

**Five Months in Petrograd in 1918:
Robert W. Imbrie and the US Search for Information in Russia.**

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Editor's Note: Studies in Intelligence Vol. 51, No. 4 (December 2007) contained an examination by Mark Benbow of President Woodrow Wilson's efforts to better understand the dynamics of the situation in Mexico during 1913–15. Then, he turned to a variety of sources outside of the Department of State, the usual provider of such information, because, Benbow argued, Wilson did not trust the department's reporting from Mexico. In this brief essay and two archival documents, David Langbart provides another insight into the collection of intelligence during Wilson's presidency, this time by an officer of the Department of State during a period, which scholars argue, constituted a crucial time in the formation of modern intelligence systems.

In the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution of 7 November 1917, the United States Department of State, through its overseas presence, mounted a vigorous effort to gather information in and about Russia and the new regime. In the US government's most significant effort, the department tried to determine how the Bolshevik seizure of power would affect the outcome of World War ²

The files of the Department of State, now in the National Archives, contain two long overlooked reports that provide a rare contemporary account of an unusual aspect of nascent intelligence gathering activities about Russia. Although concerned with a short-lived operation, the documents provide an important window on the early days of Bolshevik Russia and the primitive and ad hoc nature of US intelligence gathering at the time. Increased interest in the earliest period of relations gives these reports even more significance. Finally, in this period of change in Russia, it is worth examining the efforts the United States made to cope with an earlier period of upheaval in that country.

During the year immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution, the Department of State went to great lengths to collect information on political, economic, social, and military conditions and events in Bolshevik controlled areas of Russia, going so far as to create a network of offices and officials.

From the American Consulate General in Moscow, Consul General Maddin Summers, and after his death Acting Consul General DeWitt C. Poole,³ sent consuls and vice consuls to a wide variety of locations throughout Russia. Not surprisingly, given its importance, the United States had a more significant presence in Petrograd than in any city other than Moscow and the work there was the most unusual aspect of the collection effort.⁴

In late February 1918, Ambassador David R. Francis ordered the embassy and consulate in Petrograd to evacuate the city due to the continuing advance of German forces.⁵ American officials subsequently received little reliable information about the important events taking place in the city and conditions in its immediate environs and on the nearby Eastern Front. On 31 March, Consul General Summers in Moscow therefore instructed Vice Consul Robert Whitney Imbrie to return to Petrograd to collect information and report on military and political events there. Initially temporary, assignment soon became ongoing and after 11 May, he was the only American official in the city.⁶ Although forced by circumstances to continue handling such traditional consular duties as issuing passports and visas, he gave priority to the information-gathering activities. At one point Imbrie wrote "As I understand matters, my position here is rather that of an informant than of a consular official."⁷ Eventually he established a special "Information Service" to assist in collecting the information requested of him. Imbrie remained in Petrograd until August.

Imbrie's orders and the two reports make clear that the greatest concern of the "Information Service" was gathering information about activities of the German army as it advanced on the Eastern Front. By virtue of his presence in Petrograd, however, Imbrie was also able to collect information on political conditions and activities there, especially activities of the Bolsheviks. After the creation of a military front between the Bolsheviks and the Allied intervention forces on the Murmansk Peninsula, he reported on action and deployments there. His instructions, however, made clear that the primary objective of the Information Service was to collect information on German activities and movements, primarily of a military nature.⁸

Imbrie was not especially well prepared for the special task assigned him. After receiving degrees from George Washington University and Yale University, he worked as a lawyer from 1907 to 1915. Entering the French army as a volunteer in 1915, he earned two decorations for bravery, including the Croix de Guerre. After an honorable discharge in 1917, Imbrie applied to join the United States Consular Service.⁹ He was accepted and, despite a lack of knowledge of Russia or Russian, in August he received an appointment as a Vice Consul in Petrograd and traveled immediately to that city.

While a hard and conscientious worker, Imbrie still spoke no Russian after only seven months of experience in Russia when he began his special assignment in Petrograd. Furthermore, as a consular officer, his training and concerns had not been those of a diplomatic officer. Instead of preparing political and military reports, his consular duties included matters such as passports, visas, protection of interests, and commercial activities and reports. Imbrie also allowed his personal opinions to color his reports. As with virtually all other Department of State officials in Russia in 1918, he had an extreme, almost visceral, dislike of the Bolsheviks and expected their momentary collapse. His experiences in Petrograd did nothing to lessen that attitude.¹⁰ Indeed, they probably exacerbated it.

