in Peter's Embassy were also able to learn various ship construction and navigation techniques elsewhere in Holland.

Only in Amsterdam was the tsar finally able to settle down for long enough to learn first-hand the art of mast and sail-making, thanks to the private docks of the East India Company.⁵⁵ A project was arranged to teach Peter and his men, a group of about ten Russians, how to build a Dutch frigate. This particular ship was to be 100 feet in length, so the first chore entailed gathering lots of timber. Peter participated in all aspects of the assembly of this ship, which was named *The Apostles Peter and Paul*.⁵⁶ He carried all his

⁵³Massie, *Peter the Great*, 156.

⁵⁴Ibid., 179.

⁵⁵Ibid., 185.

⁵⁶Ibid., 186.

own tools, refused to be addressed formally, and lived like a simple carpenter in a common house with others, cooking and cleaning for himself.⁵⁷

In addition to shipbuilding, Peter's attention in Holland was often diverted in other directions. He toured all manner of factories, laboratories, museums, and botanical gardens. He met architects, sculptors, printers and traders. In Zaandam, he made a sheet of paper, and elsewhere he mastered the Dutch talents of engraving and etching.⁵⁸ He listened to anatomy lectures by the famous Professor Fredrik Ruysch, who taught the tsar how to perform several surgical techniques which he later practiced in Russia at every possible opportunity.⁵⁹ It turns out Peter deemed himself quite a fine surgeon, having studied with so reputable a teacher. Peter learned how to mend clothing and make a pair of shoes. He watched street vendors in active bargaining with their customers. Of course, his favorite places after the shipyards were the taverns.

Of course while Peter was in Holland, he still had a country to run, which he managed with unsurpassed power and authority despite the miles that separated them. He kept a close tab on matters at home including expenses, political issues and public affairs. Peter sent weekly letters home describing his experiences and issuing directives.

After about five months' stay, the tsar moved on to England. King William III had sent ships to Holland to transport Peter to England. The twenty-four hour journey on the H.M.S. *Yorke* was stormy, but it was the largest ship that Peter had ever seen. Despite the

⁵⁷Ibid., 186.

⁵⁸Anderson, *Peter the Great*, 41.

⁵⁹Massie, *Peter the Great*, 187.

weather, he remained outside, asking questions and observing the rigging system.⁶⁰

When Peter arrived in London, in January 1698, the weather was exceptionally frigid.

The Thames was partially frozen over, which greatly depressed the tsar who was anxious to get on with his shipbuilding lessons.⁶¹ In the meantime, there was plenty of sightseeing to be done and many inventions to be investigated.

Peter's host in Great Britain was William III of Orange. He was not only King of England, but he was also Stadtholder in the Netherlands. At Peter's birth in 1672, William, then age 21, was fending off the French, led by King Louis XIV, who had attacked Holland. William saved Amsterdam from being taken over by the French. His success made him respected, but real power came when he, and his wife Mary, were chosen as the king and queen of England in 1689. Then he was not only respected, but also feared. By the time Peter arrived in Great Britain in 1697-98, William was a potent ruler and the chief foil of Louis XIV. He was also quite interested in the young tsar of Russia.

Peter had been raised on stories in the Foreign Quarter that praised William because of his triumphs over the French. In fact, Peter's victory at Azov was compared to William's success against Louis XIV.⁶² Peter was eager to meet William, seeing him as a hero as much as a fascinating foreigner from whom Peter could learn many lessons.

⁶⁰Ibid., 206.

⁶¹Ibid., 208.

⁶²M.S. Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia, 1553-1815* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1958), 50. Original Source: *A Congratulatory Poem to the Czar of Muscovy on his Arrival in England* (London, 1698).

William was also interested in the young Russian autocrat, for Peter was just the type of energetic force whom William wished to cultivate as an ally against the constant threat posed by France. It didn't hurt Peter's credentials, too, that Sweden and Turkey, allies of France at the time, were simultaneously enemies of Russia. While their ages, personalities, and physical characteristics could not have been more different, Peter and William had common interests and were predisposed to get along.

When he arrived in London, it was winter, so Peter spent his time drinking in the British culture. At Kensington Palace, Peter was fascinated with his first glimpse of a weather vane. Years later, he had one just like it installed in his summer palace in St. Petersburg. He sat to have his portrait painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller, which still remains to this day as the most respectable likeness of the tsar.⁶³ He went about visiting shops and factories incognito, taking notes and asking questions. Peter learned how to make, repair and reassemble a pocket watch. He bought a British coffin to be sent to Russia as a model. He learned how to make a telescope. From the British coinage system of "milled edges" to prevent the debasement of currency, Peter later modeled a Russian coinage system unprecedented in his native country.⁶⁴ He visited the Greenwich Naval Hospital, the Greenwich Observatory, and the Woolwich Arsenal. He talked with artists and craftsmen at length about science and technology everywhere he went, ordering diagrams and models of all sorts of instruments to be sent back to Russia for study and replication. One example of direct transfer of British technology was a

⁶³Massie, *Peter the Great*, 207.

