The 1919 Diary of a Russian White Army Officer

It was a turbulent time. The fledgling Soviet Republic, founded in November 1917 after the Bolshevik Revolution, was under siege, threatened by opposing forces from within and without. Civil War broke out with the revolt of the Don Cossacks in December 1917. An anti-Bolshevik resistance, known as the White movement, gained momentum throughout 1918, and by 1919 the military efforts of the White movement had reached their peak. The two main forces of the White Army were directed by Admiral A. V. Kolchak in Siberia and General A. I. Denikin (Volunteer Army) in the South. However, the anti-Bolshevik forces were plagued by poor organization, weak leadership, and internal animosities. As a result, by early 1920, the Bolsheviks had succeeded in repelling their attackers and quelling the rebellion.

Dmitrii Dmitrievich Litovchenko, was a captain in the Preobrazhenskii Leib-Guard Regiment of the White Army in the Ukraine. From Orthodox Christmas, January 7, 1919 until his death on November 7 of that year at the hands of a Red Army firing squad, he kept a diary in which he recorded his thoughts and impressions of this tragic period in Russian history, which he calls “the cursed civil war,” the “devilish situation” when “people stopped being human.”

After his death, the diary passed into the possession of A. Stakhovich, “the only officer to survive that tragic night [of execution],” who passed it on to Litovchenko’s wife Genia. The latter added two sentences at the end, describing her husband’s death and subsequent burial at Barybinskaya Station on November 13/26. Genia bequeathed the diary to her daughter, Tatiana Litovchenko-Vycheslavtsoff, who added an introduction. The diary was kept in the family for many years until Litovchenko’s granddaughter, Catherine Bode, a resident of Toronto, donated it to the Fisher Library in the summer of 2003.

The diary, written in clear legible pencil, is contained in two pocket-size notebooks. A small original pencil, and a colored paper icon of St. Nicolas di Bari, hidden in the diary pocket, also survived. Included in the donation are a number of Litovchenko’s certificates and other original documents. The diary was translated from Russian into English by Lucy Potts, a Russian-speaking Canadian, who worked as a translator for Reuters during World War II and the translation accompanies the diary.

The diary is an invaluable primary source of information for historians, social scientists, and literary scholars. Litovchenko was determined to document, faithfully and meticulously, the fragment of history he was living through, in all its diverse aspects, including military actions, daily civilian life, and political and economic conditions. His writing alternates between objective description and subjective analysis.

The military situation in 1919 is portrayed through the eyes of a White Army officer. He describes the path to the front line through “the outpost[s] where [Bolsheviks were] catching officers;” searches, arrests and executions; unfilled offers of help from allied forces; military losses, shortage of food and money; and an atmosphere of dashed hopes and uncertain prospects “for our Mother Russia.”
Otto Schneid: Artist with a Mission

Otto Schneid was a painter, sculptor, art historian, writer, and thinker. He was born in Jablunková, Czechoslovakia on January 30, 1900 to parents who had migrated there from Poland. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to Biełitz, Silesia, where he attended school. He began to express his artistic talents at an early age, creating expressive and realistic drawings as well as clay models for sculptures. He attended university in Vienna and later in Paris, studying Anatomy, Art History, Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Ancient Near Eastern History. Since he had hoped to pursue a career in medicine, he did not enrol in an art academy. However, he soon found that his true interests lay in art and he decided to specialize in art history.

After completing his doctorate at the University of Vienna in 1926, he continued to study and travel, lecturing on art and producing paintings and sculptures. In 1934 his first book appeared, devoted to the representation of plants and animals in Chinese art. He spent the years 1936-1938 in Vilna, where he established an art museum under the auspices of YIVO, the Yiddish Scientific Institute. The museum contained over one hundred works of art.