He nevertheless had the full support of his superiors and undertook his new assignment with enthusiasm, showing initiative and diligence as he went about collecting information and actively representing American interests in Petrograd. This prompted Poole at one point to call him a "live wire."¹¹

Imbrie's reports, colored as they were by his biases, helped keep the embassy and consulate general informed on events in and around Petrograd and formed the basis for reports to the Department of State. Imbrie remained in Petrograd until the end of August 1918, when the deterioration of relations between the United States and Bolshevik authorities led all remaining American consular officers to leave Bolshevik-controlled areas.

In December 1918, while in Washington awaiting his next assignment, Imbrie prepared the two reports that follow. The first provides a general overview of his experiences and activities in Petrograd and touches lightly upon his information gathering activities, while the second focuses on the "Information Service" he established. In addition to describing activities, these reports provide a unique and colorful account of events and conditions in Petrograd in the immediate aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Imbrie subsequently served as a Vice Consul at Viborg, Finland, and Constantinople, Turkey, where he continued work relating to Russian matters, and Tehran, Persia (Iran). On 18 July 1924, a mob in Tehran beat him to death after he reportedly took photographs of a religious demonstration. His wife and some former colleagues accused the Bolsheviks of somehow being behind the murder.¹²

Document I¹³

Department of State, Washington

Report on the Petrograd Consulate

April 5 to September 1, 1918

On the 26th day of February 1918, because of the continued advance of the Germans, the Consulate at Petrograd was closed under the orders of Ambassador Francis.

Two days previous to that, a special train bearing the Embassy Staff, the American nationals, the Japanese, Siamese and Brazilian Legations had been despatched eastward. The British, French, Italian and Swedish Embassies and military missions had already departed. The Consular staff, with such of the archives and supplies as had not been destroyed, entrained on the night of the together with the American, Brazilian and Japanese Ambassadors, reaching Vologda early in the morning of the 28th.

At Vologda the embassy had no staff and codes, they having been despatched to eastern Russia; it therefore fell upon the consulate to do the code work of the embassy and it was not until the end of March that the return of the staff with the codes rendered the presence of the consulate at Vologda no longer necessary.

During this interval, little or no exact information but many rumors reached Vologda from Petrograd; it was therefore advisable that someone return to the capital for the purpose of obtaining information as to conditions there.

On the last of March Consul Tredwell¹⁴ gave the undersigned permission to return to Petrograd for this purpose and on Tuesday, April 2nd I started. The demoralized transportation facilities made the journey somewhat uncertain and it was not until three o'clock of the morning of the 5th I reached Petrograd.

An incident indicative of the lawlessness prevailing occurred as we passed through the station, when a peasant seeking to avoid the search for food, to which all passengers were subjected, sought to break through the Red Guard Detachment. Without any warning a guard, firing from the hip, killed the man in his tracks. Upon exhibiting my Bolshevik diplomatic pass to the same guard, I was politely permitted egress from the station. The city was in total darkness and the trams were not operating, but at this time cabs could still be obtained and I found the Hotel Europe open.

The 5th and 6th of April were employed in gathering material for reports which were wired to the embassy and the consulate general, and on the 8th I received instructions from Consul General Summers to remain in Petrograd until further orders unless, in my opinion, it was unsafe to do so.

During the month of March the American citizen, Lewis Simmel,¹⁵ had been entrusted by the military mission with an envelope containing Roubles 3,000 for carriage to Moscow. Ten days later reaching Moscow reported that he had been stopped en route, forcibly removed from the train, and robbed of the funds entrusted to his care. On my journey up from Vologda it happened that the porter on my car was the same man who had acted in this capacity on Simmel's train. Having had my doubts as to Simmel's story, I questioned the porter and was convinced that Simmel's story was a pure fabrication. On reaching Petrograd my first act was to search out Simmel and on the pretence of visaeing his passport obtained possession of same. I then informed him of the facts in my possession. He insisted upon his first story but upon cross examination broke down and made, in the presence of a witness, a signed written confession. He denied having possession of an amount sufficient to reimburse the mission but upon pressure he gave up the entire amount which was forwarded to the embassy together with the confession.¹⁶