⁶⁴Ibid., 213.

purchase of between 30,000 and 40,000 British flintlocks with new ring bayonets, which the Russians sent back to Russia and then copied to develop a modern flintlock industry in Russia.⁶⁵ Within just a few years, the Russians were able to manufacture 30,000-40,000 British-style flintlocks annually by themselves.

The purchase of British flintlocks and other goods strained the Russian budget. Indeed, the Grand Embassy was a very expensive venture. The Russian treasury was constantly called on to send more funds to the men in Holland and England to pay for finished goods, hiring teachers and craftsmen to come to Russia, and chartering ships to transport the goods and people back to Russia. While in England, Peter discovered a way to generate revenue. Peter's grandfather, Tsar Michael, had passed a law in 1694 forbidding the use of tobacco in Russia. His decision was based on Russian Orthodox Church's opposition to the use of tobacco. A British man by the name of Peregrine Osborne, Marquis of Carmarthen, befriended Peter and brought to him a proposal from some British merchants to reinstate the sale of tobacco in Russia. The best part was that they were offering the tsar 28,000 British pounds in cash in advance for Peter's approval. Peter signed the deal on April 16, 1698, giving the British permission to import 1.5 million pounds of tobacco into Russia with no customs duties or sales restrictions.⁶⁶

Carmarthen also performed other services for Peter. He became a recruiter of technical people. With the help of Carmarthen, Peter met and interviewed many men for potential service in Russia. He eventually settled on about sixty British workers whom he

⁶⁵Ibid., 342.

⁶⁶Ibid., 212.

convinced to return home with him.

Among them were Major Leonard van der Stamm, the master shipwright at Deptford; Captain John Perry, a hydraulic engineer to whom Peter assigned responsibility for building the Volga-Don canal; and Professor Henry Farquharson, a mathematician from the University of Aberdeen who was to open a School of Mathematics and Navigation in Moscow. Peter also write [sic] to a friend in Russia that he had recruited two barbers “for purposes of future demands,” a hint that had ominous portents for those in Moscow whose pride lay in the length of their beards.⁶⁷

It has never been determined precisely how many foreigners Peter persuaded to come to Russia as a result of his travels to Great Britain. However, it is quite clear that Peter chose English over Dutch shipbuilders. Once back in Russia, Peter promoted the original English carpenters to the rank of “Master Shipbuilders,” and he sent all the Dutch builders home, save those who were finishing ships which they had begun, and those who were ordered to report directly to Englishmen shipbuilders.⁶⁸ The last ships reportedly built by Dutchmen in Russia were finished in 1703.⁶⁹

The main reason Peter came to England was to study ship-building. Once the weather improved, he devoted his time in England almost exclusively to shipyards and the company of sailors. The fact that he spent so much time with sailors led the Austrian Ambassador in England to declare, “They say that he intends to civilize his subjects in the manner of other nations. But from his acts here, one cannot find any other intention than to make them sailors; he has had intercourse almost exclusively with sailors, and has

⁶⁷Ibid., 213.

⁶⁸Cross, *By the Banks of the Neva*, 162.

⁶⁹The ships were eleven frigates built at Stupena (on the River Voronezh), according to Charles Whitworth in *Account of Russia as it was in the Year 1710* (Strawberry Hill, 1758), p. 112. As reported in Anthony Cross, *By the Banks of the Neva*, p. 162.

gone away as shy as he came.”⁷⁰

Peter became quite adept at building the main types of naval ships then in existence. The main battleships were called “ships-of-the-line,” a term which started during the Anglo-Dutch War in the 1650s. These large, powerful ships were made with thick, solid wooden sides. These ships held as many and as large guns as could be fit into the hull; by Peter’s time, they had three gun decks with 110 total guns. A slow mover, the function of the ship-of-the-line was to sail in groups, thus emitting such powerful cannon fire as to destroy virtually any enemy.⁷¹ A smaller version of the ship-of-the-line was the razee. These battleships usually had two gun decks, and markedly fewer guns.⁷² The third major battleship of the early eighteenth century was the frigate. These flush-decked ships had only one gun deck, loaded with between twenty-four and fifty heavy guns. The frigates’ advantage was that it was much faster than its larger counterparts, and was therefore often used as a cruiser for scouting, raiding and attacking lesser warships.⁷³

In addition to the battleships themselves, navies of this time had smaller, armed vessels that had other purposes. Examples of these ships included the sloop, the ketch, the brigantine and the brig.

The sloop, equivalent to the French “corvette,” was a small ship, fore-and-aft rigged

⁷⁰Anderson, *Peter the Great*, 44. Original Source: Quoted in Schuyler, *Peter the Great*, 307-8.

⁷¹John Van Duyn Southworth, *The Age of Sails. The story of naval warfare under sail, 1213 A.D.— 1853 A.D.* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968), 147.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

with a single mast. The sloop had up to twelve six-pounder cannon.⁷⁴ Sloops were used as naval reserves.

