

## Chapter 4

# *The Terror in Halbstadt, February 16-18,* *1918*

by *Walter Burow*

*This account was written by Walter Burow, who had been a German prisoner of war. He married Father's cousin Katja Neufeld. They later moved back to Germany, and arranged for his mother-in-law, Mrs. Neufeld to go with them. She died in Germany. - Herman Enns*

It was Saturday, February 16, 1918, that my future brother-in-law, Heinrich, looked me up in my living quarters, and gave me the upsetting news that a group of 18 armed men had arrived at the Halbstadt train station that morning. They had immediately taken command of the county seat and formed a militia of local workers. He didn't know what to do - flee or stay. I calmed him down. In any case, they would most likely ask for contributions and then move out. That evening there was a concert at the School of Commerce. Halfway through the performance, an order came from the area office to stop the festivities. Martial law had been proclaimed in Halbstadt, and everyone was to go home. In our yard however, there was coming and going all night.

Sunday morning as we were having our coffee, Katja told me she had a very strange dream the night before. She had seen two coffins. In one lay her brother Heinrich, and the other body she didn't recognize. Both had had bandaged heads. She had barely finished her story when armed men walked right past our dining room window and turned into the yard. Within a few seconds they were already standing in the room. They professed that they wanted to search the house; everything was to be in a mess, as they were looking for hidden valuables. A guard stood by the door, and wouldn't let anyone leave. Up in the living room where the search was taking place, Katja protested, whereupon an armed man replied, "Be thankful that the Commissioner didn't hear that. He would have shot you on the spot." Katja realized then that this was a very serious matter. She had a cup of milk in her hand. Suddenly she fainted and fell straight back onto the floor, spilling her milk all over herself. She soon came to, and the searchers took their leave.

Herman's wife Anna sat on the floor in the middle of the mess, with tears in her eyes, trying to salvage what she could. The best things, however, had been taken from her. Then around 11 o'clock the Commissioner came and asked for Heinrich. He, however, had disappeared like dust. This Commissioner, a young man of about 27 years, had notches in his ears, indicating previous incarceration in the Peter-Pauls fortress in Petersburg. Those who were truly communists had a piece of their earlobe removed for

identification. They also had a tattoo on the forearm. Because of this, he let the earflaps of his fur hat hang down, as he repeatedly asked for Heinrich. He let it be known that he would shoot Heinrich once he got possession of Heinrich's property. Mother-in-law Neufeld, who had already had heart problems, fell into a deep faint. As Mika tried to go past the guard in order to call a doctor, he wouldn't let her go through the door, and made the comment, "Let the old one die, she's already old enough." Only after quite a while did Mother Neufeld regain consciousness. The Commissioner then took Herman and left. Then we had a few hours of peace.

Around five o'clock a representative of the commissioner came - a man about 40 years old, who had a strong squint in one eye. He drank coffee with us and spoke vindictively about Heinrich. Several times he remarked that Heinrich would not get across the border, rather would go down there, pointing his finger to the ground. Otherwise he remained courteous, and talked with us. Through this conversation we discovered that he had spent long years in the Katorga in Siberia. They left us alone then for the evening. Around seven o'clock we learned that they had arrested Heinrich in Petershagen and had already taken him to local headquarters. In addition, we heard that they had already shot three people there, and had arrested several more.

On Monday, February 18 at about 9:30 in the morning, the commissioner came onto the yard with Heinrich, and went with him into the small office where there was a bricked-in safe. As we found out later, Heinrich had (apparently to buy some time) hinted to the commissioner that he had gold hidden in the attic, and there was also some in the safe. Now he stood in front of the safe with the commissioner, along with Mother Neufeld, sister-in-law Anna and several servants, but they couldn't open the safe because Herman had the key with him. The commissioner, however, demanded that Heinrich open the safe, but that was impossible. Anna and Mother then stepped in, pleading and crying. The sisters brought all their gold jewelry, their watches, in fact all the valuables they had, but nothing helped. He wouldn't give in. He gave an ultimatum. "Where is the gold?" He asked. He gave 5 more minutes for Heinrich to produce the gold, or he would be shot. Meanwhile, more curious people had come into the small room, and stood on the stairs, so there was quite a crowd.

