

remember the Russian Revolution

and revolutionary songs, and the crowd went home.

"They didn't know what they were talking about," says Mr. Romanov bitterly in the living room of his Woodside cottage.

His wife Natasha, at that time the Princess Natalya Golitzin, remembers the early days of the Revolution as more terrifying. Warned by peasants to flee from their estate, she and her family went to Moscow where there was already shooting.

Her memories are still vivid. "I remember as a little girl running across the street, and father would say 'lean,' and we would lean way down and cross the street and cross the street again," she says.

More than 60 years later the Romanovs are among the few people left who lived through those harrowing years when the great Russian Empire was collapsing and Bolsheviks beginning to fill the power vacuum and establish the superpower which is today's Soviet Union.

LEAVING BY BATTLESHIP

Compared to what came later, not too much happened in the Crimea during the summer of 1917 as Alexander Kerensky tried to keep control of the Revolution.

"Kerensky's government couldn't do anything. It was very feeble, stupid. Then the Bolsheviks took over, and that was the end of the so-called Revolution," Mr. Romanov, then titled Prince Vasilii of Russia, recalls. "Then the horror started. They started murdering right and left."

Quite a few members of the royal family including Prince Vasilii's father and the Empress Marie, mother of

the Tsar and sister of the Dowager Queen of England, gathered in the Crimea. They were placed under guard and later brought together in one house.

With characteristic understatement, Mr. Romanov admits there were "unpleasant moments." One was the day Kerensky's men awakened everybody at 5 a.m. For 12 hours they searched the house looking for machine guns—which weren't there.

One of the worst times must have been the day they were supposed to be murdered but were liberated instead.

On that fateful day, one committee from Yalta was planning to come and kill them, while another from Sebastopol, 80 kilometers away, wanted to save them. Meanwhile the chief petty officer, who commanded the guards and answered to Sebastopol, tried to delay the murderous group.

"He sat on the telephone keeping them sort of talking instead of coming and killing us," Mr. Romanov recounts. "But nothing happened because three Germans on horseback came into Yalta, and the Bolsheviks disappeared."

After that for a while, the situation eased. The royal families lived safely under the protection of the White Russian Army in the Crimea and Caucasus. "Then that started collapsing because we didn't get enough help from our former allies," he says. "I think they were delighted to see Russia going to pieces. So that was that."

During this period Prince Vasilii enjoyed more freedom than his brothers ever had. The children played tennis and other games; they had parties again. "Actually I was the freest of them all," he recalls. "I drove my friends around the estate without the groom."

As the danger began to mount once more, Prince Vasilii's father, an admiral who had built up the Russian Air Force and was its Inspector General, went to Paris in a futile effort to gain support for the White Russians from the powers negotiating the Treaty of Versailles. None of the "big shots" would even see him, Mr. Romanov recalls.

When it became clear the White Russians could not hold out, King George V sent a battleship, the H.M.S. Marlborough, to rescue the Empress Marie. She held out for all her family to go along. Prince Vasilii still remembers the rush of departure: picking out belongings, the mixture of sadness about leaving and excitement on boarding a battleship, and arguing about who got the hammocks in the cabin he shared with his brothers and his pet canary.

One scene of departure is still seared in his memory: all of them standing at attention on deck as a minesweeper loaded with men going to join the White Russian Army fighting the Bolsheviks in the Caucasus passed. "My grandmother standing alone, smiling sadly; the Grand Duke Nicholas standing also alone, very tall and magnificent; and then hearing the sound of the beautiful Russian national anthem.

"I was standing on the deck with my cousin. He was a man and I was a boy of 11, but we both had the same feelings. Tears came to our eyes, and he turned to me and said with a smile, 'What fools we are.' I'll never forget that."

Then they sailed to Malta and dispersed all over Europe. "And we started our new life."

(Next: Escape by boxcar)

Russian Revolution in boxcars

her hand kissed by Napoleon. The John Ford film was "named by critics to be the finest spoken film yet made."

How did they meet? "I had a hangover," says Mr. Romanov, when they were introduced by a mutual friend over lunch at the old Hotel Gladstone in the winter of 1931. "We had lunch and we walked and she took me to a speakeasy—the 21 Club," he recalls.

"I was full of money," she adds. She was earning \$80 a week compiling her records of the epic boxcar trip across Siberia for playwright Maxwell Anderson.

Many speakeasies later he proposed at yet another speakeasy, and they kissed through spattering beer foam. They were married in the summer of 1931.

Since that time they have had many jobs. "I've worked all the time—so many things. It's something unbelievable," he comments. After moving to San Francisco in 1945 he has worked for the old City of Paris, the Palace Hotel and Almaden Vineyards, among others. They moved to Woodside in 1962.

Now he is chairman of the Romanov Family Association, with some 30 members, and honorary curator of the Imperial Russian Collection at Stanford's Hoover Institution. "They do all the work and I get the honor," he comments.

Their daughter, Marina, lives in New York with her husband and four children they adore.



VASIL AND NATASHA ROMANOV relax in their Woodside cottage with their little dog Tofu. They still vividly recall the days before the Russian Revolution when he was Prince Vasil of Russia, nephew to the Tsar and she was Princess Natalya Golitzin growing up outside Moscow.

"We have lived here so long, and everyone has been enormously kind to us," says Mrs. Romanov. "We've been awfully happy here."

What do they think when they see the current news about Russia?

"I just thank God we are here. We still have a pretty free country," replies the former Prince Vasil of Russia. "God bless America."

This concludes the series.

More volunteers wanted for telephone 'help' lines

United Way of the Bay Area is recruiting volunteers to train for its Information and Referral Service. The program is a weekday telephone service that links people with human service agencies throughout the Bay Area for help in such areas as health and child care, counseling, recreation, employment, housing or transportation.

The Information and Referral Service is located at United Way headquarters in San Francisco and is staffed by professionals and volunteers. Initial training will be held this month.

After orientation, each volunteer works a minimum of eight hours a week and attends advanced training sessions.

If you are interested and can make a six month commitment, call 772-4387 or 772-4444 for an application.