Next was the ketch, a two-masted ship used for coastal trading. This ship originated in England in the mid-seventeenth century. Initially, this ship was square-rigged on both masts, but later adopted a fore-and-aft rig. With a remarkable ability to sail in almost any weather conditions, the ketch was used to run supplies between other ships.⁷⁵

The brigantine, a two-masted, square-rigged ship introduced in the late seventeenth century, was used frequently by pirates from northern Europe, particularly from England, France and the Netherlands. For naval purposes, the brigantine served as a patrol and communications ship.⁷⁶

Brigs were also two-masted ships with square rigging on both masts. The main mast of a brig also had a lower fore-and-aft sail with a gaff and boom. The brig had a 140-500 ton displacement. A small ship, the brig usually had only one gun deck, few guns (about twenty), and a small crew. It was used as a small warship, but mainly as a patrol and communications ship. The brig was also used widely as a naval training vessel.⁷⁷

Another common fighting ship of this time was the galley. Galleys had been around for thousands of years by the time Peter became acquainted with them. The galley was an

⁷⁴Anthony Bruce and William Cogar. *An Encyclopedia of Naval History* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1998), 341.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 210.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*.

oared fighting ship: long, lean, and shallow, but also equipped with supplementary sails. There were several designs of galleys, based on the need for oar banks and space for enough oarsmen. They had fixed guns above the oar banks, which meant the guns' aim could not be adjusted. Galleys could be designed to employ 500 crew, achieving up to a speed of about nine knots. Lateen sails on either two or three masts also aided in the sailing operation of galleys. Most galleys had a bow ram which could destroy enemy ships, oars or bridges. While sailing ships were becoming increasingly useful and diverse during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, galleys still had their purpose of being quite maneuverable. The downside was that they were heavy with personnel, which prevented them from being useful on extended campaigns; there simply was not room to hold supplies in the hull.⁷⁸

It was thanks to William's friendship that Peter was allowed such freedom to access the shipbuilding and other military secrets while he traveled in England and Holland. It was William who approved Peter and the men in his Embassy to observe, record notes on and even participate in the shipyards. William presented Peter with a gift of the yacht *Royal Transport*, and then he opened the entire English fleet for Peter's inspection.⁷⁹ William, in effect, gave the Russians the secrets of British naval supremacy. Peter was also given use of a small yacht named "the *Dove*," along with its crew of three while he

⁷⁸Ibid., 150-1.

⁷⁹The *Royal Transport* was used to bring to Russia many specialists from England, and arrived at Archangel on 9 June 1698. Unfortunately, the ship was lost at sea a few years later. Peter had never sailed on it since he was in England. Anthony Cross. *By the Banks of the Neva*, 162.

was in England.⁸⁰

Peter commanded the *Dove* from Deptford down to Woolwich to attend an experimental firing display that was arranged for his benefit in March 1698. The tsar was not yet skilled enough at steering such a sophisticated vessel in close quarters and he crashed it into another ship. The Master Shipwright at Deptford reported to the Navy Board on this incident, stating: “His Majesty [Peter] steering himself, run on board one of the Bomb Vessels, which broke away ... all that belonged to the head (of the yacht), and has given order to the Master to bring her here [to Deptford] to be fitted.”⁸¹

Peter’s mistake caused a lot of damage, which was paid for “at the King’s charge.”⁸² William obviously was unconcerned. He wanted Peter to learn and enjoy himself. The military exercise took place as planned. Smoke was used to shroud the ships, making their maneuvers as realistic as possible without deploying any cannon. Peter was “jubilant” as he furiously took down notes on everything, including the tactics, signals and procedures.⁸³ This training was undoubtedly the highlight of his stay in England. Reluctantly, Peter left England in early May 1698.

⁸⁰Bernard Pool, “Peter the Great On the Thames,” *Mariner’s Mirror* 59 (1973): 10.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 11.

⁸²*Ibid.* Peter evidently caused damage to another ship, the yacht *Henrietta*, also when he steered his boat into it, breaking the head and causing leak damage. He also cut and lost cable from this yacht. The total charge for repair or replacement of all three incidents came to £11 9s, plus a little extra for the cable. *Ibid.* Original Source: Public Record Office, Adm. 106-3292.

⁸³Massie, *Peter the Great*, 214.

CHAPTER V

THE ENGLISH MODEL: KEY TO RUSSIA'S MILITARY SUCCESS

The Great Embassy and Peter's sojourn to England were transforming events for the Russian military. In England specifically, Peter developed a deep appreciation of sea power. Of course, he also learned sea faring and ship building from the Dutch and, to a degree, from other nations, but Britain was already the dominant sea power and it was to England that Peter looked for guidance and modeling.