Heinrich took advantage of this circumstance, slipped away from the commissioner, ran through the shop, through the iron storeroom, out the back door, unseen across the yard and crawled into the drying kiln, where he hid. Now the devil was unleashed. The commissioner threatened to shoot us all. We were herded into the rooms, with guards posted at the doors so no one could leave. In the iron storeroom, through which Heinrich had gone, the commissioner came across Mr. August Hamm. With the words, "You have hidden him, you have helped him escape," he had August Hamm arrested, and ordered two of his men to take him out into the yard and shoot him. I saw how Mr. Hamm, holding his head in both hands and saying something unintelligible, was taken down the steep steps. After a while a shot was fired. They had murdered Mr. Hamm with a shot through the head. He had collapsed in front of the iron storeroom. Eyewitnesses reported that the commissioner had ordered a German, named Kroeker, "Shoot, or I'll shoot you down." Kroeker fired from nearby where Mr. Hamm knelt on the ground and prayed. The shot entered the cheekbone, and went through the brain, blowing away the back of the head. Then they dragged the body by the legs across the

whole yard, onto the verandah by the entrance to the house. Meanwhile, they had roused Heinrich from his hiding place in the kiln and had taken him into custody again.

A young Czech who worked in the malthouse had heard the heavy iron door click shut and reported this to the commissioner. Escorted by the militiamen, Heinrich was to be taken to the local headquarters. A large crowd had gathered on the street by our front gate. As the police tried to take Heinrich past the crowd, he suddenly slipped away from his guards and ran directly into the crowd, which scattered. A policeman quickly ran after Heinrich, lifted his gun and shot him through the head, so that he collapsed, dead, in front of our dining room window. Just before the shot was fired, Heinrich had turned to face his pursuer, and as he looked directly into the raised gun, quickly put his hand over his left eye- but only for a brief moment- and then the shot was fired. Here too, the shot entered the cheekbone and exited through the brain, blowing away the back of the head. They dragged the body back into the yard and threw it near Mr. Hamm's body on the verandah.

The rest of us had to come forward, and were taken under guard to the local headquarters, where we were to be questioned. As we left the house, we became aware of the two bodies near the door, still warm and steaming, because on this day the temperature was -15 degrees. We were all taken to the headquarters under heavy guard. The employees from the business were taken to jail, and the family members to headquarters. Herman was called before the commissioner, who requested the gold. Herman accompanied him to the house, and the other family members were allowed to go along. At home, Herman had to unlock the safe and hand over all the gold and silver. Herman's wife now pleaded hard for them to release Herman. Finally, after much pleading, the commissioner allowed this, with the stipulation that she would guarantee that Herman would not flee, which she did. The commissioner then gave instructions for the burial of the two bodies: there was to be no sermon at the funeral. After that, God allowed no more murders.

## Chapter 5

# *The Terror in Halbstadt* *February 16-18, 1918* *by Herman Neufeld*

*This account was written by Herman Neufeld, my father's cousin. – Herman Enns*

On February 16<sup>th</sup>, a group of sailors arrived in Halbstadt and carried out a number of house searches. They were probably anarchists, who were greatly feared. That evening a celebration was to take place at the School of Commerce, and the auditorium was brightly lit and filled with people. The atmosphere became depressed as they heard that Jacob Sudermann had been arrested. Suddenly an order came from the worker's council to disperse. Everyone went home in low spirits.

The next day was Sunday. I picked up my New Testament from my nightstand and stuck it into my pocket - I had never before carried it in my pocket - and went to church with my wife. On the way we met armed soldiers, who were on their way to our house. My wife immediately turned around, while I made my way to relatives. I didn't stay there long, however, and went home too. There, the soldiers were at work. Food, clothing and household items were removed and taken away. The search concentrated on weapons and gold items. When they finally left, we thought, "Thank God, we're finished with that." I then met a friend on the street, whose house had also been searched, and his opinion was, that this was not the end of the matter. He was right.

