

EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

Divine Liturgies Offered on Battlefields

By Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

The photographic collection in our Museum and Library is quite extensive. It covers many subjects. For example, we have photographs illustrating church, social, and political aspects of the Ukrainian Diaspora as well as of other major Ukrainian historical events. These photographs serve as an excellent documentation of important occurrences. Probably the largest collection that we have deals with the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen and the Ukrainian Galician Army. Among these we have group and individual portraits of soldiers, marching men-at-arms (infantry, cavalry), battle scenes in fields, in trenches, in forests, in scenes of moments of relaxation between battles, etc. Of special interest are photographs depicting Divine Liturgies offered on battlefields.

Western Ukraine was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. There was an official law which

required that the Empire's armies have a certain number of active and reserve chaplains. In the mid of the 19th century when the Austrian government introduced mandatory service in the army for all young men of the Empire, many Ukrainians also had to serve. Ukrainian Greek-Catholic priests, who at that time were not only spiritual, but also social and political leaders for the Ukrainians in Western Ukraine, requested that the government also assign Greek-Catholic priests as chaplains for the Ukrainian young men serving in the Austrian Army. The government granted this request.

When World War I began, the Legion of Sich Riflemen was organized and began its defense of the people and country against the tsarist Russian army, and later against Red and White Russian armies and the Polish army. With these Ukrainian army divisions

were Ukrainian field chaplains. Depending on the location of the battles or where the unit transport was stationed, Ukrainian priests of nearby parishes, in addition to the chaplains, helped the soldiers in their spiritual needs, by hearing confessions, offering Divine Liturgies on the battlefields, in trenches, and in forests. The priests especially tried to have celebrations during the major holidays, namely Easter and Christmas, notwithstanding the danger and dire situation of the moment. Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky, as soon as he was freed from Russian exile and back in Ukraine, had as his top priority travel to the battlefields and offer Divine Liturgy for the Sich Riflemen army units.

We are including some of the photographs from our collection depicting Divine Liturgies offered on battlefields. □



Metropolitan A. Sheptytsky visits Sich Riflemen, Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford



A traditional Jordan Water Blessing on a river bank, Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

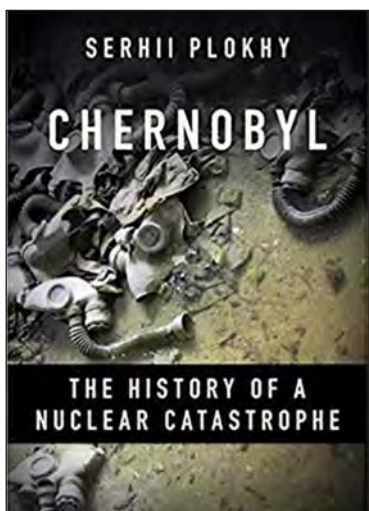


A priest preaches at a Sich Riflemen camp, Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

Book Review by Museum Director

Msgr. John Terlecky

CHERNOBYL: THE HISTORY OF A NUCLEAR CATASTROPHE by Serhii Plokhyy. New York: Basic Books, 2018, \$32. (ISBN 978-1-5416-1709-4)



This fabulous book was just published this past May by Serhii Plokhyy, the noted historian and director of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University. This is just his latest

of a number of English-language books about various eras in Ukrainian history.

The professional reviews of this book have been positively stunning in their assessment of this book released on or about the thirty-second anniversary of the nuclear disaster that took place at the Chernobyl Nuclear Reactor Zone on April 26, 1986. The book is divided into two parts: a description of the catastrophe itself and the impetus of the catastrophe towards the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as the declared independence of Ukraine on August 24, 1991. I found the second half of the book more thrilling in content than the scientific nomenclature associated with the catastrophe itself.

I offer some of the highlights of this thoroughly researched book that garnered my attention. The author clearly in one sentence does away with the criticism of some in using the term "Chernobyl" by stating

that the Ukrainian name for this city is Chornobyl on the first page of the book. I deeply felt the intensity of the meticulous, almost minute-by-minute log of the events leading up to the moment of nuclear explosion and its immediate aftermath of attempted rescues by the powers of both the governments of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in Kyiv and the Supreme Command of the Soviet Union leadership in Moscow. The aftermath of chaos between the two governments is clearly represented in contesting decisions of how to rescue those most threatened by the disaster's effects versus the safeguarding of the very philosophical principles that gave Soviet Communism its identity. I was moved by the presentation of courage that began the transformation of Ukraine from being a puppet state to the voice of the people publicly expressed in various rallies and protests between the years 1987-1991.

Through this book, I was introduced to someone whose name was unknown to me. It was a heroine of Ukraine in the person of a journalist and deputy of Ukraine's parliament named Alla Yaroshynska of the Zhytomyr province. She waged a personal campaign, under much duress from her editors and censorship by government leaders, to expose the Chernobyl tragedy facing the people of Ukraine through successive winds of radioactive poisoning. Her courage opened up a rare opportunity to meet face-to-face with Mikhail Gorbachev at the Congress of People's Deputies in the spring of 1989 in Moscow. From the dais of this gathering, the political silence of the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster came out of the closet to be forever judged and condemned. Her work was just the first step of what eventually became the focus of the Ukrainian Writers' Union, the formation of the Rukh move-

ment, and the declaration of Ukraine's independent sovereignty.

A number of academicians have hailed this book as the definitive and genuine account of the Chernobyl crisis and its aftermath. The Chernobyl nuclear plant was finally closed in the year 2000 and its reactors contained within a huge sarcophagus. The nearby city of Prypiat is a ghost town. The effects of the disaster upon the populace of Ukraine, Belarus and other countries will take years to truly assess. Chornobyl, Ukraine is now rated the number one attraction by TripAdvisor for tourists visiting the Kyiv region.

How does the world assess the political cover-up of this nuclear disaster? Perhaps a quote which appeared in Time magazine attributed to a citizen of Poland says it best – "That the Soviets said nothing and let our children suffer exposure to this cloud for days IS UNFORGIVABLE." □