On the 10th of April word reached the consulate that American citizen Ralph Wilner¹⁷ had been arrested on the charge of "speculation." It was a matter of six hours before the man was finally located in the dungeon at revolutionary headquarters. It was only after repeated and emphatic representation that I was permitted to see the prisoner. After an interview, being convinced of the man's innocence, I demanded his immediate release from Uritsky,¹⁸ the first commissar for the Suppression of Contra Revolution. His release being assured, I made a demand in writing that a written apology be sent our government through the medium of the Norwegian government for Wilner's unwarranted arrest and detention. On the 13th such written apology was made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and duly transmitted through the Norwegian government to our embassy.¹⁹

It was during the second week in April that I got in touch with the expatriated American citizen George Ackerman.²⁰ This man had in his possession a lot of forty-three documents, purporting to have been stolen from revolutionary headquarters and showing the Bolshevik German intrigue and the working of the German spy system. The price demanded for these documents was Roubles 40,000. After examining these documents with an expert, I communicated with the ambassador who authorized their purchase. As a result of considerable negotiation, they were finally obtained for Roubles 20,000. Three facsimile sets were then made, one set and the originals being sent to the consulate general, and the third set placed under seal and deposited with the Norwegian embassy, against its receipt.

It was while these documents were in my possession that I obtained through the espionage system I had established upon the telegraph a copy of an en claire message sent by the American correspondent Lewis Edgar Browne.²¹ This message was so flagrantly indiscreet as to involve all consular officials and others who had to do with the purchase of the Sisson documents²² or with the second batch of documents just referred to. On my recommendation, the use of the wires was thereafter forbidden Browne and he was permitted to leave Russia.

About the middle of April, under the direction of the consulate general a military espionage system was established at Petrograd and continued to operate until the withdrawal of the consular officials from soviet Russia. (See separate memorandum.)²³

Because of the frequency of the reports it now became necessary to establish a regular courier service to Vologda (the embassy) and to Moscow (the consulate general).

There were in Petrograd at this time about fifteen American citizens. A number of these were destitute, without food or means to leave the country. An appeal made to Moscow and the Red Cross resulted in the collection of a relief fund. These people were then furnished with food and transportation and, after repeated delays, due to the fighting along the railroads and interruption of communication, were finally despatched through Archangel and Murmansk.

Prior to the evacuation of Petrograd by the Allied embassies, certain Americans had interested themselves in founding and maintaining an asylum for orphaned children. Upon my return I found this institution without food and funds and in a really pitiable state. As food was daily growing scarcer and absolute famine was not far off, it was evident that these children had to be gotten out of the city. After despatching an agent to Viatka I decided on this as the best place for the asylum and, having gotten together sufficient food, I evacuated the entire lot of children in charge of several members of the Salvation Army.

On May 9th the one remaining representative of the American Red Cross,²⁴ who had been in Petrograd about a fortnight, turned over the affairs of that organization to the consulate and thereafter all relief work was rendered through the consulate.

The representatives of the American on Public Information having been recalled, I was requested by the Petrograd manager, Mr. Graham Taylor, to take over the work of this organization and did so on May 14th. From this time on until the cutting of the cables it fell to the consulate to edit and prepare for the press all despatches from America and to furnish propaganda for controlling German intrigue.²⁵ In this connection, five thousand posters, printed in the German language, containing extracts from President Wilson's speeches were prepared and were in readiness to post upon the entry of German troops in the city, an event of daily expectation.

On May 11 Vice Consul Dennis,²⁶ 25 whom the consulate general had assigned to assist at Petrograd for two weeks, was recalled to Moscow for other assignment and thereafter I was the sole American official in Petrograd.

All American representatives of American firms having left Petrograd in February, the interests of these firms were guarded solely by Russians. As a result, confiscation of American property was attempted almost daily and a large share of the consulate's time was claimed in giving this property protection, demanding the return of property already confiscated and taking inventory, for filing, of all American property which might be subject to confiscation. On the 29th of May the Bolshevik announced the confiscation of the Singer building, an American

owned building wherein was located the consulate. The pretence was the non-payment of a wholly illegal tax of 87,000 Roubles. To save the building and before the Red Forces could move in, I raised the flag and took over the building in the name of the United States government. This prevented its occupation.

June 4th Ambassador Francis came up to Petrograd accompanied by Colonel Ruggles,²⁷ chief of the military mission and several members of the embassy staff. The ambassador remained three days, returning then to Vologda.