Shortly before noon I was called and told that there were soldiers in the yard who wished to speak to me. There were four soldiers, armed to the teeth, and a commissioner wearing a leather jacket and a black hat. He held a revolver in his right hand, and a riding-whip in the other. He screamed at me to come along into the barn. Here the leader struck me with the whip and cursed as I had never before heard a person curse. He said it was because our workers had had to sleep in the barn. Now I was to be locked in the small bedroom for two days, and the workers were to sleep inside the house. Usually the coachman, who happened to be present, slept in the barn. Then the commissioner said, "Now comrade, from now on you'll have a better home." He then screamed at me to immediately prepare a room in the house for the coachman. I promised to do this. Then he ordered me to go into the barracks, where he struck me again because the workers had torn bedding. He ordered me to provide new beds, and linoleum to cover the floor. "If this isn't done by tomorrow," he said as he held the revolver to my forehead, "then you

will get the bullet.” Then, in the presence of the commissioner, I had to carry out his orders, and was taken to the area headquarters by guards, where I was thrown into jail.

There were already six prisoners -Johann Thiessen, Heinz Willms, Peter Loetkemann, Jakob Sudermann, Jakob Heinrich Schroeder, and Jakob Johann Schroeder. The room was cold, because outside it was several degrees below freezing. I greeted my friends, who were of the opinion that our jailers would ask for ransom money. Only Heinz Willms was restless, because a soldier had said they would keep tabs on him. Heinz Willms had been accused of shooting a girl. At about 12:30, a Russian lad, about 19 years old, was brought into the room. When he was asked why he was there, he said he had scolded the soldiers, and criticized their thievery. Half an hour later he was called out and was put against the wall opposite our jail. From our window we could see how two soldiers shot at him from their positions. He wasn't quite dead however, as he was still moving his hands and head. Then they took him into the barn, and we heard three more shots. At the first shot, Heinz Willms immediately jumped up in great agitation, and said, “Now it's my turn!” Jakob Sudermann took my Testament and read a passage as consolation to the young man, and encouraged him. At about 2 o'clock the door was opened again, and a guard shouted into the room, “Now, the one who shot the girl!” The bandits didn't want to believe that the young man was innocent. As Heinz stood in the doorway, Sudermann asked him, “Are you prepared to die?” “Yes,” he answered. They pushed him down the steps, and put him against the wall. Three shots were fired, and Heinz was among the living no more. This body too, was taken into the barn. Now we knew that all this had nothing to do with money, but was simply murder for pleasure. Each of us was prepared to be the next one to die. It was quiet in the room. Jakob Sudermann was our pastor here, and comforted us.

Two hours later, more prisoners were brought in, among them my brother Heinrich. My brother had, at the suggestion of a guard well-known to him, taken flight, but was found in Petershagen and brought directly to the jail. There were now twelve men in the cell. The accusations were all false charges. One was supposed to have hidden some sugar; another was supposedly a spy and had ordered radio-telegraph equipment from a foreign country; a third was accused of being a counter-revolutionary.

At times one wanted to lose heart - yes, yes it is terrible to look death in the face. Sudermann always found words of encouragement, read from the Psalms, and prayed with us. Around six o'clock my wife came to visit me. She had received permission to bring me bread and coffee, and to stay for two minutes. A Red soldier stood by and watched the clock. Not much can be said in two minutes, but we learned from her that prayers were being said for us. In the night our minds became calmer, although little sleeping was done. Monday morning the commissioner came into our cell and wrote down our names. He was very drunk, and swore using the foulest language. He was especially angry with my brother, because he had fled, and consequently he was the first against the wall. Then he made notes to shoot four more men. They were: Jakob Sudermann, P. Loetkemann, L. Schilling and J. Schroeder. We all pleaded hard to be allowed to live. However, as soon as anyone said a word, he began to curse, and we were forced to be silent. “Today, five will have their turn,” and with those words he left. There was no doubt anymore that death was a sure thing. We all wrote farewell notes in our notebooks. Soon then, Heinrich was called out. He said good-bye to me and left,

