

0.09 WORLD WAR ONE ERUPTS

In August 1915 wagons carrying the wounded started rolling through Torchin. The Russians were retreating and the German army was in hot pursuit.

Manuel was 7 at the time and remembered refugees wearing linen pants, carrying big sacks.

Brother Neil, a young teenager, was spending his days handlung, buying cattle from farmers and reselling them in town. He no longer dared leave home.

Kaila was nursing a new baby;

Rifka, Kaila's widowed sister, had just arrived with her infant, Misha. She carried the child in a Packel on her back, and at one point noticed her load had suddenly grown lighter. Her child was gone. She turned and found the boy at the side of the road, unharmed, and covered with mud.

Surca: "Everyone prepared himself to leave, to leave the house. They



knew it was coming. So mother started to pack sheets; and (for) some things, (some possessions) we dug holes, and we put them in the ground. We didn't have a horse and wagon like other people. So mother cried: She said everyone has already a horse and wagon and you know it's coming, we hear from the other cities.'

So I went out in back of the house.

I don't know if it's nice to say that I went ...we had a washroom outside.

And I heard in back that some pabgas,

that's a man who works for a Poretz. He came with a horse and a little two wheeler. He said he wants to sell it. He knew the people who lived next door and that's why he stopped in back of their house. And when I heard it, I was still a kid, I ran into the house. I knew what mother (had) complained. And I said 'Mom, there is a man who has a horse and wagon to sell.'" (As Surca repeated these words her voice grew loud, excited and filled with the anticipation of those days.)

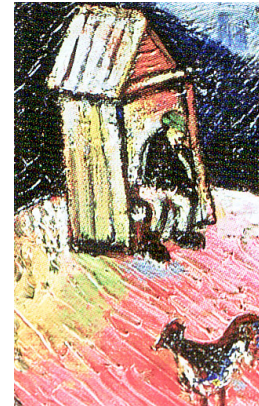
'I overheard it. So go out and you will be able to buy it.' I knew that the other people had horses and wagons.

So she went out and she bought it right away from that young man. That young man probably needed the money, the cash. So when she came in, and she was so happy. 'Oh, I bought a horse.' And she said to daddy 'Now we have the horse, but where's the wagon?' Because it is only a two wheeler.



So grandpa, Shlomo, said 'I know of a friend who has a hay wagon. It's a real huge wagon.' So he went over to that man. And he had no alternative. There's one horse. So he took the wagon and brought it home. That was Friday."

Before the evening of the evacuation there must have been an increased tempo of wagons, refugees, soldiers on foot, smells of horses, sweat, dried blood, and death. A look of fear on the faces of the people; a sense of urgency as they looked backwards.



Surca: "And at night, right away we heard screaming."Run! Run and hide in a valley! The valley was around our shul, around the Karlina Sheela.

Manuel remembered that night. Someone knocked on the door. Someone yelled "Go down by the river ...now.". The whole town gathered at this low point. They stood and waited. They heard shots being fired. Manuel remembers a Cossack riding up and screaming "Give me hot eggs! Give me hot eggs."

Surca: We were in the valley around the shul. We had already the wagon. We had my father's step sister. (Sprintzer). She had three children of her own. We had a baby, a little boy. And my father's step-sister helped to nurse him. So we had to take them, their whole family. And a man came from Lacotch with his wife and son. He was injured. About 20 bayonet holes in his stomach and all over his body. So this man was sitting there and kratzing. And the son was there. And the wife ran back. She thought she was going to save something in Lacotch. She left him with the boy. And we had to take that sick one along too. So we had plenty. But the wagon took all we got. But the wounded man couldn't go into a wagon. So we had the two wheeler. Neil was the horse. And that boy pushed in the back.



Surca: And that's how we got into the valley. It was dark but not late. In fact, we left chullant in the oven. It was still staying there.

Surca: Before we left Torchin a Russian Cossack went around and he burned all the houses. So Grandfather (Shlomo) saw that our house was already burned. So he went around with a bucket and a rag. And the minute the Cossack went out of a house (that he put the fire on) he probably used gasoline or something to burn the house. When the Cossack left, Shlomo went in and tried to put out the fire.

Manuel's recollection: Russian Cossacks began to burn the town. Shlomo took off his long black overcoat and dipped it in the river.



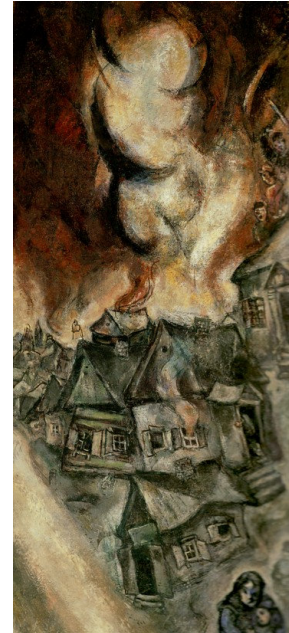
Then he walked over to the burning buildings. He snuffed out one fire. He smothered another. Then the Cossack who was burning the houses saw the bearded Jew undoing his work. He drew his sword and rode towards Shlomo. As he was bearing down, Shlomo saw him coming and slipped into a narrow alleyway between two buildings. It was big enough for a man but too small for a horse. The Cossack could have dismounted and come after him. But he didn't. He rode on.

Village burns Chagall

Surca: Neil might have been with him. He said 'Daddy, they'll catch us. They're going to kill us.'

Surca: Shlomo said 'If I don't get this house at least I'll get somebody's house. Our house is already gone.

'He got out the chullant, and the chullant was still good and warm.'



