

Diary and recovered note cast new light on defection and assassination on Fiala-Ziegler Polar Expedition, 1903–05

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ABSTRACT. An article by Walter Sullivan in *The New York Times* of 30 January 1969 speculated that a note discovered by a Russian party on Rudolf Island, Franz Josef Land, was evidence of defection by three members of the Fiala-Ziegler Polar Expedition, 1903–05. Sullivan indicated that the Soviet Novosti news service had reported that the partially decayed note, which was dated 2 July 1904, started: ‘We the opposition’ and was signed by ‘Tess, Veddy, and Ralliet.’ Examinations of the diaries of a member of the expedition and of expedition leader Anthony Fiala’s book *Fighting the polar ice* show that it was impossible for these men to have been together on 2 July 1904, but that they were together a year later, and that they left a note then, at the place where Novosti reported the Russian party to have found one. Fiala and the diary show that the reported version of the note is not consistent with the circumstances at the purported time of the writing. When the note of 1905 was written, the trio was on a mission to assist Fiala. Defection and dissent by this group are contrary to available documents and publications, as well as the text of what is undoubtedly the original note, newly brought to light. In addition, the foundation for the issue of assassination and defection as raised by William Hunt, who referenced Sullivan’s story in his book *To stand at the Pole*, is challenged.

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Background

Franz Josef Land (Zemlya Frantsa-Iosifa) is an archipelago in the Arctic Ocean north of western Russia; its extent was unknown at the beginning of the twentieth century (Fig. 1). The first certain sighting of Franz Josef Land was made by the members of the Austro-Hungarian Exploring Expedition on 30 August 1873, when their ice-bound ship *Tegetthoff* drifted close to land in the southern part of the archipelago (Holland 1994: 290–291). The first landing was made on 1 November at Wilczek Island (Ostrov Vil’checka), following which parties under Julius Payer, the co-commander of the expedition, made exploratory trips by sledge, in April 1874 reaching Cape Fligley (Mys Fligeli) on Rudolf Island (Ostrov Rudol’fa), the northernmost point of the archipelago (Payer 1876: 161–162). The newly discovered land was initially named Kaiser Franz-Josefs Land after the reigning monarch of Austria (Slupetzky 1995).

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, parts of the archipelago were explored on expeditions led by Benjamin Leigh Smith (1880, 1881–82), Fridtjof Nansen (1895–96), George Frederick Jackson (1894–97), and Walter Wellman (1898–99) (Nansen 1897; Jackson 1899; Wellman 1899; Credland 1980; Cromack and Riffenburgh

2000). In 1899–1900, Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, the Duke of the Abruzzi, led an expedition to reach the North Pole via Franz Josef Land. In April 1900, a party under his second-in-command, Umberto Cagni, attained a farthest north of 86° 34’, having gone north from his base at Teplitz Bay, Rudolf Island (Savoia 1903).

In the early years of the twentieth century, the American millionaire William Ziegler, who had made his fortune in the baking powder business, financed two expeditions with the goal of reaching the North Pole (Barr 1995). The first, the Baldwin-Ziegler Polar Expedition of 1901–02, under Evelyn Baldwin, achieved very little. Disappointed, Ziegler sent out a second expedition under Anthony Fiala, who had been the photographer on Baldwin’s expedition. After establishing a base at ‘Camp Abruzzi’ near Teplitz Bay, Fiala, the ship’s crew, and the field party were marooned when the ship, *America*, was crushed in the ice in November 1903, and subsequently sank. They were forced to wait for rescue until the end of July 1905.

Meanwhile, Fiala made three attempts during the next two years to reach the North Pole. The first two came in March 1904, but cold weather and failure of the sledges forced him to turn back. He then set out south to Cape Flora (Mys Flora) with the men who wished to return home. He left 25 men at Cape Flora, living largely on supplies left by Jackson and the Duke of the Abruzzi. After returning to Camp Abruzzi, he again headed north in March 1905, but he turned back having reached only 82°N (Fiala 1906).