completely prepared for death. He stood against the wall opposite our window, apparently completely calm, but very pale. Two guards fired. We all fell to our knees and cried out to God. When we stood up there was no one to be seen. My brother had not been hit - they had purposely missed him! "We have prayed him free!" one of us said.

After some time the commissioner came in, again violently agitated, and said, because my brother had escaped, we would now all be shot. We could not grasp how this was possible. We promised to do whatever was asked of us, as long as we were allowed to live. The commissioner brought us to silence again with his cursing. "I will go to ask the people," he shouted, and what the people say, so will it be!" After about an hour Sudermann was called out. At this moment I did not believe he would be shot. But I deluded myself. We saw the old, but still sprightly, man walk past the window. He walked toward the same wall, but never made it there. The black man appeared at his side and shot him with a pistol. Sudermann fell face down to the ground. Immediately after, Loetkemann was called. In the doorway, he turned to us and said, "Pray for me." He went out and then stood beside Sudermann's body. As the commissioner raised his pistol and took aim, I turned away from the window. I couldn't bear to watch anymore, all the shooting cut me to the marrow. Loetkemann lay face up near Sudermann - a very sad sight. Who was next in line? We thought involuntarily of the passengers of the Titanic, who with the song "Nearer my God to Thee," went to their deaths. The two bodies were taken to where the others were lying. Now it was quiet. But how frightened I was when the door opened, and all the employees of our stockroom came in. They had all been arrested, and now told me everything that had happened at home. Apparently, before my brother had been placed against the wall, he said that he would provide them with gold money if they would let him go. A number of soldiers went home with him, and he took them to the safe. However he couldn't open it, because I had the key with me. Then my brother supposedly said that he had hidden some gold in the attic. Naturally, this was not the case - he had said this only to buy some time. In the meantime, the commissioner had also arrived. When no gold was found, the commissioner ordered that gold would have to be provided within fifteen minutes, or else he would shoot Heinrich. Heinrich escaped then and hid in the malt-house. The whole band of anarchists became alarmed when they heard revolver shots, and in a short time the whole yard was teeming with wild sailors and soldiers.

## Chapter 6

### *The Germans Are Coming*

It was April, 1918. The whispers grew ever louder: "The Germans are coming." People had been watching for them for a long time now, as they were very tired of the constant house searches. Then, one morning we suddenly saw train after train coming down the hill from Fishau and, behind our woods in Schönau, slowly pass in the direction of Halbstadt. Shortly before noon everything came to a standstill. The railway tracks were occupied as far as the eye could see toward Halbstadt. Somewhere there was a problem. It didn't take long before the Reds streamed from the trains to the council office in the village and demanded to be transported to the station in Halbstadt. While they were in the office waiting for the wagons, they ransacked everything. In a drawer they found the Deszatzky (auxiliary police) shields from the time of the Tsar. Angrily, they threw them on the ground and crushed them with their feet. When the wagons arrived, they climbed on and drove off to Halbstadt. I had the opportunity to drive too, and had four men in my wagon. Three sat in the back, and one sat in front beside me. They were all dressed and armed differently. It depended on whom they had robbed. The one who sat by me had a large pistol sticking out of his pants pocket. Now, my grandmother had sent along with me a fairly large container of sugarcane syrup (molasses) for relatives in Halbstadt. The container had only a piece of paper tied over the top. As we were on our way, the one sitting beside me was very restless, turning from side to side, and watching in front in case some Germans might suddenly appear on the road and cut us off. All at once, his pistol fell out of his pocket, right into my container of syrup. He bent over to pick up the pistol, but when he saw where it had gone, he began to curse terribly, and wanted to know why I had syrup standing there. When his comrades saw what had happened, they burst out laughing. The louder they laughed, the angrier the first man became. At first I feared for my life, but luckily he couldn't do much with his pistol, considering the circumstances. Eventually he calmed down. I was happy when I had dropped them off at the train station, delivered my syrup, and found myself on the road home again. Back at home that afternoon, I went to my friend and neighbour, and together we went to see the only Red - a Russian refugee from the war - who lived in our village. He had taken the Austrian firearm from me that I had brought home from Moscow during the war. When we got to his place, we saw it hanging on his wall. I went and took it down, and said to him that the time had come for me to take my gun home again. He never said a word. Toward evening, as I was in the barn feeding the cattle, I suddenly heard a tremendous noise in the house, and over and over my name being called loudly in Russian. I knew the Reds were there looking for the weapon. Naturally, I