Upon returning to Russia, Peter immediately set up a program to capitalize upon England's expertise and his relationship with the British government. He also began a vast reform and overhaul of the Russian armed forces. The two actions went forward hand in hand. The first reform that Peter initiated had little to do with the British. While he was in Europe, the *streltsy* attempted a coup against Peter. This was the old guard that was opposed to Peter's Westernization program. The coup failed, but Peter decided to gut the *streltsy*, which was the backbone of the traditional Russian army. In its place, Peter built a new army and a new navy. The process was slow going, however. Nonetheless, Peter first hired some of the best British shipbuilders in the world, including Joseph Nye, Richard Cozens, and Richard Brown.⁸⁴ These men were leading shipwrights

⁸⁴Cross, *By the Banks of the Neva*, 162.

and they basically made Russia into a leading ship-building nation. Then the tsar developed a new weapons and metallurgical industry, using British models, to produce, as mentioned, flintlocks for guns. He also improved Russian mining and metallurgy for casting artillery and cannon. Next, Peter started impressing peasants and noblemen for service in the army. And he hired foreigners from the West to command the army. Peter also sent young Russian students to work with British merchants as interns at the tsar's expense. These Russians had gone through mathematical school, but needed practical experience.⁸⁵ The British government did not object to such plans, and clearly encouraged British technicians and merchants to accept and educate Russia's youth. While the training of young Russians on English ships was unsurpassed, Peter also submitted students to Dutch, Danish, Venetian and French sea captains.⁸⁶

Needless to say, the British and Western innovations and technology took some time to change the Russian military. Initially, Peter's armed forces were no match for Western forces, which became abundantly clear when Charles XII attacked Russia. In 1700 Charles XII's Sweden dealt a crushing defeat to Peter's army at the Battle of Narva. Peter's forces displayed all of the weaknesses that had been earlier described: the troops were not properly trained or organized, the commander-in-chief was a foreigner who did not speak Russian, and there was a shortage of weapons, supplies and reinforcements. The Russian force also lacked a fighting spirit and was taken completely by surprise when the Swedes attacked in a snowstorm in November 1700.

⁸⁵Cross, *By the Banks of the Thames*, 148.

⁸⁶Ibid.

Nonetheless, Peter did not despair. Fortunately, Charles did not follow up on his victory. When the Russians retreated, Charles allowed them to flee, preferring to stay in central Europe and attack the Poles rather than chase the Russians across the barren, frozen plain of Eurasia.

Slowly but surely, Peter continued his reform of the Russian military, using particularly the British model and strategies that he had learned about in 1698. He first determined that Russia needed a naval force to move its troops about and to support its armies. More British shipwrights were hired to lead the effort to build the new navy. By 1703, Peter had assembled “not less than a thousand small crafts, besides twenty-two frigates and a number of other vessels.”⁸⁷

Peter then decided that it would be advantageous to move the capital of Russia from Moscow, which faced Asia, to St. Petersburg, which was located on the tip of the Gulf of Finland, where the Neva River flows into the Baltic Sea. This “window on the West” would facilitate Russia’s access to Western technology. Peter also developed a naval base on the strategic island of Kronstadt, which was situated in front of the marshland where Peter planned to build his new capital and naval port city. The naval base would protect St. Petersburg and anchor Russia’s Baltic fleet.

Next, Peter hired many more European officers of many nationalities, including British, to lead and train his new Russian army. The tsar paid the foreign officers half

⁸⁷Matthew S. Anderson, “English Views of Russia in the Age of Peter the Great,” *American Slavonic and East European Review* 13, issue 2 (April 1954): 205. Original Source: Public Record Office, State Papers Foreign, S.P. 101/40, Newsletters, Hamburg, August 10, 1703.

again as much as his Russian officers, which caused resentment among the Russians, but it attracted and kept competent foreign military professionals.

Peter also developed a new draft to fill the ranks of his new army. Soldiers had to be supplied by districts that were organized on a territorial basis. In this innovation, Peter basically followed the Prussians. He also put his soldiers in uniforms similar to the British and other Western armies. He organized the troops into regiments that followed Western standards. He armed the soldiers with muskets and artillery that were of Western design and he tried to develop a department of supply.⁸⁸

Additionally, Peter hired British citizens and other Westerners to teach navigation, mathematics, weapons development and machinery. Among these technical instructors was John Bradlee, who worked in the Moscow Artillery Office and later prepared instruments and instructed Russian pupils on weapons making.⁸⁹ Another valuable Englishman was George Sanepens, who was a mechanic and lathe-maker whose work in Moscow was much admired by the tsar.⁹⁰ Besides Bradlee and Sanepens, dozens of other British technical instructors arrived in Russia. Soon the Foreign Quarter was dominated by the British “scientific community.”

One of the most well-known British subjects who traveled to Russia in Peter’s reign was Captain John Perry. Perry was hired to be the architect of a passage (or canal)

⁸⁸Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*, 73-74.