Note stirs polar mystery

On 30 January 1969, *The New York Times* printed an article entitled ‘‘04 note stirs polar mystery,’ by Walter Sullivan. In the article, reference was made to a Soviet Novosti news service report of the finding of a note by a

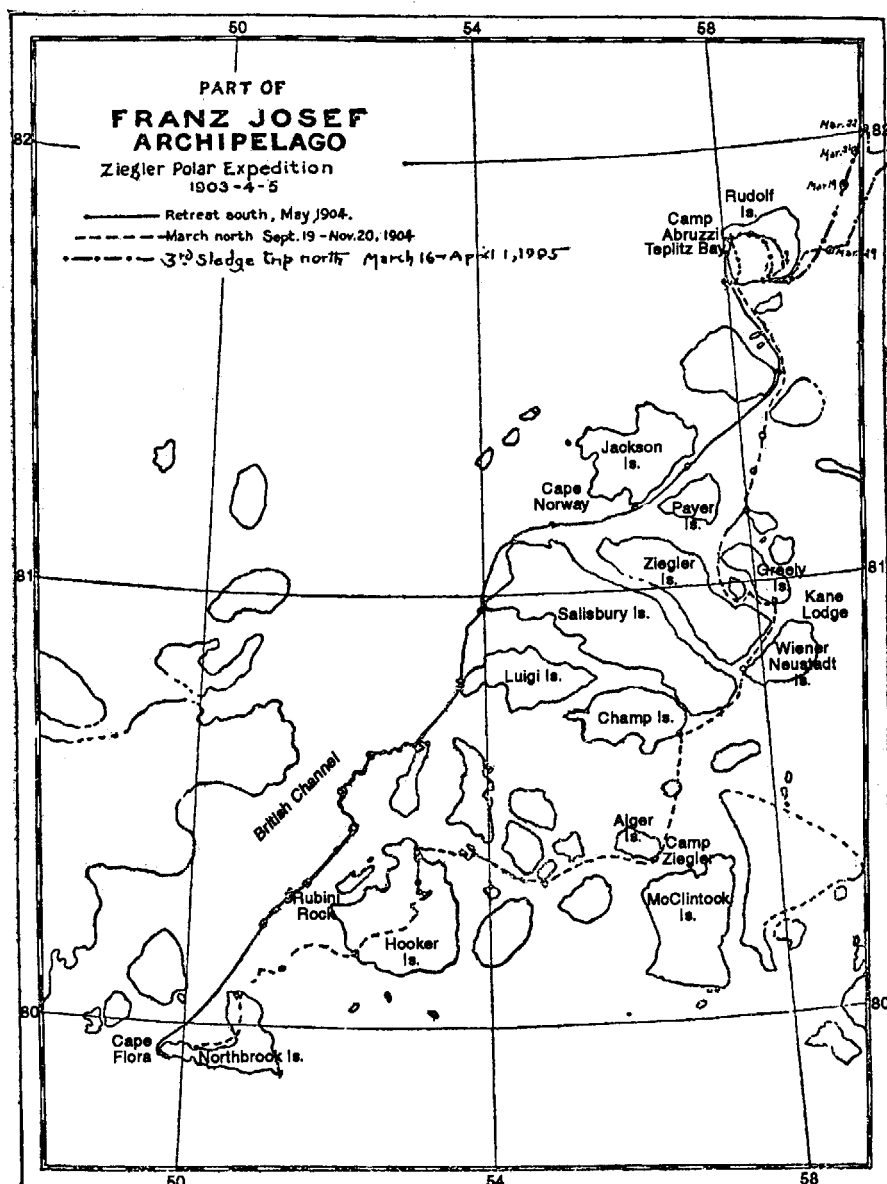


Fig. 1. Map of Franz Josef Land, based on that from *Fighting the polar ice* (Fiala 1906), indicating the knowledge of the archipelago at the time of the Fiala-Ziegler expedition.

Russian wintering party on Rudolf Island. Sullivan wrote in part:

A note seemingly indicative of defection in an American expedition during the race for the North Pole at the start of this century has been found by Russian explorers on Rudolf Island, northernmost point in Soviet territory... In the cabin of the American leader, the Russians say, was 'an infernal machine, the wire of which extended to the dynamic charge in the food storage.'... Did this mean, the Russians ask, that the expedition failed because of 'animosity' among its members?

The note that was found, in a state of partial decay, would seem to indicate such dissension. According to the Soviet account, it said: 'We, the opposition, are leaving the camp on Saturday, July 2, 1904,

having 18 dogs, two ponies, and an indian boat.'... It was signed, the report said, by 'Tess, Veddy and Ralliet.'...

All buildings of the station, said the report, were linked by telephone. The base was that used by the Ziegler-Fiala Expedition of 1903-1906 [*sic*]. From it, three abortive efforts to reach the North Pole were made... The finding was reported recently by Novosti, the Soviet feature agency. The report was made on the basis of a finding by a Soviet wintering party.