Food conditions were daily growing worse. By June bread and sugar issues had ceased and there were many cases of actual starvation. Cabs were becoming very scarce as horses were commandeered for food. Flour in very limited quantities could still be purchased at Roubles 20 (\$2.00 per font (9/10 of a pound)), and sugar at Roubles 30. By September these prices had more than doubled. Food rioting several times broke out but the armoured cars being brought out, was suppressed with comparatively small loss of life. The banks, which had been closed since December, remained closed; many of the stores were closed. Those remaining open were "nationalized," and clothes and tobacco, as well as food, could only be had in very limited quantities and then on cards. Violent crime was rampant but the coming of the "white nights" decreased it somewhat.²⁸

Later in June, learning that the estate of the American citizen Winifred McClellan²⁹ at Strelina--thirty miles from Petrograd--was threatened with confiscation I went to Strelina and took over the estate and villa as my official residence, posting a notice to that effect and registering my passport with the local soviet. Up to the time of the withdrawal of the consular officials from soviet Russia, this action had been respected and the estate had not been confiscated.

On July 7th, the Social Revolutionists declared against the Bolshevik as a result of the Mirbach assassination,³⁰ and barricaded themselves in headquarters near the consulate. This resulted in a battle during which the Bolshevik brought up field artillery and blew the Social Revolutionary headquarters to pieces. The casualties amounted to something over one hundred of which the Bolshevik share was about seventy-five per cent. The movement was completely suppressed, though intermittent fighting continued in the streets for several days.

With the coming of warm weather, cholera made its appearance. Owing to the lack of sanitation and proper medicine with which to combat the disease, it spread rapidly and within a fortnight was averaging 1500 cases daily with 80 percent mortality.

When originally assigned to Petrograd, I was instructed to disregard passport matters but so many applications were made by Russians and the remaining Americans that these instructions were amended and I was directed by the consulate general to take charge of this work in Petrograd. In middle July, however, the cables being cut I could no longer communicate with Washington and was, therefore, obliged thereafter to refuse all Russians applications for visae.

Upon return to Vologda, Ambassador Francis instructed me to take over supervision of the embassy and its staff of Russians and to raise the American flag over the building.³¹

On July 11th, owing to fighting at Yarrowslave the embassy was cut off from direct communications with the consulate general and from this time until the departure of the embassy northward every wire passing between the two was sent to the consulate at Petrograd and then relayed. This necessitated the employment of additional typists. All telegrams and despatches, both from the and the consulate general, had for some time prior to this been sent to Petrograd for transmission through the Norwegian legation as the cutting of the Murmansk line had severed the last direct link with the outside world.

In addition to our own telegrams we also handled those of the French, as they had been forbidden the use of the wire for the transmission of code messages.

The ill feelings of the Bolsheviks towards the allies increased daily and the Americans remaining at Petrograd were subject to many annoyances, searches, and arrests. Much of my time was now taken up in securing the release from arrest, in arranging for the hiding of those whom the Bolsheviks sought and in protesting to Uritsky against these outrages.

Matters assumed such a serious aspect that on the last day of July, I lowered our flag from the and with the permission of the Norwegian Charge raised the Norwegian flag, again placing the building under Norwegian protection. On the same day the allied consular representatives had a meeting to discuss the advisability of destroying the codes.

On August 2nd I received a telegrams from Consul Poole announcing a break of the de facto relations, which up to this time had existed with the Bolshevik government. Upon instructions, brought by courier the same day, I lowered our flag from the consulate and requested the Norwegian charge to extend the protection of his government. On August 6th I received news of the arrest of the French and British Consuls General at Moscow³² and on the through the espionage system, received a copy of a wire from Moscow directing my arrest. With the assistance of the Norwegian charge³³ who furnished me with a Norwegian passport and lent me his car, I withdrew to Strelina, thirty miles from Petrograd where I remained for four days, keeping in touch with the consulate by messenger and telephone. At the expiration of this time the had securing for me a guaranty of immunity from arrest and I returned to Petrograd. On the 7th of August, because of chaotic conditions prevailing and the liability of search I considered it imperative that the Diplomatic Red Code No. 423, Consular 87, in my possession be destroyed. Accordingly on that date, in the presence of Emil W. Rarogewicz,³⁴ I completely destroyed same, a performance which has since received the Department's approval. (Despatch No. September 21, 1918.)