⁸⁹Cross, *By the Banks of the Neva*, 226.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 227.

between the Caspian and Black Seas, by means of the Volga and Don Rivers.⁹¹ Perry's book described how Peter's loss at Narva caused the project on the canal to be stopped, as men, money and supplies were more urgently needed in preparation for the drawn-out war with Sweden. Perry was sent to Voronezh in 1702, where he worked on a system of locks, raising water levels, where needed, so as to remove ships onto dry docks for repair. Perry wrote a memoir of his trip in Russia. Perry recalled, "I plac'd 15 Ships (some of them 50 Guns) upon the Land, to be re-fitted, fitting upright upon Blocks like as in our dry Docks in *England*, and which Ships as they were found defective, were stripp'd down and repaired."⁹² Perry's book elaborated on other experiences in Russia, mostly with bitter reflection. Like many other foreigners, Perry was never compensated according to his contract, despite his constant protests.

One other British technician worth noting is John Pateling. He came to St. Petersburg in 1718, on the reputation of being a very skilled machinist.⁹³ Pateling introduced a steam pump which raised water fountains in the Summer Garden. He also made lanterns fixed atop posts in an English fashion to line the Great Perspective Road in St. Petersburg.⁹⁴

Peter also expanded his internship program in England. Sometimes this program foundered on British needs. Some students from the Moscow School who arrived in

⁹¹John Perry, *The State of Russia Under the Present Czar* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), 2.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁹³Cross, *By the Banks of the Neva*, 227.

⁹⁴*Ibid.* This road would later be renamed *Nevskii Prospekt*.

London on 1706 and 1707 were drafted for service in the British navy during the War of the Spanish Succession.⁹⁵ In 1708, other Russians were captured en route from Archangel to London and imprisoned for a year.⁹⁶ The terror of kidnapping worked both ways. In December 1713, a committee of England's Russia Company met with Queen Anne to protest the action of the military governor of Archangel who was forcing British sailors into service in the Russian navy. In the petition to Queen Anne, the Company outlined the specific complaint:

That by order of ye Governor of Archangell there was this year forcibly taken out of every English shipp at Archangell one able-seaman and putt on board his Czarish Maties shippes of warr there.....That this extraordinary proceeding has so terrified the seamen that the Company are apprehensive they shall not be able to procure shippes to go that voyage unles they may be protected from this violence. [sic]⁹⁷

Another constant problem with the internship plan and the study abroad program was the severe lack of funding. Numerous accounts described the seriousness of Russian students starving, living on the streets, and in many ways behaving irresponsibly, including carrying on as perpetual drunks.⁹⁸ Some Russians solved the financial problems by abandoning Russia and joining the British navy. Others simply existed in squalor. A few lucky aristocratic Russians could finance their own way.

Despite the drawbacks, the process of sending students to England and hiring teachers

⁹⁵Ibid, 149.

⁹⁶Ibid..

⁹⁷Minutes of a committee presented to Queen Anne on 3 December 1713, as published in *Historical Documents*, ed. Simon Dixon, #137, p. 126.

⁹⁸Cross, *By the Banks of the Thames*, 150.

from England and the West was invaluable. Peter's immediate successors did not expand Peter's efforts and, in fact, there was a reduction in sending students abroad or hiring foreign instructors. The process, nonetheless, continued. Foreigners were hired, for example, to staff the Academy of Sciences and the University of Moscow which they opened in 1726 and 1755, respectively. Catherine the Great expanded contact with the West and with England particularly after her wars against Turkey, the partitioning of Poland, and the outbreak of the French Revolution.

Finally, Peter developed a huge taxing system, similar to some Western governments, except he extended taxes to every conceivable object and person, including beards, salt and Old Believers, to pay for the army, navy and new military innovations. To manage the entire web of changes, the tsar established a new bureaucracy. He was at the top. Below him was a Senate, which served as an executive department. The country then was divided into ten governing regions called gubernii or "governments." Peter also started a state service for all nobility. Every nobleman had to render state service, either in the civilian bureaucracy or in the military, either the navy or army. But elite positions were not awarded to nobility based upon their titles or stations that were inherited at birth. Peter cared little about inherited rank. He set up a Table of Ranks that had fourteen steps. Everyone started at the bottom and only moved up based upon merit. Peter also opened the ranks to non-nobles, so that even common men could gain access to the top positions in the Russian government. This new elite of merit was the group that made the Petrine revolution permanent, for they outlived Peter and blocked any return to old Muscovite practices. Peter was always an admirer of merit from his earliest days as a child, but he

particularly saw its advantages in England, where opportunities were open to many enterprising individuals who had few, if any, high connections. Promotion by merit was one of the main ideas that Peter took from England. The obvious difference is the role crown charters and the complex legal institutions played in British innovation, creativity and science, which were not implemented in Russia under Peter. He did not seek to promote individual development and creativity; rather, he wished to organize a more structured, and therefore controllable, military state. Peter's choices in this regard would ultimately lead his modernization efforts to their doom.

For all of these changes, Peter was indebted to Great Britain. British commanders, engineers and instructors came to Russia, as mentioned, and helped Peter implement his plan. In the end, Peter's efforts were extraordinarily successful. The results of Peter's reforms were on full display in the ongoing war with Sweden and Charles XII.