didn't let myself be seen. It was as I had thought: Red stragglers had come through the village, our Red had complained to them, and now they had come to get the weapon. When they found it under the mattress of my bed, they took it and disappeared as quickly as they had come.

The next morning a locomotive arrived, moving slowly in reverse down the tracks. Mounted on the front was a machine gun, attended to by men in field-gray uniforms. Then we knew the Germans had arrived. It wasn't long before German military followed on the country road into our village. They were greeted with roast chicken and zwieback (Mennonite buns). "Isn't this a marvelous Bolshevik hunt," they were heard to say. They didn't stay long however, and soon moved on to Halbstadt.

The next day the Reds who had terrorized the occupants of the villages, were arrested and taken to Halbstadt where they were turned over to the Germans. The Red in our village tried to escape at the last minute. However, they found him out in the meadow and took him to Halbstadt too. When he behaved somewhat impudently toward the Germans there, one German soldier slapped his face so hard that his hat flew off his head. Then he understood that the wind had turned. The Reds were then all taken away and shot. Among the Germans were names like Braun, Wiebe, Lichtenau, Ladekopp, Friesen, and Ruekenau.

Now, in the space of a few days, everything had changed. Where before we couldn't even go to the mill in the neighbouring village without a note of permission, now we could go anywhere we wanted to, as far as the Germans had freed the land.

Two German non-commissioned officers came to our village, gathered the young men from Schönau and Tiegenhagen, and began military drills with them in the meadow. They were being prepared for the future Selbstschutz (self-defense).

The weather was beautiful, and they cheerfully marched and sang:

Gold and silver I'd gladly have,  
And I could really use it.  
Wish I had a whole big sea  
To dip myself into.  
But much better is the gold  
That from the curly head of  
My sweet darling, rolled  
In two long braids.  
Come, my darling, come right now,  
Come and let me kiss you,  
Before your hair turns to silver,  
And we have to part.

In our villages peace and quiet ruled again. There was no more theft, and no houses were ransacked. The whole village economy began to pulsate again. It was the calm before the storm that would soon follow with all its might.



## Chapter 7

# *My Journey to Germany 1918*

When the Germans had occupied our area, they recruited workers for their industry. I, too, allowed myself to be registered. In August, a whole train load of workers left Halbstadt for Germany, accompanied by German soldiers. When we got past Warsaw, the wide gauge railway tracks ended. We left the train and were billeted with local residents. I, along with several others, ended up in a Jewish inn. Since it was Friday and the sun had already gone down, the landlord asked us if we would keep the fire going in the stove. Here, the rooms were already being heated, and because the sun had set he could no longer touch the stove door.

Our escorts arranged for wagons, which we boarded with our belongings, and we set off for the German border, which was not too far away. Once we got there we were taken to a delousing facility. All our belongings were disinfected and we ourselves had to take showers. Then we boarded a German train and left for Berlin. There we were distributed through the whole country. I and several others were sent to Gelsenkirchen in Westphalia. Because I knew food was scarce in Germany, I had brought along from home two two-hundred pound sacks of flour and two large hams. Since I was tired of dragging these around, I asked the official at the station in Berlin if I could check them as baggage. When he realized that it was white flour, he said it would be impossible, but I should declare it as chalk. I was ready to do this, but then I thought, "What could I do in Gelsenkirchen if they actually gave me two sacks of chalk?" I wouldn't be able to do anything about it, and so I went back to the official and told him I'd rather keep the flour with me, which I did.