August 13th there was called a conference of the representatives of the British, French, Danish, Swedish, and American governments. As the only American official in Petrograd, I attended this conference. The purpose of the conference was the drawing of a Protocol, binding the Allies to guarantee that the

Allied Forces at Archangel and Murmansk would exercise no reprisals, provided the Allied citizens, then held by the Bolsheviks as prisoners, should be released. Inasmuch as no American citizen was at this time under arrest, I refused to sign such an instrument.

Negotiation was now undertaken by the neutral ministers, with the end in view of securing the departure of Allied officials and nationals and their safe conduct through the German Forces in Finland. There still remaining in Petrograd about ten Americans, I notified these that if they desired to leave Russia that this was their opportunity. As it was necessary to take food enough for ten days for the journey, this was collected and arrangement was made for the anti-cholera inoculation, and health certificates to satisfy the Swedish authorities were obtained. Upon application to the Swedish consulate, a blank visae for all Americans leaving Petrograd for Sweden was granted. The passports were then taken to Uritsky for the Bolshevik visae. In the case of the officials this, after some delay, was granted but the passports of the American nationals were retained. Before these could be secured Uritsky was assassinated³⁵ and in the resultant confusion it was impossible to secure these passports. Having no passport forms there I issued Certificates of Citizenship, under the consulate seal, and it was on these that the remaining Americans finally left Russia and crossed into Sweden.

As it seemed to me that some American official should remain in Russia for the purpose of conducting the Information Service, I notified the consulate general that I was willing to remain. Consul Poole, however, being of the opinion that the risk was unwarranted, I prepared to leave with the nationals. A fund of 100,000 Roubles was, at the direction of Consul Poole, left with Lieutenant Peretz,³⁶ the man who acted as chief of my Information Service in Petrograd, the money to be utilized in maintaining this service after I withdrew.

On August 28, the special train from Moscow, with the American officials and nationals, reached Petrograd. It was not until the 31st that permission was obtained for the train to proceed to the Finnish border. In the meantime, the British consul had been arrested. On the afternoon of the 31st, the Norwegian ambassador telephoned me saying that he was sending his car for me and unless I left at once, he could not be held as charged with my safety. Prior to this I had sealed all consular records and delivered same to the custody of the Norwegian embassy against receipt. Nothing, therefore, remained to be done save to secure the consular seal and remaining funds. These I took with me, later delivering both to the consulate general at Stockholm against receipt.

At five o'clock, in company with the Norwegian consul, I started for the Finnish station. Our route led past the British embassy and as we approached we saw that the place was surrounded by armed sailors and Red Guard. A detachment surrounded our car and prevented our advance in spite of the fact that the Norwegian flag was flying from the machine. In the meantime firing had broken out in the embassy and Captain Cromie, the British Naval Attaché, was killed.³⁷ The British were now brought out under guard and lined up by the side of our machine.

Five Months in Petrograd

The Norwegian consul was vigorous in his protest over the stopping of his car and on exhibiting our papers, mine furnished me by the charge showing me to be an attaché of their legation, we were finally permitted to proceed. That night we reached the Finnish border and after two days delay, crossed into Finland.

Robert Whitney Imbrie

Vice Consul

Document II³⁸

Department of State, Washington

December 3, 1918

Memorandum Regarding the "Information Service"
Established in the Petrograd

Robert W. Imbrie, American Vice Consul

Early in April of the present year instructions were issued by the Consulate General in Moscow to the Vice Consul in Charge at Petrograd to employ Agents for the purpose of obtaining military information regarding the Germans in Finland and North Russia and also for obtaining political information.

The enemy³⁹ at this time had occupied Helsingfors in Eastern Finland and in Russia proper had proceeded North from Riga to the vicinity of Wolmar. In furtherance of the instructions from the Consulate General an Information Service was established. It was a matter of some difficulty to select men whose discretion, energy and military knowledge fitted them for the duties assigned. For the most part Russians were employed, though among those in the Service was one Finn and a Swede.⁴⁰ When employing a new man the information he brought in was checked up by that furnished by an Agent of proved ability and exactitude, each working without the knowledge of the other. If the new Agent's information did not tally with that of the old, his report was disregarded and another "checking trip" was assigned before finally establishing his reliability.

Each Agent was furnished with a chart, painted in colors, showing the insignia, rank, regimental, corps, divisional and departmental marks of the German Army, which marks he was required to commit to memory before being sent into the field.