In an effort to elucidate the account, a search has been made by this writer of the records of the American expedition... The account written by the leader of the American venture, Anthony Fiala, a Brooklyn photographer, made no mention of telephones — for

‘infernal devices.’ However, he said, the camp was wired for electric lights, powered by a mile-long wire from the expedition ship.

In a storm one night the lights went out and when the gale subsided the ship had vanished. She had broken loose. She finally returned, only to be crushed by ice soon thereafter . . .

In March 1904, from his base on Rudolf Island, Fiala made two abortive attempts to start for the Pole. In both cases he was turned back by bad conditions and a variety of mishaps.

He decided to remain a second winter and try once more in 1905. However, according to his account, he allowed all who wished to go home to retreat south to an agreed-upon rendezvous with a rescue ship.

‘The politicians in the retreating party,’ Fiala wrote, ‘used their influence and persuasiveness to enlarge their own party — until those to whom “Northward?” had become a shibboleth, became, like Gideon’s band, fewer and fewer.’

After the homeward bound party had left, two other men ‘made no secret of the fact that they had grown discouraged with the outlook.’ They took off after the retreating group. However, the ship *Terra Nova* [in fact it was *Frithjof* (Fiala 1906: 195)], assigned to rescue them, was unable to breach the ice and the entire expedition had to remain another winter . . . This note found by the Russians dates from the time when most of Fiala’s men, temporarily under his leadership, had marched south to await rescue.

While the names given in the Soviet account are garbled, it is clear that the note was signed by: Peter L. Tessem, the Norwegian ship’s carpenter; Charles E. Rilliet of St Louis, Mo., quartermaster in charge of equipment, and one of the two Vedoe’s [*sic*] on the expedition. Both were from Boston and probably were brothers. John Vedoe was assistant quartermaster. Anton Vedoe was an assistant ship’s engineer.

The episode that gave rise to the note is not described in Fiala’s account. He was absent from the camp at the time. When he returned the three men had apparently ended their defection. From Fiala’s account he seems to have remained on good terms with Rilliet and the two Vedoes, but he virtually ignores Tessem. (Sullivan 1969; copyright © 1969 by the New York Times Co. Reprinted by permission.)

Analysis of note

Issues of opposition and defection were prompted by the Novosti publication of its version of a partially decayed note. There is much evidence to show that the Russian interpretation of the note could be faulty, but, taken at face value, it led Sullivan to a suggestion of defection. However, this is not supported by the accounts of Fiala; Russell Porter, the third-in-command (Porter 1976); Anton Vedoe’s expedition diary (Vedoe 1990); or the text of the newly recovered original note (M. Gavrilov, scientific secretary, the Russian State Museum of the

Arctic and Antarctic, personal communication, 10 December 2002). This note was photographed, but the quality that was able to be reproduced was so poor that it was unable to be included with this article.

In fact, there are a number of issues raised by a comparison of the note as reported by Novosti with the circumstances as reported by Fiala (1906) and Anton Vedoe (1990). Vedoe was second assistant engineer on *America*, and after the loss of the ship he took part in the three attempts on the North Pole and made a number of sledge journeys in support of the expedition (Fiala 1906).

Date of note: ‘04 or ‘05?

Sullivan used Fiala’s *Fighting the polar ice* for reference in writing his article. From this he deduced correctly the names of Tessem, Vedoe, and Rilliet, but had he used all the information available in Fiala’s book, Sullivan would have found that it was impossible for a party composed of one of the two Vedoes, Tessem, and Rilliet to have been together at Rudolf Island on 2 July 1904. Anton Vedoe and Rilliet had left Camp Abruzzi, where the note was found, on 9 May 1904 (Fiala 1906: 253–254; Vedoe 1990: 116) with Porter and two other men, bound for Cape Flora, approximately 160 miles to the south. Fiala had ordered them to make a journey of survey and exploration and to report at Cape Flora by 15 July (Fiala 1906: 97). According to Fiala, the Porter party arrived at Cape Flora on 7 July 1904 (Fiala 1906: 115). Anton Vedoe in his diary makes the arrival near midnight, 9 July 1904 (Vedoe 1990: 129). Meanwhile, John Vedoe and Peter Tessem were at Camp Abruzzi until 8 July, when they left for Cape Flora (Fiala 1906: 256; Vedoe 1990: 194), where they arrived on the last day of August (Fiala 1906: 120) after a harrowing canoe trip down the west coasts of the islands of the archipelago. John Vedoe’s narrative of that trip states that they arrived at 1:00 AM, 1 September 1904 (Vedoe 1990: 211–212).