Charles was a military genius. The Swedes were a first-class fighting force with a sophisticated army and a state-of-the-art navy. Sweden was the dominant military power in the Baltic Sea, and it was not to be taken lightly. Peter had already witnessed first-hand the awesome prowess of the Swedes at the Battle of Narva. The Swedes and Charles watched with perhaps some amusement and perhaps some worry when Peter set about building a navy, a force of sailors, a naval base at Kronstadt, and a new port capital called St. Petersburg.

By 1709, Charles was ready to teach Peter another bitter lesson. He had allowed the Russians some latitude while he focused on foes in Central and Western Europe, but he now sensed the growing threat that Peter's military modernization represented, and he

was ready to reverse it. Peter, however, was prepared to prevent a reversal. His military reforms had created a formidable army.⁹⁹

At the Battle of Poltava in 1709, Charles XII came up against a well-trained, competently-led military force. He was decisively defeated. Although there were extenuating circumstances that diminished Charles' fighting effectiveness, including the cold, the failure of his Cossack ally, Ivan Mazeppa, to deliver reinforcements, the scorched-earth tactics of the Russians, and his own wounding, the fact is the Russian army of Peter the Great was superior to Charles' Swedish army. Peter's new cannons (manufactured from melted church bells) were far superior to the "sharp rapiers"¹⁰⁰ with which the Swedes were equipped. The swords that the Russians used were also of superior quality and design than the Swedish swords. His cavalry and regiments, too, attacked in coordinated fashion and prevented the Swedish cavalry from giving proper support to the Swedish infantry.¹⁰¹ Charles also could not count upon supplies or aid from the Turks, because the new Russian navy sailed down the Don River to the Sea of Azov and discouraged the Turks from answering Charles' pleas for supplies and aid. The Russians also had the advantage of fighting on their own soil, and with supply lines that were well-protected. In the end, Charles' army was destroyed, and the remaining fourteen

⁹⁹Ingvar Andersson, *A History of Sweden*. trans. By Carolyn Hannay. (Westport: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1975), 235. Different sources vary on the exact numbers; Andersson lists 45,000 Russians against 22,000 Swedes. Stipulations indicate the Russians had a greater than 2-1 advantage throughout most of the battles with Sweden.

¹⁰⁰Scott, *Sweden*, 233.

¹⁰¹Andersson, *A History of Sweden*, 235.

thousand Swedes surrendered to Russian General Alexander Menshikov, Peter's trusted friend.

The key British contributions to the Russian victory at Poltava were manifold. First, the British provided the Russians with prototypes of the flintlocks that became standard in the Russian army at the Battle of Poltava. Second, the British had a major role in the development and construction of the Russian navy. Peter's modern navy at Azov discouraged the Turks from entering the battle of Poltava on the side of Charles XII, despite desperate pleas from Charles for assistance. Third, the British had a hand in building the discipline and professionalism of the Russian army. In part, the British examples of naval organization and structure were applied to Peter's land-based troops. This force not only defeated the Swedes, but also soon led to the end of the Cossacks as an independent force capable of frustrating the will of the Russian tsar. Fourth, the presence of English and Dutch technicians and military strategists with both the navy and the army contributed to the continuing training and arming of the Russian armed forces. Fifth, the British contributed master swordsmakers to Russia in 1703. Their skills contributed significantly to the superior weaponry used at Poltava.¹⁰² Finally, the British advisors inculcated a sense of confidence in the Russians because they provided them with up-to-date equipment and technology. The Russians still had to fight and win, but their frame of mind was positive rather than defeatist, a particularly difficult transition since the Russians had been defeated by Charles and his well-trained and fearsome army.

¹⁰²Proposal from the Ambassadorial Chancellery to representatives of the Russia Company, 13 January 1703 as published in *Historical Documents*. ed. Dixon, #43, pp. 38-39.

The defeat at Poltava was devastating, but Charles still had his navy. He set about to attempt to recover his reputation as leader of the most magnificent warring nation in Europe. By 1714, the Russians were allied with Denmark and Prussia against Sweden. The number of Russian and Danish ships combined outnumbered those of Sweden, but since they were unable to combine their forces on the sea, Charles still had the advantage.¹⁰³

The commander of the new Russian navy in the Baltic Sea was Admiral Fyodor Apraksin. He was invaluable to Peter. Known as the “father of the Russian navy,” Apraksin had been instrumental to Peter’s successes of capturing Azov from the Turks in 1696 and subsequently in building the Azov dockyards. Now this personal friend of the tsar took command of the Russian fleet against Charles of Sweden.

The Russian Baltic fleet was a work in progress. To build it was massive, and involved hiring many foreign laborers and craftsmen. By 1710-11, Peter had big ships, but since so much was invested in their construction, he was understandably cautious about sailing them into the open sea against the Swedish navy. The result was that these years passed without the Russian ships-of-the-line and frigates hardly being used in battle.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, they were a deterrent to a Swedish attack upon St. Petersburg or Kronstadt.