In most cases the men chosen for the work were ex-officers, in two instances of professional spies under the old regime. Occasionally, however, common soldiers, or employed because of the greater ease with which they might pass through the enemy's lines. The Agents were sent into the field under instructions to procure the following information:

1. Number of enemy's forces.
2. Character; i.e. branch of service.
3. Corps, divisional, and regimental numbers.
4. Location of general headquarters.
5. Name of commanding officers.

6. Armament and equipment.
7. Engineering defenses (trenches, wire entanglements and so forth) if any.
8. Enemy's probable future movements.
9. Treatment of the population of the occupied territory.
10. Attitude of the population of the occupied territory.
11. Enemy's probable line of advance.
12. Number, character, equipment and morale of Russian forces opposed to enemy.
13. Condition of railroads and transport roads leading to front.

Though it was some weeks before the Service was in full operation, before June information on all of the above points was in our possession. As the enemy advanced from the south to Pskof and Narva and from the North to Bellestrov, on the Finnish border nineteen miles from Petrograd, the length of the journeys necessary to be undertaken by the Agents grew correspondingly shorter and hence we were able to obtain more accurate and up-to-date information. On repeated occasions our Agents penetrated the enemy's lines, passing through to the other side and, returning, bringing exact information unobtained by any other similar service of the Allies, winning the commendation from the Allied Military Missions in Moscow who informed the Consulate General that our reports were the most valuable turned in. That the enemy himself appreciated the value of the Service is indicated by the fact that scarcely a week passed when the Consulate at Petrograd was not in receipt of threatening letters.

The Agents were paid at the rate of roubles thirty (\$3.00) per day and actual expenses, for which latter an itemized statement was required. They were frequently fired upon and several times arrested on suspicion but only one failed to return, his fate being problematical.

In most cases the men did not know for whom they were working and reported to a Head Agent⁴¹ who in turn reported to the Vice Consul. The Agents had instructions to report at any time of the day or night when they happened to return. These reports were written; immediately translated, put into military form and an epitomized version put on the wires in code, one message going to the Ambassador and head of the American Military Mission, the other to the Consulate General. The full report as soon as written, together with exhibits, such as passes, German papers, money, copies of orders, military schedules, was immediately prepared and forwarded by courier.

At one time or another some eleven or twelve individuals were employed in the Information Service. For the gathering political

information, in two instances, women were employed because of their intimacy with certain of the Bolshevick leaders.⁴²

With the landing of Allied troops on the Murmansk and the closing of the peninsular railroad, resulting in the formation of a front, Agents of proven anti-Bolshevik belief were dispatched there and at frequent intervals brought in information regarding developments on this front.

Upon the flight of the Allied Embassies from Volgoda to the north,⁴³ and the formation of the Bolshevick Army to oppose the Allied advance from Archangel, other agents reported on this front.

The Service was in operation to the very day of the withdrawal of the consular officials from Soviet, Russia, and at this time we were in possession of exact information (since transmitted by the undersigned to the Commanding American Officer at Archangel) of the Bolshevick forces, their armament, and so forth.

In addition to affairs military and political, this service was able to report on Naval matters. Within ten days after the German occupation of Helsingfors, a complete list of the Russian vessels taken by the enemy was furnished the Consulate General for transmission to Washington. A list of the Baltic fleet in the harbor of Petrograd and at Kronstadt was constantly kept up to date and the movement of all vessels reported. Besides this, information (since communicated to the United States Naval Intelligence) concerning the placement and operation of the mine fields in the Baltic was obtained.

The expense of the Information Service at Petrograd at no time exceeded roubles seven thousand (\$700) per month. The written reports averaged two per week.

/S/ Robert W. Imbrie

American Vice Consul

¹ The author is an archivist in the in the National Archives and Records Administration specializing in records of the Department of State and agencies of the intelligence community. He acknowledges the assistance of Lillian S. Clementi, David C. Humphrey, and M. Philip Lucas. The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect those of any agency of the US government.

² At the time of World War I, the Department of State was responsible for gathering most of the intelligence and information on which American policy-makers based foreign policy decisions. Today's intelligence agencies were another world war's aftermath away. The Army's Military Intelligence Division and the Office of Naval Intelligence concentrated on military topics and domestic subversive activities.

³ During World War II, Poole headed the Foreign Nationalities Branch of the Office of Strategic Services.