Because Tessem and John Vedoe were on Rudolf Island on 2 July 1904, and Anton Vedoe and Rilliet were, at that time, camped with Porter’s party on Rubini Rock (Vedoe 1990: 125, 127; Fig. 2), approximately 115 miles south of Rudolf Island, the stated trio could not have signed and left a note at Rudolf Island on that day.

However, another interpretation of the note is one not of defection or opposition, but of concern for the safety of Fiala. In July 1905 all members of the expedition were at Cape Flora or Camp Ziegler, Alger Island (Ostrov Aldzher), or heading there to await rescue. Fiala and Henry P. Hartt, the chief engineer, had been the last members of the expedition at Camp Abruzzi, where they had been alone since 20 April 1905 (Fiala 1906: 182). They left on 26 May for Camp Ziegler (Fiala 1906: 183). Meanwhile, William Peters, the second-in-command — at Camp Ziegler, approximately 100 miles to the south of Camp Abruzzi, and worried for the welfare of Fiala and Hartt (Vedoe 1990: 174.3) — sent Anton Vedoe with Tessem and Rilliet to Kane Lodge, Greeley Island (Ostrov Grili), about one half of the way north to Camp Abruzzi,

July 2nd 1904 Saturday
 Left our camp on the ice at Rubini
 Rock this morning. After a
 lot of stops we reached the top
 of the dome taking on the pass
 now we hauled up yesterday
 and by luck we were on the
 extreme top of "Hooker Isl".
 From there we had a good
 view all around being remark-
 ably clear although it was
 overcast. We could see the "Haystack
 Spur" and "Knit-hill" very
 plain in the north east and
 Cape "Abruzzi" Camp point in the
 south west. The going on the
 glacier was over expectations
 few clods and by using the
 chies we avoided rubbing
 down in the deep snow.
 At 5:30 pm we reached what
 we think is "Old Depot"
 and camped in the base

Fig. 2. Copy of Anton Vedoe's diary from 2 July 1904. Vedoe and Charles Rilliet were on Rubini Rock, 115 miles south of Camp Abruzzi on the same day Novosti dated the note with their signatures at Camp Abruzzi. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, Rauner Library, Steff. Ms 233:1.

to search for them (Vedoe 1990: 170). The three left Camp Ziegler on 5 June 1905 (Vedoe 1990: 170), returning 16 June with no news of Fiala (Vedoe 1990: 174.3). Peters then asked Vedoe to lead Tessem and Rilliet to Camp Abruzzi to search for Fiala and Hartt (Vedoe 1990: 171; Porter 1976: 150). Vedoe's diary states: 'June 18 – 05 Sunday – It was still drifting and snowing this morning. After breakfast we harnessed up and left at 10:50. At 1:20 we stopped for lunch on North Isle' (Vedoe 1990: 171). Meanwhile, Fiala was to the west, working his way along the shore of Champ Island (Ostrov Champ) to spend the night near Cape Clare (Fiala 1906: 184). Ironically, Vedoe and Fiala passed within about 10 miles of each other without making contact.

Fiala arrived at Camp Ziegler the next day. Vedoe and his companions arrived at Camp Abruzzi on 26 June. Vedoe wrote in his diary on that date: 'Nobody here and no message' (Vedoe 1990: 173). Vedoe's party now was the last of the expedition to be at Camp Abruzzi. According to his diary, they rested for a few days and headed south on Sunday, 2 July 1905. Vedoe's diary on that date reads: 'Arose again at 11:00 am. After breakfast we packed the sledges, cleaned the house. At 5 we had everything in order, and had our last lunch, nailed up windows and doors and left for south, leaving a note at 6:30' (Vedoe

now falling during day.
~~turn in at 8~~
~~June~~ July 1st 05 Saturday
 Turn in at 5 am.
 Arose for breakfast a 11:25 am
 Tessem and I have got up
 sledge runners. We will proba-
 bly be ready to leave
 tomorrow. Fair weather
 Wind S. The main spring in
 my watch broken. I man-
 aged to get the watch
 running by riveting the
 spring together.
 July 2nd Sunday (Sat) JDV
 Turned in at 3 am. Arose again
 at 11 am. After breakfast we packed
 the sledges, cleaned the house
 at 5 we had everything in order
 had our last lunch, nailed up
 the windows and doors and
 left for south leaving a note
 at 6:30. A good South wind was
 blowing and it felt rather cold

Fig. 3. Copy of Anton Vedoe's diary from 1–2 July 1905. On 2 July, Vedoe wrote, 'leaving a note. . .' '(Sat) JDV' is a memorandum in pencil to check the day of week. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, Rauner Library, Steff. Ms 233:1.

