

Vetluga Memoir: A Turkish Prisoner of War in Russia, 1916-1918

By Mehmet Arif Olcen

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Mehmet Arif was an officer in a Turkish unit captured early on in World War I by Russian forces. His memoirs describe the hardships of the war in a remote Russian town, the life of the ordinary people in the last years of Czarist Russia and the chaos caused by the Bolshevik Revolution.

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Vetluga Memoir: A Turkish Prisoner of War in Russia, 1916-1918 By Mehmet Arif Olcen Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #5099258 in Books
- Published on: 1995-06-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.82" h x .98" w x 5.90" l, 1.17 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 264 pages

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Editorial Review

Language Notes
Text: English
Original Language: Turkish

From the Back Cover
Early in World War I, during a freezing winter battle on the eastern front in the Caucasus, Russian troops captured a young Turkish officer whose unit was badly outnumbered and undersupplied. This rare account is Mehmet Arif Olcen's story of what followed: his three years as a prisoner of war in the small town of Varnavino, east of Moscow on the Vetluga River. Mehmet Arif and the other prisoners were given considerable freedom to form friendships with the local people, and Mehmet, who recorded his feelings and observations in a pocket notebook, was a keen observer. His descriptions of the hardships of the war in a remote Russian town present a vivid and compassionate picture of the ordinary people during the last years of Czarist Russia and of the chaos they experienced during the Bolshevik Revolution. More than a personal reminiscence, Vetluga Memoir is also a historical document that describes a lost episode during World War I - the political and strategic mistakes made by the Ottoman Third Army - and the final days of one corner of the Czarist empire. The author's son, Ali Nejat, offers an overview of the problems that the Ottoman Empire faced in the years preceding the war and notes that Mehmet's insights about Bolshevism foretell, with ironic commentary, the recent collapse of the Soviet Union.

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