⁴ Surprisingly little has been written about the work and activities of US officials gathering information in Russia at this time. For a balanced overview of early US information-gathering activities in Russia, see David A. Langbart, “‘Spare No Expense,’ The Department of State and the Search for Information About Bolshevik Russia, November 1917–September 1918,” *Intelligence and National Security* 4, no. 2 (April 1989): 316–34. David S. Fogelson, in his article “Xenophon Kalamatiano: An American Spy in Russia?” in *Intelligence and National Security* 6, no. 1 (January 1991): 154–95, presents a detailed, if exaggerated, description of the activities of one person involved in the effort. See also his *America’s Secret War Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), which emphasizes the anti-Bolshevik nature of the information gathering work to the exclusion of its other aspects. For other histories of US-Russian relations during this period, see George F. Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), and *The Decision to Intervene* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1958); David W. McFadden, *Alternative Paths: Soviets and Americans, 1917-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Norman Saul, *War and Revolution: The United States and Russia, 1917–1921* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001). Kennan dedicated the second of the two volumes noted above to Poole and Summers.

⁵ The Germans and Bolshevik authorities began peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk in December 1917, but when the discussions declaring “No war, no peace” ended, the Germans resumed their offensive operations against the Russians.

⁶ Summers to Imbrie, 13 April 1918, and Poole to Imbrie, 16 April 1918, Files of the US Consulate, Petrograd, Record Group 84, National Archives. Hereafter cited as Petrograd Files, RG 84, NA.

⁷ Imbrie to Summers, 17 April 1918, Petrograd Files, RG 84, NA. See also Imbrie to Lee, 29 April 1918, and Imbrie to Poole, 15 May 1918, Petrograd Files, RG 84, NA

⁸ Fogelson in his article on Kalamatiano cites Document II as demonstrating the predominantly anti-Bolshevik nature of Imbrie’s activities. He ignores the larger portions of the report that deal with German activities and forgets that for the entire period of Imbrie’s work in Petrograd, the United States was at war with Germany. Summers’ orders, for example, directed Imbrie to collect and report information about “number and character of troops advancing,” the supplies falling into their hands, and the resistance being put up by Russian forces, as well as on Russian naval units that escaped German capture. Many American officials, Imbrie among them, thought the Bolsheviks to be German agents and not representatives of their ally. Summers to Imbrie, 13 April 1918, Petrograd Files, RG 84, NA.

⁹ At the time of World War I, the overseas presence of the Department of State was divided into two mutually exclusive and competing branches—the Diplomatic Service and the Consular Service. Diplomatic officials had responsibility for the official relations of the United States with other governments. Consular officials were responsible for commercial relations and visa and passport matters. The Rogers Act of 1924 created the unified Foreign Service.

¹⁰ Biographical information on Imbrie comes from Central Decimal File 123 Im 1, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, NA; “Petrograd Facing Winter Hardships,” *The Washington Star*, 10 November 1918; and H.L. Rennick, “Imbrie, Acting, in Red Petrograd,” *New York Times Magazine*, 7 September 1924.

¹¹ Poole to Imbrie, 16 April 1918, Petrograd Files, RG 84, NA. Imbrie managed to retain his sense of humor throughout his time in Petrograd. For example, at one point he sent a letter to another American official addressed at “Manager of the Committee on Public Information and Inspector of Icebergs, Somewhere in Russia.” See Imbrie to Taylor, 5 June 1918, Petrograd, RG 84, NA.

¹² For more detail, see: Michael P. Zirinsky, “Blood Power and Hypocrisy: The Murder of Robert Imbrie and American Relations with Pahlavi Iran, 1924,” *the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 18: 275–92.

Notes for Document I

¹³ Source: "Report on the Petrograd Consulate, April 5, to September 1, 1918," enclosed in Robert W. Imbrie to Basil Miles, 18 December 1918, Department of State Central Decimal File 125.813/7-1/2, RG 59, NA. Imbrie's letter reads: "In accordance with your suggestion I have the honor to transmit herewith a report on the Petrograd Consulate covering the dates, inclusive, April 5, to September 1, 1918." This document was not filed in the central files of the Department of State until 1937, when it was received from the Division of Eastern European Affairs (EE). This report is reproduced using Imbrie's spelling and punctuation.

¹⁴ Roger C. Tredwell, an American Consul in Russia.

¹⁵ Not further identified.

¹⁶ See also Imbrie to Tredwell, 9 April 1918, Petrograd Files, RG 84, NA. Imbrie subsequently reported that Simmel was "thoroughly repentant" and did useful work procuring information for him. Imbrie to Francis, 16 April 1918, Petrograd Files, RG 84, NA.