1990: 174) (Fig. 3). As Vedoe had found no message at Camp Abruzzi when his party arrived, the note he left on 2 July 1905, when his party departed, must be the note discovered by the Russians. The newly recovered original note confirms the date of 2 July 1905 (M. Gavrilov, personal communication, 10 December 2002).

Saturday or Sunday?

Vedoe's diary gives the day as Sunday, which is correct for 2 July 1905 (Vedoe 1990: 174), but the recovered note reads 'Saturday July 2, 1905' (M. Gavrilov, personal communication, 10 December 2002). Vedoe appears to have been confused when he dated 2 July as Saturday, although it is clear he wrote the note on Sunday (Vedoe 1990: 174). In his diary he repeated Sunday, but marking it as 3 July, which was a Monday, and carried an error of one day behind the true day of the week until 11 July, when he corrected it (Vedoe 1990: 175).

Ponies or sledges?

Fiala wanted to use ponies for his next attempt on the North Pole in 1905. As he was preparing to lead south the men who wanted to go home, he wrote: 'On the eve of departure, he [Dr Newcomb, the veterinarian] notified me that it would be best to send all the ponies south as there were indications of the spread of the disease [glanders] which might menace the men' (Fiala 1906: 95). Fiala left

Camp Abruzzi on 30 April 1904 with ‘a party of 25 men, sixteen pony sledges, and eight dog teams and sledges’ (Fiala 1906: 99) bound for Cape Flora. The party arrived at Cape Flora on 16 May. On the trip down, ‘3 of the ponies had been shot for dog food on the march and one died from exhaustion leaving twelve in harness’ (Fiala 1906: 109). On arrival at Cape Flora, ‘all ponies save two just mentioned were led off for slaughter’ (Fiala 1906: 111). In the autumn ‘two ponies left over from the slaughter of spring were shot for food’ (Fiala 1906: 122).

Sullivan reported that Novosti indicated the note stated there were two ponies with the party at Camp Abruzzi on Rudolf Island in July 1904. According to Fiala, there were no ponies at Camp Abruzzi on 2 July 1904 or 2 July 1905. There were only two alive on 2 July 1904, but they were at Cape Flora. Anton Vedoe, in a draft report of his activities from 11 April to 11 July 1905, stated that his party at Camp Abruzzi on 2 July 1905 included: ‘Two dog teams of nine dogs each’ (Vedoe 1990: 174–175). As the Novosti report indicated that there were 18 dogs and two ponies, and Vedoe’s party did have 18 dogs pulling two sledges, it can be concluded that the Novosti report mistook ponies for sledges. The two sledges were confirmed in the newly recovered note (M. Gavriilo, personal communication, 10 December 2002).

Indian boat or Indian canoe?

Novosti also reported the use of an Indian boat. The members of the expedition used the term ‘Indian canoe’ or simply ‘canoe.’ Fiala frequently used the simple word ‘canoe’ (for example, Fiala 1906: 116, 120, 123). Vedoe, in the draft report of his field trip, wrote of the composition of the relief party: ‘June 18 we again started, this time for Camp Abruzzi. Mr Chas E. Rilliet, karpenter [*sic*] Tessem and myself consisting the party. Two dog teams of nine dogs each and the Indian canoe were taken along. Although late in the season I did not expect to meet with much open water on our intended course, and therefore decided to take the above mentioned number of dogs to facilitate speedy travel not giving the channels time to break up’ (Vedoe 1990: 174; Fig. 4). From the foregoing it would appear that Novosti mistakenly reported ‘boat’ in place of ‘canoe,’ which Vedoe had written (Vedoe: 1990); this is again confirmed in the recovered note (M. Gavriilo, personal communication, 10 December 2002).

Opposition or concern?

