

Everything passes away—suffering, pain, blood, hunger, pestilence. The sword will pass away too, but the stars will still remain when the shadows of our presence and our deeds have vanished from the earth. There is no man who does not know that. Why, then, will we not turn our eyes toward the stars? Why?

Mikhail Bulgakov, *The White Guard*



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.”¹

After his death, the diary passed into the possession of A. Stakhovich, “the only officer to survive that tragic night [of execution],”² 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 Barabinskaya 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.



Dmitrii Dmitrievich Litovchenko, 1891-1919

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; unfulfilled 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.”

Litovchenko starts making his way to the front from Odessa, where he establishes the Guards Recruiting Bureau in January 1919, spends “five months in the Volunteer Army (Odessa, Novorossiysk, Kislovodsk and Petrovsk),” takes “a month’s journey to Siberia” after deciding to join Kolchak’s Army there, and retreats with Kolchak’s military forces.

In the diary, there are a few recurring themes, such as “retreat,” “demoralization,” “confusion,” “disorder,” and the “phenomenal” disorganization of the White Army. In both Denikin’s and Kolchak’s forces, “there is no organization at all,” and, he laments, “this kind of struggle makes no sense any more.”

Another recurring theme is the dearth of information (often replaced with disinformation) the White Army officers suffered from due to poor roads and the lack of communication. They felt cut off from the rest of the world, “in complete ignorance” and uncertainty. They had to guess about the situation at the front, internal changes in the army, the position of the allied forces, and the welfare of their own families.

The diary contains a vast amount of factual information. It sheds light on the internal strife, conflicts of interest and ambitions which were tearing up the ruling echelons of the White Army. It provides a comparison between Kolchak’s and Denikin’s armies: the composition of their forces, the number of officers, the morale, organization, and training of the troops. “The Siberian [Kolchak’s] army” he says, “is far more numerous than the Volunteer [Denikin’s] Army but due to the lack of officers it cannot be put into action at the front. The Army at the front is quite demoralized and is retreating, showing no resistance to the advancing Red Army.” Yet, Litovchenko concludes: “We feel a real governing force [under Kolchak] which we did not feel under Denikin.”

Many entries in the diary also contain a detailed chronology of events and precise descriptions of the routes the officers took; for example, this entry dated May 5 (May 18), 1919: “The route planned so far is as follows: first Mineralnie³ Vody, then turn

towards Mozdok-Kizlyar, from Kizlyar by boat to Terskaya, then down the Caspian Sea coast to Petrovsk to await Admiral Bubnoff, then on with him to Guriev-Uralsk.” The routes and geographic places are easy to follow with the aid of two maps, donated with the diary, which indicate sites where Litovchenko stopped on his way to Siberia.

In many entries, Litovchenko refers to the economic situation in the country, such as the “hunger ... approaching Odessa,” or the cost of living in Kislovodsk, which is much lower than in Novorossiisk. He later states that he has “not yet discovered the greatly praised Siberian low [food] prices,” which, in fact, “are slightly higher ... than in the Caucasus,” and that “everything is terribly] expensive in Omsk (firewood is almost 1500 rubles ... a pound, candles 100 rubles and so on).” On the last page of each notebook of the diary, Litovchenko records his personal earnings and expenditures.

Despite his personal plight and the disastrous situation in the country, Litovchenko still appreciates and enjoys simple things, such as observing nature, and ordinary people. “My clean room here with its comfortable bed is a real Paradise,” he writes in Kislovodsk on April 15. “We took a dip in its famous salt lake, where it is very difficult to swim as the water is so salty that it pushes you up to the surface and out” (June 23). Two days later, he notes, “it was such a pleasure to sleep in a freight car after those ghastly carts. It was so comfortable to sit on the floor of the freight car and not be shaken up all the time as [I was] in the carts.” Trying to maintain some semblance of normalcy, he

and his friends “celebrated Easter, breaking the fast in the proper manner.”

Landscapes he passes through are often described using vivid literary language, enriched with similes and metaphors: “Our carts dragged along the bare [lifeless] steppes ... under the broiling sun;” “the Caspian Sea gives a most awful impression;” “beachless and full of sand banks, it looks like a vast dirty puddle” (May 9); “we spent all day riding through the steppes, which are flat as a pancake and devoid of vegetation” (June 14). “The countryside is beautiful with many rivers and forest-covered hills,” he writes on July 23-24, while Omsk appears “awful, dirty and dusty” (July 8-10). Litovchenko devotedly writes down his impressions of people he meets: “the native Cossacks,” “cheerful ... and very hospitable,” offering the officers a “warm welcome, so unusual nowadays;” “the old Ural people ... full of spirit and determination not to surrender under any circumstances;” and people populating the steppes, who “lead a good and prosperous life” and “are much more cultured than people in Russia.”

“In the diary there is nothing personal. He expresses his personal feelings only when he says how much he misses his family,” writes Tatiana Litovchenko-Vycheslavtsoff in the introduction. Indeed, it is not until July 25 that personal notes enter his diary, and he starts talking about his family: “I am feeling very gloomy. I try to think that at home all is well and yet at the same time I have had no news at all for half a year.” After this date, Litovchenko adds personal remarks to his business-like diary almost in every entry, confessing he feels “terribly depressed”

and longs to see his “dearest loved ones.”

The diary moves from hope to disillusionment and despair, showing the evolution in Litovchenko’s state of consciousness as the White Army retreated deeper into Siberia. Expectations that in all likelihood Bolshevism would collapse on its own and that “hopefully, there will be a popular uprising inside the country” gradually transform into a sense of catastrophe when “the army is totally demoralized, some units refuse to fight, there is no longer a frontline and everybody is fleeing anywhere to the east, pursued by the Reds.” Yet, faith, hope, and a desperate desire to live remained with him until the last day: “I keep ... hoping that these cursed times will [quickly] pass ... and that one will be able to start living again...” Sadly, for Litovchenko, this hope was never fulfilled.

Litovchenko’s diary, an important witness to a tragic, tumultuous time in Russian history, is now available to researchers at the Fisher Library. We are grateful to his daughter and granddaughter for the donation of this precious family heirloom.

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¹ All quotations are taken from the translation of the diary by Lucy Potts (see below) unless otherwise specified.

² Tatiana Litovchenko-Vycheslavtsoff, *Introduction* to the diary.

³ Transliteration of the Russian names and geographic places in the quotations is kept as it appears in the Potts translation; in other places, the Library of Congress transliteration system is followed.



Decorative flourish

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 Bielitz, 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