The ship that the Russians used to defeat the Swedish navy at the famous Battle of Hangö on the tip of Finland in July 1714 was the galley. The galley was a sail ship that

¹⁰³Southworth, *The Age of Sails*, 398.

¹⁰⁴Massie, *Peter the Great*, 583.

was also powered by oarsmen. The combination of power allowed it to perform strategic maneuvers for which the Swedes had no answer. The Finnish coastline was shallow and rocky, which kept the larger Swedish ships out at sea. Also, when the wind died down, the Swedish sailing ships sat still and powerless like sitting ducks. Peter's smaller galleys, on the other hand, moved effectively along the Finnish coast, and then rowed out to the stalled Swedish vessels and rammed them and boarded them with a superior armed force. Peter wrote about this victory: "We captured the Swedish rear-admiral Nilsson Erenschild with one frigate, six galleys and two sloops."¹⁰⁵

Charles' response to this defeat was to send nineteen ships-of-the-line and some other vessels east, retaining four at Stralsund, and sending the rest to defend Stockholm.¹⁰⁶ Dividing his navy in this way prevented Charles from protecting his men against Peter's forces. Within months, another showdown was forming at Gangut Peninsula. Led by Admiral Apraksin, the infant Russian Baltic Fleet, consisting of 30 sailing ships and 180 galleys, "decisively defeated the Swedes and ended their domination of the Baltic."¹⁰⁷

In May 1716, Peter met with the kings of Prussia and Denmark to make plans for an attack on Sweden. The British, too, joined the alliance. Peter's plan was to attack Sweden from Denmark. In August 1716, Peter coordinated the command of four fleets

¹⁰⁵Letter from Peter to Prince Golitsyn, 29 June 1714, as found in Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*, 52.

¹⁰⁶Southworth, *The Age of Sails*, 398.

¹⁰⁷Bruce and Cogar, *An Encyclopedia of Naval History*, 18.

— Danish, Dutch, British and Russian.¹⁰⁸ Disagreements between the Russians and the Danish broke this alliance apart before any war could be waged. Peter spent the early part of 1717 touring Paris instead of conquering Sweden.

Discussion for a new alliance against Sweden filled 1717 and 1718. Peter, however, pushed for a peace resolution from the Swedish crown, and just when it seemed talks about peace would start, Charles XII was killed in a battle against Denmark.

Following Charles' death in late 1718, his sister Ulrica took the Swedish throne. She determined to punish the Russians in her brother's name. She sent Peter a letter demanding that he surrender all the land Russia had taken from Sweden. Peter's response was to send a "squadron of warships...[whereupon he] captured two Swedish ships-of-the-line and a brigantine."¹⁰⁹ Peter followed up on this maneuver by sending 180 Russian warships, 300 barges and 40,000 soldiers to "ravage the Swedish coasts."¹¹⁰ By this time, Britain had become wary of Peter's growing power in the Baltic and had sent a fleet to the area potentially to negotiate an alliance with Sweden. However, when pressured by Peter, British Admiral Sir John Norris and his forces only stood by and watched as the Russians destroyed more of the Swedish forces. Eventually, however, Great Britain did sign an alliance with Sweden, and the balance of power turned against Peter.

By late 1719, Peter was threatened with a British plan that would launch "an anti-Russian coalition with the possible participation of Austria, France, Prussia, the Dutch

¹⁰⁸Hughes, *Russia*, 53.

¹⁰⁹Southworth, *The Age of Sails*, 401.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

Republic, Saxony, Poland and Turkey.”¹¹¹ This alliance never was formed, however, due to political and trade problems between Great Britain, France and Austria.

Finally, late in the summer of 1721, the Treaty of Nystad was signed, which ended the long Great Northern War. Peter’s dream for St. Petersburg was finally secure. Peter’s efforts throughout the many campaigns on the sea with Sweden had also gained a powerful navy for Russia: “By the end of the Great Northern War, 1700-21, the Russian navy had been established as a major power in the Baltic, with a fleet of some 180 warships.”¹¹²

The British change of heart on the development of Russian power in the Baltic emerged long before 1718. Glimpses of it were apparent as early as 1708-9, the pivotal years when Russian power was in place and ready to challenge Sweden’s position as the major military power in the eastern Baltic.

In 1707, Peter sent his first senior permanent ambassador to London, a man by the name of Andrei Matveev. Matveev never established permanent residence in London, because the Russian government was not yet ready for permanent ambassadors abroad. Like others before and after him, Matveev was sent with specific orders of what he was to accomplish while abroad. Peter was very specific about his intentions: he wanted to solidify an Anglo-Russian treaty that would gain support for his war against Sweden.¹¹³ Peter particularly hoped that he would be granted full support from Queen Anne, who

¹¹¹Hughes, *Russia*, 55.

¹¹²Bruce and Cogar, *An Encyclopedia of Naval History*, 285.