It is apparent that the notion of opposition by Anton Vedoe and his party does not fit the circumstances of the time. The men who left the note were concerned for the welfare of Fiala and Hartt. They did not have a reason to leave a note starting, ‘We the opposition.’ Moreover, there is nothing in the record to indicate opposition by any of this group. To the contrary, Anton Vedoe’s discharge, signed by Fiala, reads in part: ‘After the loss of the “AMERICA” Engineer Vedoe assisted in the work of the expedition on shore and proved to be of great value in the many sledge journeys made between 1903 and 1905. He is especially

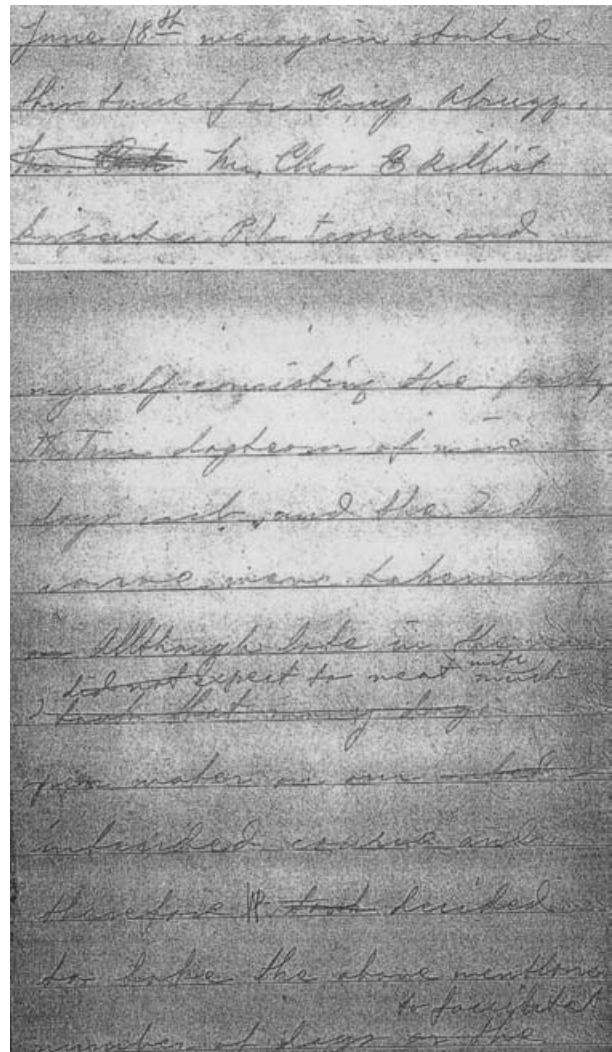


Fig. 4. Excerpt from Anton Vedoe’s draft report of the field trip, 11 April–11 July 1905. Here he spells out the composition of the party that he led to Camp Abruzzi to relieve Fiala and Hartt. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, Rauner Library, Steff. Ms 233:1.

recommended for honesty, efficiency and faithfulness’ (Vedoe 1990: 178).

It is not likely that Fiala would commend Vedoe for faithfulness if Vedoe had opposed his commander. In addition, Vedoe clearly stated his position vis-à-vis Fiala. At Cape Flora in the autumn of 1904, Fiala bunked with the crew in Elmwood, a small building left by Jackson, an earlier explorer. Nearby was a ‘ten-sided portable house’ (probably an octagonal hut left by Jackson (Barr 1995)) nicknamed ‘Little Italy,’ as it had been used for storage by the Italian expedition (Fiala 1906: 112). Here the field party, including the malcontents, was quartered. Vedoe’s diary of 23 July 1904 reads: ‘Mr Fiala issued an order concerning the hunting and saving of provisions in case we should have to stay here another year. He sent it over to the field dep. to read. They sent it back with Mr Truden saying they would not accept it. A lot of indulgent children. Whoever heard of men saying they would not accept an order by their commander!’ (Vedoe 1990: 131).

This is further evidence that Vedoe's group would not have characterized itself in the adversarial connotation of 'We the opposition.'

Original note recovered

Sporadic efforts made by the author since 1991, including a query to Walter Sullivan of *The New York Times* (personal communication, 7 July 1991), were unsuccessful in locating the original note or a copy of the Novosti news service report. Prompted by the recommendation of Ian R. Stone, in February 2002 an intensive search commenced for the note and the news release.

The original Novosti news service story has not been located. However, the original note that the Vedoe party left on Rudolf Island 2 July 1905 was found. It appears that the note was among 'the documents and artefacts from the Ziegler-Fiala expedition [which] were found in 1935 by the Russian polar men of the research station, Ostrov Rudol'fa, Zemlya Frantsa-Iosifa, on the wintering site in Teplitz Bay' (V. Boyarsky, Director, Russian State Museum of the Arctic and Antarctic, personal communication, 24 October 2002).