When we arrived in Gelsenkirchen I and several others were sent to the Wilhelmine Victoria coal mine- a huge operation. This mining company was named after a German princess who married an English prince. They arranged room and board for us in the private home of Frau Steinicke. I was sent to work in the repair shop, where several French prisoners of war also worked. The coal that came from the mine was sifted and the small pieces were burned to coke in the coke furnace. The tar or pitch, which was a by-product of this, was processed for various other products, such as Benzol, Hyol, fertilizer, naphthalene, etc. The naphthalene had to be kept under water so it wouldn't evaporate. In the sanitation service (medical corp) we had smeared it on our collars and sleeves to keep the lice from our bodies.

When the glowing coke came out of the furnace, Russian prisoners of war had to cool it with water hoses, and then load it onto railway cars. The Russian prisoners were treated quite roughly. The French didn't allow themselves to be treated that way, but

were quick to threaten with a hammer. One day when I was in the office on business, a Russian prisoner of war came in without taking off his hat. The official behind the desk jumped up and hit the Russian on the side of the head so hard that his hat flew off. He told him that the next time he came into a room to take his hat off. One night when the prisoners again had to load the coke, they had put thick planks across the end wall of the train car. A number of prisoners crawled behind these boards, and the others loaded the car. They knew this coke was going to Holland, and so they escaped.

We had to be at work at six in the morning, and at about 8 o'clock we had breakfast. The food we received contained little nutritional value. The bread made of buckwheat had a lot of sawdust mixed in. There was some marmalade to go with it. For lunch we mostly had cabbage soup, naturally without meat. Twice a week we got bean soup, which was better, and we got two eggs and a herring each month. I had brought some flour with me from home, so I went to the bakery and asked if they could bake bread from it for me. They told me they could not do that, but if I mixed the dough myself and brought it to them, they would bake it for me, which I did.

Because food was so scarce, people drove out to the countryside again and again to see what they could barter from the farmers. They understood how to always put a little aside. This was strongly forbidden, and was called hoarding. Over and over again one heard or read about it. One morning a farmer came to town and reported that someone had stolen his pig during the night. The police sent out a man with a dog to hunt for the pig. They found it fairly quickly - butchered and buried in a barrel underground. The farmers also had to deliver their milk to the town. The temptation was great to add water to the milk, and then hold some back for themselves. Now, one farmer had overdone it somewhat, and added too much water to the milk. An official was sent out, and the daughter of the house was to milk the cows in his presence. She, however, had prepared herself for this. She had filled a pig's bladder with water ahead of time and carried it under her apron into the barn. She hung the end of the bladder into the milk pail, and as she milked, squeezed the bladder, and so squirted water into the milk. However, she became somewhat careless, and suddenly the bladder rolled out from under her apron onto the ground. When the official saw this, he realized what was going on, and the girl was imprisoned for several months.

Travelers had to have their luggage inspected at the train station to make sure they had no illegal food with them. One day a man came to the station with a large suitcase. When the official asked him to open the case, the man said he couldn't, because he had a cat inside, and he was afraid the cat would run away if he opened the case. "Nonsense!" said the official. "Open it!" The man opened it and sure enough, a cat leapt out wildly. The official went after it and tried to catch it. The traveler locked his suitcase, smiled to himself, and boarded his train, which had arrived in the meantime. The cat was of no value to him - what he wanted to save was the ham in the bottom of the case, which he managed to do.

