

Bulavin's Rebellion, 1707–1708

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Like numerous Russian peasant rebellions, Bulavin's uprising emerged in the Cossack areas along the Don River. While the Russian government sought to limit the power and independence of the Cossacks, at the same time it sought to control the border region to prevent serfs from escaping beyond the Don. In the early 1700s, the Russian government was under political pressure from Russian landowners to capture more than 60,000 serfs who fled their masters to the Don River. In response to calls for action by landowners, Peter the Great signed a decree on July 6, 1707 calling for a census in Cossack settlements as a pretext to track down all runaway serfs and return them to their lords. Peter the Great appointed Duke Dolgorukiy to lead the military expedition that initially captured about 3,000 fugitive serfs. But Cossacks saw Dolgorukiy's mission as a threat to their own rights and freedom. In response to the Russian military infiltration, Cossack chief or *ataman* Kondratiy Bulavin formed a rebel army to repel the Russian forces. On the night of October 8, 1707, Kondratiy Bulavin staged an attack and killed Dolgorukiy and his entire forces.

Not all of the Cossacks supported Bulavin's effort. Some *atamans* remained loyal to the tsar

and sought to capture Bulavin and his insurgents, who had already escaped to Zaporozhye, a town on the western Donetsk River Basin, to regroup before staging a second attack. During the winter hundreds of Cossacks and non-Russian nationalities, including Kalmyks, Mordva, and Tatars, joined the rebels. In February 1708, Bulavin and his rebel army returned to the Don to commence a second uprising against the Russians, seizing Cherkassk, the political center of the Don, and seeking to advance to Moscow. Simultaneously, the tsar organized an army of 32,000 soldiers to capture Bulavin and quell the insurgency. Meanwhile, some Cossacks in Bulavin's entourage conspired against him, surrounding his house on July 7, 1708 and killing him in a shootout. While Bulavin's defeat was seen as a decisive victory in the royal court, and Peter the Great sought extensive control over the Don, he could not abolish Cossack customs and traditions and future popular uprisings against the Russians.

SEE ALSO: Bolotnikov's Rebellion, 1606–1607; Decembrists to the Rise of Russian Marxism; Pugachev's Rebellion, 1773–1775; Razin's Rebellion, 1670–1671

References and Suggested Readings

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