Maria Gavrillo, who found the note, further indicated: 'The text attached to the objects when they were delivered to the museum says also the following, "Wintering party of the aviation base of the GUSMP [Glavnoe upravlenie severnogo morskogo puti, i.e. Chief administration of the Northern Sea Route] in 1936–1938 found at site of Fiala expedition on Rudolf Island big collection of artifacts including the note left by the last party of Fiala's expedition in a metal box with attached... (statuette)." All artifacts were delivered to the Arctic Museum October 11, 1938' (M. Gavrillo, personal communication, 13 January 2003).

A listing of the artifacts of the Fiala-Ziegler expedition at the museum was compiled on 1 November 1939. Item number 12 on the list is 'Zapiska ostavennaya poslednei partiiy ekspeditsii Fiala v zhestianoi korobke' ['Note in a metal box left behind by the last group of the Fiala expedition'] (Popov-Shtark 1940: 70; E. Tammiksaar, Karl Ernst von Baer Museum, Tartu, Estonia, personal communications, 30 September 2002, 10 October 2002).

This note in a metal box apparently lay dormant until October 1968, when it was uncovered (M. Gavrillo, personal communication, 13 January 2003) and presumably became the basis of the Novosti release. It was retrieved from a metal container among the Fiala artifacts at the Russian State Museum of the Arctic and Antarctic on 10 December 2002 (M. Gavrillo, personal communication, 10 December 2002). Maria Gavrillo transcribed the fragile rolled note as follows:

Camp Abruzzi, Rhudolf Island

Saturday, July 2, 1905

We leave here today via Rane[Kane] Lodge for East Camp Ziegler.

18 dogs, 2 sledges, and one Indian canoe
all in gisel..... best of..... cattis

S[P].L. Tessem

A. Vedoe

Rilliet (Reference number 0-2796, Ziegler-Fiala Expedition Collection, Russian State Museum of the Arctic and Antarctic; M. Gavrillo, personal communication, 10 December 2002, 18 December 2002)

The paper contains a watermark, 'WW. S & Regent Linen, Made in USA.' The last line is damaged, and partly decayed. 'We the opposition' is noteworthy by its absence.

Thus, the evidence is that there was no note at Camp Abruzzi when Vedoe's party arrived 26 June 1905 and that a note was left on Sunday, 2 July 1905 by Vedoe's party, consisting of himself, Tessem, and Rilliet on a mission, not of opposition or defection, but of concern for the safety of Fiala and Hartt. Vedoe's group had 18 dogs, two sledges and an Indian canoe. The evidence indicates that the inaccurate Novosti report misled Walter Sullivan.

Assassination

In his book *To stand at the Pole*, historian William R. Hunt made the remarkable statement:

Fiala wrote nothing of what was seemingly an assassination attempt on him. Russians who visited Fiala's base on Rudolf Island in 1969 found an electrically wired explosive device planted in Fiala's quarters. Also found was a note signed by three defectors: 'We, the opposition, are leaving the camp on Saturday, July 2, 1904, having 18 dogs, two ponies, and an Indian boat.' (Hunt 1981: 101)

Hunt's date of the note being found in 1969 was clearly incorrect. According to Viktor Boyarsky, the note was found by 'Russian Polar men in 1935' (personal communication, 24 October 2002). It was delivered to the Museum on 11 October 1938 (M. Gavrillo, personal communication, 13 January 2003). In addition, the evidence is overwhelming that Tessem, Vedoe and Rilliet were not defectors.

Moreover, Hunt's only reference for his statement was Sullivan's story, which indicated: 'In the cabin of the American leader, the Russians say, was "an infernal machine, the wire of which extended to the dynamic charge in the food storage."' Hunt clearly interpreted this as an 'electrically wired explosive device' (Hunt 1981: 101).

This is all puzzling. According to Vedoe, Fiala's quarters were a room in the southeast corner of the house: 'Mr Truden has built a room for himself and Rilliet in the SE corner of the house with a door leading to Mr Fiala's room' (Vedoe 1990: 77). It is possible that the Russian reference to a cabin meant Fiala's room in the house, but it is also possible that the Russians confused his room with the observatory, which was located some distance to the northwest of the house (Fiala 1906: facing 66). The observatory, which could be described as a cabin, had a powered telephone in it, and, on leaving Camp Abruzzi for the last time, Fiala had left guns, ammunition, and other items there, including a sledge, fur clothing, and camping equipment (Fiala 1906: 182–183).