¹¹³Cross, *By the Banks of the Thames*, 5.

became English Monarch in 1702 when William III died.¹¹⁴ Peter hoped that the British would not derail his plan to become dominant in the Baltic Sea. This was never granted, though, for as Peter's naval ambitions grew, so did Britain's suspicion of his power increase.

Matveev's tenure was a failure in more ways than one. He failed to gain backing for Peter's naval ambitions, and he ran afoul of English debtors' law. He suffered a terrible beating and was thrown in prison in July 1708 for having accumulated £50 worth of debts. When news of this occurrence reached Peter, he became enraged at the indignity. The British government was embarrassed. Queen Anne apologized to Peter at length for this mishap:

Our most sovereign and dearest Brother. We do not doubt that Your Imperial Majesty has long known of the unfortunate incident which occurred to your recent ambassador to us when he was apprehended on our streets in an unruly manner at the insistence of certain persons, his creditors. We were at once deeply pained by the sense of the grave insult which had been inflicted on the person and character of the ambassador of Your Imperial Majesty, our good friend and ally, and therefore we issued our firmest instructions to our ministers and officials to place under arrest the perpetrators of this vile and inhumane deed and to condemn them and subject them to the cruellest punishment which can be inflicted under the laws and statutes of our imperial realms for their offense in daring to violate the sacred laws and privileges of diplomacy in such a foul manner.¹¹⁵

In April 1709, an Act of Parliament granted diplomatic immunity to future ambassadors. The damage was done, however, and Matveev left England soon after being released from prison.

¹¹⁴Queen Mary, William's wife, had passed away in 1694.

¹¹⁵Royal letter from Queen Anne to Peter I, 19 September 1708, as found in *Britain and Russia in the Age of Peter the Great: Historical Documents*, ed. Dixon. Number 82, p. 75.

Peter replaced Matveev with Prince Boris Ivanovich Kurakin in late 1709. Like his predecessor, Kurakin never became formally installed in England; however, Peter used him on numerous occasions in the coming years to represent the Russian government in London while certain treaties and alliances were being discussed.¹¹⁶ Kurakin was a significant factor in Peter's negotiations abroad. He had been in Peter's service for a number of years prior to his appointment to England, and in 1696, Peter had sent him to Italy to study mathematics and navigation. Kurakin also served the tsar as ambassador to Rome in 1707.

¹¹⁶Cross, *By the Banks of the Thames*, 6.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The influence of Great Britain on the transformation of the Russian military, particularly naval forces, cannot be overemphasized. In every respect, England was Russia's model. In addition, the role of Peter the Great in personally leading and implementing the transformation of the Russian military along British lines cannot be stressed enough.

Britain provided so many advancements to Russia during Peter's reign, it is difficult to fathom the profound impact which was undoubtedly felt by the Russian people. Because of Peter's natural interests in military issues, he sought military technology from the West first and foremost. He was not disappointed. Dozens of British teachers, craftsmen, sailors, officers and laborers arrived in Russia at this time to share their trades and knowledge with the Russians. The Russian navy was virtually created thanks to the assistance and design of the British Royal navy.

King William III was extremely instrumental in negotiating the initial contact between Russia and Britain; when Peter went on his Grand Embassy in 1697-8, it was William who befriended and welcomed this stranger from the East into the high society of England and Holland. Their relationship was crucial to Peter being allowed to pursue his

dreams of building a Russian navy. William provided unlimited access to English shipbuilding yards and specifications. He even arranged for Peter to work in private shipyards, have access to a tour guide around the cities, and truly want for very little during his extended stay abroad. Without this initial welcoming and invitation to study British ships, Peter would not have been able to modernize the Russian armed forces or to maintain a relationship of mutual respect with William's successors.

Besides the critical role of Britain in the modernization of the Russian armed forces, there is one other key factor in the modernization process — Peter the Great himself. Peter was a revolutionary. He changed Russia virtually overnight. Without the force of Peter's personality, his enormous energy, and his insatiable curiosity, the Russian armed forces would have never been reformed. Peter was in every way at the center of Britain's dramatic impact on Russian military modernization. Together, Peter and Great Britain made the marriage that produced the armed forces that defeated Charles XII of Sweden.

At the same time, there was something about the British-Russian exchange that was incomplete. The Russians knew that the British were advanced and inventive. They copied and followed them. They borrowed their technology, sent their students to study in England, and hired English engineers and technicians. The crux of the problem was that the British system of individual incentive was not transferred to Russia. It is not the intention of this study to delve into this question in depth, particularly the issue of whether or not the value system could have been assimilated by the Russians. The fact is that Peter was not interested in the British individual incentive system, which would have curbed his power and limited autocracy. This system also flew in the face of the Russian

religious and historical tradition, which emphasized authoritarianism and anti-Westernism. But such practices were the heart and soul of the reason why Great Britain had a sophisticated military and an inventive people. The fact that Peter and the Russians eschewed such ideas meant in the long run that Peter's marvelous military modernization could not be sustained and that the Kronstadt naval base and the capital city of St. Petersburg would be reduced in importance and become symbols of Russia's enduring backwardness.

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