

Relics handed down through generations

By Tatiana Vishnevskaya

Military ranks' shoulder emblems kept at Museum of Volkovysk Military Commissariat

The museum is the only one of its kind in the republic, established ten years ago; since then, the collection has been growing. One of its expositions today details Belarus-born people who took part in war conflicts worldwide after the end of WWII, displaying awards, photos and military documents of soldiers-internationalists and of those from the Volkovysk district. Others tell visitors about Marshals and Generals who were born in Belarus, about military ranks and the history of their appearance. The museum possesses shoulder emblems from every Soviet Army rank, alongside army and marine uniform and headgear.



Some materials are dedicated to military research and the Chernobyl tragedy. The creator of the museum, Anatoly Ignatovich — chief specialist on social protection in the Volkovysk District Military Commissariat, tells us that over 600,000 soldiers (from over 290 military units from throughout the former USSR) were involved in cleaning up the Chernobyl catastrophe. 40,000 soldiers worked there each day.

Mr. Ignatovich's museum captures the history of the Military Commissariat, with exhibits including a 'Continental' typewriter, manufactured in 1900, a 1884 military service record card for a draftee from the Volkovysk district and post-war Red Army regulations.

Bychikha and Ozerishche are Belarusian 'poles of cold'

Our correspondent visits the coldest region in the country

By Sergey Golesnik

It may seem easy to find the coldest region — you simply read your thermometer. However, three are debating their superiority — Yakutian Verkhoyansk, Oimyakon and Tomtor, where minus 60 is registered almost every winter. We wonder where the coldest Belarusian area is.

Official reference books state that, before the Great Patriotic War, minus 42.2 was registered in Slavnoye village (in the Tolochin district, Vitebsk region) while, in January 1940, minus 41.5 degree frosts covered Bychikha village, 20km away from Gorodok to the north. Staff at the Vitebsk Regional Hydrometeorological Station tell me that the average annual temperature in the Gorodok district (in the north-east of Belarus) is the lowest in the country. The names of villages speak for themselves — Studenka (translated as frost), Drozhaki (shiver), Mekhovoe (fur). Accordingly, I decided to look for the Belarusian 'pole of cold' there.

...It took me an hour and a half to reach Bychikha on the Vitebsk-Yezerishche diesel train. Sadly, I failed to find the former meteorological station but local Piotr Romanenko recalled that, once, as a small boy, he saw a box full of thermometers standing in its yard. "I showed no interest in the equipment," he tells me. "However, I well remember the frost, when water in wells became frozen, and snowstorms which half buried our houses. To keep warm we used to wear felt boots, sheepskins and woollen overcoats with high collars. Almost every village had a skilful tailor, a felt maker and a stove maker." To confirm his words, the 81-year-old shows me a shabby men's short fur coat that belonged to his father and a bright old samovar for boiling water. "The whole family used to gather at the table to warm themselves. I often drank up to seven cups of tea each evening!"

Post-war winters were no less snowy or frosty. Piotr began working as a road master on the Odessa-Leningrad route and recalls that,

in 1956, the frosts closed the road, so people were obliged to resort to horses and tractors. Local resident Nadezhda Lushchik (an accountant for Bychikha Village Council) recalls, "When the temperature reached minus 26, it was announced on the radio that we needn't attend school. On hearing that, we hurried to the farm to take the horse sledges and chute. Surprisingly, we

temperature has jumped from minus 14 to plus 1." Ms. Gulova adds that weather-lore no longer seems to apply and her native Yezerishche sky is ready to be illuminated with true polar lights. Naturally, these are not 'the whisper of



Temperatures and environment are constantly monitored

rarely fell ill — unlike modern children, who tend to spend leisure time on their computers."

In 1955, the meteorological station moved from Bychikha to Yezerishche. Its former Head, Leonid Randarenko, says, "There were winters when we could easily reach out and touch the sparrows as they sat on branches — they were so frozen that they couldn't fly away." At present, Yezerishche station (the most northern in Belarus) is run by Yelena Gulova. She remembers the 35 degree frosts of 2000 and calls Bychikha 'a Belarusian Oimyakon'. She believes our weather is unpredictable, "Today, for example, the

stars' — as Yakuts say of freezing human breath at minus 50 — but, still, an unusual phenomenon.

"Generally, it's sometimes ghastly at night, but my old cat Borka saves me from loneliness," she smiles. While chatting and studying the complicated equipment —

whose data is sent to the Republican Hydrometeorological Centre several times a day for the compilation of maps and forecasts — the large cat slept quietly on the stove. Indeed, it's the best place to be in the Belarusian 'pole of cold'.

Stefan Batory's home returning to former glory

By Tatiana Vishnevskaya

Old Grodno castle to be restored as a 16th century royal residence

The reconstruction of the Old Castle in Grodno has been debated for several years, since the building — which currently hosts Grodno's Historical-Archaeological Museum — was last repaired in the 1950s. However, a restoration plan is yet to be elaborated.

The author and scientific head of the project, architect Vladimir Bachkov, proposed a detailed plan about 20 years ago, which foresaw half of the castle being restored to its former glory as Rzech Pospolita



Old Castle today

King Stefan Batory's residence. In 1580, the castle was rebuilt by Italian architect Santi Gucci for the

King, given an attic style decoration as well as Renaissance-style architectural details and carved or-

naments. Mr. Bachkov thought the other half of the castle could take its original 12th century form — with wooden galleries and restored Nizhnaya Church. A glass pavilion could divide the two, hosting an archaeological exhibition.

However, Mr. Bachkov's project was rejected. The castle is now to be restored as Stefan Batory's residence, with a crested attic style decoration and arcade loggia at the centre. Moulded facades are to be decorated with frescoes and hewn sandstone. Two towers will crown the building — the Middle and Angle — while a dome will appear above the gates. The interior will resemble a royal residence, with

gargoyles, stoves and fireplaces. Meanwhile, the Italian ceilings will be decorated with carvings and paintings. 12th century Nizhnaya Church is to be exhibited in its present condition.

Mr. Bachkov explains that the restoration will take place in stages, with 10 percent of the job already done. Each stage will be overseen by experts and approved by the Culture Ministry. Grodno castle graces Belarus' State List of Historical-Cultural Heritage. The 11th-19th century site features religious, defence and living areas and has been rebuilt several times over the years, having been burnt and destroyed on more than one occasion.