The village was aflame. The smell of burned wood and smoke mingled with the odor of gunpowder: The sound of gunfire grew nearer. Shlomo returned to his family.

Surca: After we came to the valley they started to shoot straight on us. They thought we were the army, because the whole town was there (in the valley.) The Germans shot at us. So some of the soldiers (Russian) said 'Run! Run out of here because they are going to hit you.'

So we got down into the valley. But we couldn't get back out again with that big wagon; because when that one horse looked back (and saw what he was pulling) he didn't even move. So we had to put something over his eyes to make him (move) (and we had to) shlep him.

CHAGALL



On the way to Kasilin Manuel and his mother stopped to dig up potatoes. In Kasilin they searched the attics of houses for food left behind. Manuel caught a chicken and they took it too the shochet. Surca: So we dragged ourselves and dragged ourselves until we came to Kasilin. the next little town. My father's sister lived there. So when we came there to the house, the (wounded man in the two wheeler) the cousin from Zacotch died right there.

WORLD WAR ONE



In 1914 Europe had 5 major military powers; England, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia. England and France were parliamentary democracies. Germany was ruled by the Kaiser, Russia by his cousin, the Tsar, and Austria-Hungary by the aging emperor (84yo) Franz Joseph. On June 28, 1914, Franz Joseph's nephew and heir, Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo, (The Balkans.) There were no other heirs to take his place. None. No one. When Franz Joseph died there would be no orderly succession. There would be

struggles. Chaos. People would kill one another. The empire might break up.

Franz Joseph was full of sadness, dread, and fury. He was certain his nephew's murder was planned by the leaders of that Balkan country; and they had to be punished. The entire Serbian nation must suffer for this act. Franz Joseph decided to send his army to the Balkans to crush his rebellious subjects.

In those days there were treaties and understandings. Russia was Serbia's protector, and the Tsar was not about to let Austria destroy the small nation. If Austria attacked Serbia, the armies of Russia would intervene. A war with Serbia meant a war with Russia. Unfortunately Germany and Austria had a mutual defense treaty, and if Russia attacked the Austro-Hungarians, the Russians would be stopped by the mighty German army.

The Tsar of Russia and the leader of Germany, the Kaiser, were cousins. They knew each other well. The thought of these leaders going to war with one another must have seemed impossible.

The power in Europe was balanced. Treaties were, no doubt, in place to avoid impossible wars. To make it obvious to all the leaders those countries could no longer invade their neighbors and conquer them. That no country that went to war could win. Russia, like Austria, had allies who, in the event of war, would come to its aid. If Germany or Austria attacked the Russians they would have the armies of the English and the French to contend with.

The nations of Europe made threats and counter threats. The parties lined up and affirmed that they would go to war if their ally was attacked.

Then, fearing the worst, they mobilized their armies, and prepared for war. Then they went to war.

The Germans knew that the major modern army that they faced was that of France. Germany assumed it would take the Russians months to prepare for war. They decided to leave a small army in the East to slow down the Russians. Then, hoping for a quick victory, they attacked France with the majority of their men and guns.

Russia fooled them. In August 1914 three Russian armies attacked. The southern Russian army fought the Austrians and was winning. The 2 northern Russian armies advanced on Germany slowly and won an early victory. Then, at a battle dubbed Tannenberg, the German army engaged and destroyed one of the Russian armies. The other Russian army later fought the Germans, lost, and withdrew. The Germans then moved south and came to the aid of the Austrians. They decimated the third Russian army. At the end of 1914 the Russian military machine had been soundly defeated. It appeared to the Germans that the Russians might withdraw from the war.

But they were wrong. Russia had an immense population and the Tsar wanted to fight on. In December 1914 the wounded Russian army had 2

Tsar Nicholas



million soldiers, but by the following spring their numbers had doubled, and they were attacking again. In March 1915 the Russians attacked and routed the Austrians. This time Germany decided to knock Russia out of the war. All spring the Germans massed their cannons and artillery in southern Poland. And on May 2, 1915, 1500 heavy guns started shooting. They fired 700,000 shells in 4 hours. Tens of thousands of Russians died.

When the Russian units had been torn to shreds, the Germans attacked. Within a few months more than 1.4 million Russian soldiers were killed or wounded. Almost a million more were taken prisoner.

The Russians retreated, burning whatever they could as they left. The Germans followed, moving through ethnic Poland (And Torchin).



From Ansky: The Destruction of Galicia

Late June, 1915 — Torczyn

On the morning after I came from Luck I traveled to the shtetl of Torczyn, to which many refugees from Horochov and other places had come. It was an old, poor shtetl that had only one long street and a few small, wretched shops. Women and children were outside, as if the overcrowded houses couldn't contain them. And it was very nearly true. Every household had taken in at least one newly arrived family and some had taken several. All the granaries and the animal stalls had been turned into living quarters for the refugees, too.

There had been about two thousand Jews out of a total population of four thousand in the shtetl before the war.

They made their living by selling produce abroad. Now with trade at a standstill, the loan company no longer functioned and even the agricultural school was closed. All the wealthier residents had left.

Poryck had suffered a pogrom the week before, and the local residents were frightened to death that it would reach them. The mood was a bit calmer now but the underlying fear persisted that the Cossacks might come. They were not much reassured by the military's rumored directive to the Cossacks: "Whatever happened in Galicia happened. But we must not behave the same way with the Jews of Russia. No robbing!"

We suggested that a committee be set up to register the homeless in Torczyn and to help the neediest among them. I gave the committee four hundred rubles to help the many refugees who could not find housing and who slept in storehouses and even under the open sky.



A
RUSSIAN COSSACK.