¹⁷ Not further identified.

¹⁸ M.S. Uritsky, Commissar for Internal Affairs and head of the Petrograd Cheka.

¹⁹ See also Imbrie to Tredwell, 11 April 1918, Petrograd Files, RG 84, NA.

²⁰ Not further identified.

²¹ Lewis Edgar Browne, *Chicago Daily News* correspondent in Russia.

²² The Sisson Documents were procured by Edgar Sisson, a representative of the Committee on Public Information in Petrograd. The documents purportedly came from the files of the Bolshevik regime and supposedly demonstrated that the Bolsheviks were acting under the direction of the Germans. Publication of the documents by the CPI helped precipitate the final break between the United States and the Bolsheviks. The CPI, created by Executive Order 2594 in April 1917, was the United State's first official propaganda organization.

²³ See Document II.

²⁴ Not further identified.

²⁵ The exact date the cables were cut could not be determined.

²⁶ Ralph B. Dennis, an American Vice Consul in Russia.

²⁷ Colonel James A. Ruggles, US Military Attaché and chief of the American Military Mission in Russia.

²⁸ Problems with the water supply led one of Imbrie's colleagues to recommend that he "drink champagne and Burgundy, or even at a pinch white or red wine." And when one of his consular colleagues sent Imbrie some tobacco, he thanked him, writing that "I shall cut up some thousand rouble bills and mix them with the tobacco, thus making it go further and cost less." See Armour to Imbrie, 20 July 1918, and Imbrie to Lee, 30 July 1918, Petrograd Files, RG 84, NA.

²⁹ Not further identified.

³⁰ Count Wilhelm von Mirbach, German ambassador to Russia. He was assassinated in the German embassy by two Russian leftist opponents of the Bolsheviks trying to provoke a break between the Bolsheviks and Germany. The Bolsheviks called the incident an Anglo-French provocation.

³¹ Imbrie had no US flag in his possession and had to request the flag used by the Petrograd office of the Committee on Public Information (CPI). Imbrie to Younger, 7 June 1918, Petrograd Files, RG 84, NA.

³² In response to the landing of Allied troops under British command in Archangel, Bolshevik authorities arrested and interned a large number of British and French residents of Moscow, including those countries' consular staffs.

³³ Not further identified.

³⁴ Emil Rarogewicz was variously described by Imbrie as a clerk, a courier, and an interpreter in the consulate.

³⁵ Uritsky was assassinated on 30 August 1918 by a military cadet. That evening, Lenin was shot by a leftist opponent. The two events were apparently unconnected but set off the “Red Terror.”

³⁶ Lieutenant Michael Peretz, a former tsarist officer, Imbrie’s chief assistant. Formerly attached to the American Military Mission in Russia.

³⁷ Captain Francis N.A. Cromie, British Naval Attaché. After the assassination of Uritsky and the attempted assassination of Lenin on 30 August, the Bolsheviks began a rampage. On 31 August, a mob attacked the British embassy and Cromie died defending the premises.

³⁸ Source: Robert W. Imbrie, “Memorandum Regarding the ‘Information Service’ Established in Petrograd,” 3 December 1918, Department of State Central Decimal File 59, NA. A notation on the report indicates that the department sent a copy to the Military Intelligence Division on 15 January 1919. Attached to the report is a note dated 3 October 1919, by Basil Miles, Division of Near Eastern Affairs (Russia), the department's leading Russia expert in 1919, to C. Poole. It reads “I have kept this out of the file for the time. It is real romance but highly important to keep quiet until Imbrie gets out of range.” This report is reproduced using Imbrie’s spelling and punctuation.

³⁹ The Germans. Despite ratification of the Treaty of Litovsk between Germany and the Bolshevik regime, the German army continued its advance into Russia. It made its deepest penetrations in the Ukraine and the Crimea, but also moved forward toward Petrograd. In addition, there were rumors of German intrigues to influence the internal situation of Russia.

⁴⁰ With the exception of chief assistant Michael Peretz, none of the members of the Information Service have been identified.

⁴¹ As noted in the previous report, Lt. Michael Peretz.

⁴² The records of the Department of State shed no additional light on this aspect of the “Information Service.”

⁴³ In late July, the diplomatic and consular missions in Vologda moved to Archangel, arriving there on 26 July.