

On the North Russian Front
An Orcadian Officer
in the Russian Civil War, 1919



Henry William Scarth (1899-1972) was the Eleventh Laird of Breckness, and lived at Skail House, Orkney, from 1929 until his death.

In the Spring of 1919, Scarth (then a Second Lieutenant in the Scots Guards) answered a call for volunteers to relieve the British troops who had just fought a winter campaign against the Bolsheviks in North Russia. Scarth was assigned to the 3rd Battalion of the 3rd North Russian Rifle Regiment (White Russian Army), as a Liaison Officer. He served at Archangel and along the Northern Dvina River from June to September 1919. His diary, photographs and other papers conjure a vivid picture of Britain's forgotten intervention in the Russian Civil War.

Scarth was involved in battles at Tikoutika, Selmenga and Lipovets, as Allied and Bolshevik forces clashed along the heavily forested banks of the Dvina. He saw biplanes, river gunboats and machine gun companies in action, witnessed a forest fire, encountered some of the leading figures on the anti-Bolshevik side (General Saddleir-Jackson, General Yevgeny Miller and Prince Morousi), and endured a summer amid the heat and mosquitoes, where the risk of enemy attack was often overshadowed by the fear of mutiny, and the dropping river level left the whole Allied force at risk of being stranded in the roadless forest.

Exhibits include Scarth's diary, his photographs taken in North Russia, the manuscript of the short story that HWS based on his experiences - 'The Snow Halo' (published 1924) - and 'souvenirs' ranging from Orthodox icons to a Cossack officer's camel-hair hood.

Exhibition opens Saturday 26 March and runs until 31 October 2016.
Skail House, Sandwick KW16 3LR. Open daily. Telephone (01856) 841501.
www.skailhouse.co.uk