After *America* was crushed by ice, efforts were made to take ashore as much as possible. Fiala wrote that among the stores brought ashore were ‘machine tools, dynamos, a lathe, and a small engine. A machine shop was built by our commissary and Carpenter, under the shelter of which a boiler was constructed by the Engineer and his men, from the old gas generating tank left by the Duke of the Abruzzi. The boiler and engine were to serve with the dynamos in the production of electric light at camp’ (Fiala 1906: 58–59). On 14 January 1904 Fiala noted: ‘Machine shop constructed, and dynamo engine and generators with machine stores brought ashore’ (Fiala 1906: 68).

Sullivan suggested that an infernal machine might be a telephone: ‘Anthony Fiala, a Brooklyn photographer, made no mention of telephones — for “infernal devices.”’ According to Sullivan, the actual Novosti report read ‘infernal machine.’ One cannot be certain of what the Russians meant by infernal machine, but telephones certainly had been installed at Camp Abruzzi: ‘I have put up a telephone line and phones between the astronomical observatory and the house’ (Vedoe 1990: 78). Moreover, at one point Vedoe (1990: 82) indicated that Long ‘finally found the telephone which was concealed in the commissary storeroom.’

It is possible that the dynamo, in the commissary (food storage), did produce a dynamic charge to operate the telephone (infernal machine) in the observatory, which also contained some of Fiala’s possessions; this may have led the Russians to assume that it was Fiala’s cabin. It is not known what the Russians meant by ‘infernal machine’ or ‘dynamic charge,’ nor what was actually found, but Novosti’s misleading version of the note left by the Vedoe group throws doubt on whether the report of an ‘infernal machine’ was valid and was the result of the need to back up ‘We the opposition,’ possibly for political or journalistic purposes. It should also be noted that the original meaning of ‘infernal machine’ could have been obscured by translation from Cyrillic Russian to Roman English. These uncertainties — coupled with the knowledge that: (1) Fiala and Hartt were alone at Camp Abruzzi for 36 days (Fiala 1906: 182–183) with plenty of opportunity to uncover an assassination plot; (2) a month later Vedoe’s party, on a mission to aid Fiala, stayed at Camp Abruzzi for a further seven days (Vedoe: 1990); (3) these were the last members of the expedition to be at Camp Abruzzi; and (4) there is an absence of the slightest corroborative evidence for any assassination — preclude the notion of an assassination attempt on Fiala.

Epilogue

The rescue ship, *Terra Nova*, arrived 29 July 1905 at Cape Dillon, McClintock Island (Ostrov Mak-Klintoka). It collected 38 members of the Fiala-Ziegler Polar Expedition. Fireman Sigurd Myhre had died 16 May 1904 at Camp Abruzzi, the same day that his wife had died in Norway. At their rescue, the expedition members learned of the death on 24 May 1905 of their sponsor, William

Ziegler. They embarked for Tromsø, Norway, where they arrived 9 August 1905, and then dispersed (Fiala 1906).

Fiala had failed in his polar quest. Sullivan wrote that the Russians asked if the expedition failed because of animosity among its members. There was dissension, but that was the product of loss and failure, not the cause of failure. It was after the loss of *America*, and the two failed attempts for the Pole in 1904, that the expedition was marked by dissension (Fiala 1906). Many of the men who had lost their *raison d’être* showed their unhappiness in insubordinate and quarrelsome behavior, which, Porter wrote (1976: 134): ‘they regretted later in the States.’ Nonetheless, the expedition had completed a significant survey and charting of Franz Josef Land, in which ‘nearly a thousand miles of unknown channels, bays, capes, islands and glaciers were charted, the last of the archipelago to give up its secrets’ (Porter 1976: 150).

Conclusion

Allegations of defection and dissension in 1904 by Tessem, Rilliet, and Anton Vedoe, and an attempted assassination of Fiala, during the Fiala-Ziegler Polar Expedition of 1903–05 have existed since the publication of Walter Sullivan’s article and William Hunt’s subsequent book.

The allegations about Tessem, Rilliet, and Vedoe have been refuted not only by the published accounts of Fiala and Porter and by Vedoe’s diary, but by the text of the newly recovered note. Drawing only on Sullivan’s story of the Novosti news release, which appears to have an inaccurate version of the Vedoe note, Hunt’s suggestion of assassination also lacks substantiation. No definitive credible evidence of assassination has been found, and it is highly improbable that there was any such attempt.

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