

The

war continues

Torczyn pointing



is near top pink arrow at 7.16



Surca: So when we returned back (to Torchin) we didn't have a house to move into. They burned.... most of the Jewish homes were gone. But in the farm around the town they still had homes. In the beginning when we came in we didn't have a piece of bread. So we went around and we were digging...and potatoes we found yet in the fields..Neil and I. Manuel was

still a kid. And whatever we found in the house, an apple..anything we found, it was a metziya. But afterwards we bought flour and we started to bake. We moved into our laundry lady's house. (It was small and much like their own---dirt floored, thatch roofed. There was wheat hidden in the rafters and wood piled in back.) The whole family was gone to Russia except the grandpa (Ilka). He was there. He didn't want to go. The grandpa was left and he gave us trouble. He didn't let us bake there. The only thing we did was bake rolls and sell it to the soldiers. I was a youngster yet. I could go up to a soldier. I wasn't afraid. Older children were afraid to go into the soldier's (place where they lived.) I used to carry these rolls and sell them. We were under Russia at that time. Afterwards came in the Germans. We thought when the Germans came in (they would be) a r'feeya for the Jews:



we can talk to them and this and that. (But) they didn't treat us any better. The Germans took everybody to work. And (when) Neil went with a horse and wagon they took away the horse and wagon. He came home without it.

Shia and his family managed to join Shlomo's family in Torchin early in the war. Yitzhak was trapped on the other side of the front lines. Manuel remembered that on the first shabbos after Shia joined them Shlomo raised his glass of wine, ready to make kiddush and he stopped. He was choked up. There were tears in his eyes. He was worried about Yitzhak. Did he survive? Where was he?

Shlomo looked forward to Austrian rule. The Austrian language, German, was close to Yiddish, so it would be easy to talk to the soldiers. Austria did not have the official anti-Semitic laws that Russia had. There were Jews in the Austrian army who were even officers. They would treat the Jews of Torchin fairly.

Shlomo's optimism was not borne out. The Austrians confiscated all their food. Then they doled out 2 pound of flour per person each day, barely enough for survival. Jews could buy butter, sugar, or any of the things that made food taste good. In return for the meager ration the Jews were expected to work on the roads, digging ditches, clearing mud puddles, and removing rubble.



One day a tall stately Austrian officer came to shul for shabbos. He prayed like a Jew. They called him to the Torah and he chanted the blessings loudly with a rich melodious voice. The Jews present were impressed. The officer became friendly with some of the town's leading citizens. They invited him to their house for shabbos and he attended services regularly. Then one day he stopped coming and everyone knew why. When he came to the wealthy Jew's house for shabbos he asked where the Jew had hidden his brass pots and silver ornaments. The Jew told him, in confidence. Then he returned with soldiers who had guns and shovels, and they unearthed the Jew's belongings.

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By the spring of 1916 the Russians had raised another army, and in May 1916 The Russians attacked. The Russians were again stopped, this time 8 miles west of



Torchin. Their losses were again staggering. (1.2 MILLION MEN)

Soldiers 1914 Chagall



And the stage was set for the Russian revolution.

For the rest of WWI, Torchin was in Russian hands. And the food that was sent from all over Russia to feed the troops was stored in and around Torchin; so for the last part of the war there was enough food for the civilian population.

Neil goes into hiding:

Neil was still young, but he didn't have a document (that proved how old he was.) So they would have taken him (into the Russian army.)

So we dugout a hole under the big closet right by the door.

And he was sitting there. And the air what came in between the closet (and the wall) that was his air.

We had 3 soldiers (that) they (the Russian army) put in (to sleep in that house.) The house what had only one porch and a living room and a bed room, and a kitchen. And they put in 3 soldiers. We gave them the bed room. And we had 12 people in the house. Now we were laying there and sleepin on the floor and benches. It was a ground floor (a dirt floor.)



They used to bomb (to shell) the town. One soldier, Sochika, said that he's already 3 times injured and he knows all about the war; he knows about everything. And he said that between the doors, (in the doorways) was the safest place to stand when they're starting to bomb. (The other soldier's name was Veenagrad) At one side of the doorway (was the air space above Neil's hideout) between the doorway and the closet. So (when they shelled Torchin) Misha's mother,

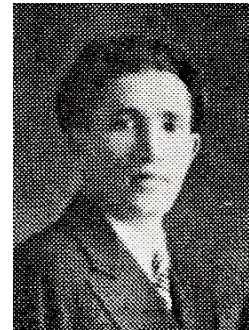
Rifka, stood in front of the air space. She kept with the soldiers nice; she talked to the soldiers. So whenever a person gives a cough, everybody coughs. We said: "the chicken." We made noise. Anything. He (Neil) was sitting there, and it was on little wheels. In the wall we pushed in the food. And (when) a person has to do something (when he had to go to the bathroom) that was real nice.

At night they searched for deserters. They were going at night and they were looking for those boys. And they came to the door and knocked on the door. So you can imagine how we got pale, and we were scared to death. (They came to our house and wanted to search it.) So that soldier, Sotchika, came up and he said: "What do you think? If I would know that somebody is hiding here I would kill him myself. I was three times injured."

So they stepped away. They didn't look any farther. They had the answer. Nu. When we heard that (what Sotchika said) (We were even more frightened.)

So mother said to daddy, she says: "we have to do something. If he'll hear (Neil) then he'll kill him. We got to get Neil out."

So daddy went away to Elisha Sitfritz. He was a man who used to be a macher in the government. I don't know (exactly what he did.) And



at one time he (Elisha) used to sit in our house. When I was born he knew all about the family. So Elisha looked for documents and he found a document (for Neil.)

And we got Neil out. But (when) we got him out he was so pale and so sick that he couldn't walk on his feet. So Rifka took the soldiers out for a walk, and we took Neil out from the hiding place, and we put him in a different house. Uncle Elyah lived next door. We put a big coat, a booka they call it. It's a big coat what you wear when you come from a trip, we put a booka (over Neil). We dragged him in (to the house next door) He couldn't walk. We said he came from the hospital.

So the soldiers said, they said: "Why didn't you ever mention that he was in the hospital?"



CHAGALL SOLDIER DRINKS

Neil looked more sick than from a hospital. He couldn't even walk. He was in hiding 3 months. We used to take him out at night (Before) when the soldiers weren't around. But as soon as the soldiers moved in we had only some relief when Rifka took a walk with the soldiers. (That's when) we relieved him, when we took him out (for) a little while. It took 2 months before Neil started to walk. That was a lucky thing that he got out.