In the fall, when Germany collapsed, all the prisoners of war were released, and they prepared for the journey home. I too decided to go home. Before I left I bought a number of razors, scissors and pocketknives to take with me. I traveled along with the prisoners of war. When we reached the Polish border, the Poles wouldn't allow any prisoners of war to travel through, so our train was rerouted to Latvia. We arrived in

Schönsee, in East Germany. Here, the station was a sorry sight. Prisoners of war, who had gone through before us, had torn apart the train cars and had thrown everything out. There were bicycles, books, and all things imaginable lying around. They had taken only what they could use.

At the Russian border we had to change trains again. We got to Kremenschug where we met the first bandits. They went through the train and took what they wanted from the prisoners of war. They took all my things away from me, and when I protested one of them hit me on the side of my head. At a number of stations where the train stopped, the women brought pirogy to the train. Some were filled with sauerkraut, and some with beans.

Then we got to Guljag, Poland. Here we got to know Machno's gangs. They came and searched the train. Since I had already lost all of my belongings, they left me alone. All that I had left were my clothes and a suitcase, on which I was sitting. We were told horrible things about these bandits. It was said that they had taken passengers and thrown them live into the fire in the locomotive.

As the train was puffing up the slope between Halbstadt and Schönau, I jumped off the train with my suitcase in hand, and hurried home through the woods. At home, everything was in good order, and I was happy to put my feet under a well spread table again. I had gained no earthly possessions, but was richer in experience.

## Chapter 8

### *In the Selbstschutz (Self Defence Force)*

After the Germans had retreated in the fall of 1918, gangs of bandits moved into our area. They attacked and robbed the estates, and in some cases murdered the owners in horrible fashion. Many of the landowners then fled to us in the colonies, where at that time it was still fairly peaceful. There were Russian officers and soldiers who had come with the Germans, and stayed behind when the Germans left. They organized themselves and wanted to try to keep the bandits and the Reds out of the colonies. They recruited young men from the village for their troops. I had just recently returned from Germany and, along with a number of others from the village, had to go to Tokmak. Here we were taught to handle machine guns - take them apart, clean them, and reassemble them. Then we were loaded onto a train and sent to Werchne Tokmak where we were to come into contact with the enemy. With us on the train was Gerhard Toews with his group of horsemen. Toews was in charge of the cavalry. The German army had included some Russians, and when the Germans retreated, those Russians who remained behind were hired to train the villagers in the use of machine guns. This was done for a short period of time, after which these men went out to fight the Red Army. Fighting was done on open fields. The Red Army consisted mainly of Chinese who had been hired by the Russians.

We reached our destination in the morning. At the station, I saw a railroad car standing, loaded with naked bodies frozen blue. Where they came from and where they were being taken was a mystery to me. Soon after our arrival, one part of our group had to line up by rank and file; each man received a glass of whiskey, and then it was off to the front. I myself didn't have to go, but my brother did. Toews too, rode with his squadron to meet the enemy. Our forces could not stand up to the stronger force, however, and were pushed back. When our young men saw that it was a hopeless situation, they ran away. Those from our village ran to Landskrone, and from there relatives took them home in wagons. I went on the train into Crimea, and went home from there.

As the bandits became bolder and threatened our villages too, the *Selbstschutz* (self-defense force) was organized. The Germans had already trained us for this. A number of German officers and soldiers had stayed behind, and took over the leadership of this group. Our quarters were in Halbstadt. We got our orders from there. Again and again we had to evacuate the border villages when they were threatened, but most often we went to Blumenthal, where we had to help out time after time. The signal to evacuate was one shot. When we heard it, we knew we had to report to the mayor. We boarded the wagons and headed to Halbstadt, from where we were sent to wherever help was

needed. We had a devout grandmother who would kneel down with my brother and me and pray to God for our safety every time we had to leave.

Our self-defense unit recorded very few losses. There were: Martens from Halbstadt, Braeul from Wernersdorf, and Mierau from Tiege. There were also several others, but their names have escaped me.

It was around the new year 1918-1919. A thick fog covered the area. The bandits from nearby Russian villages succeeded in forcing their way into Blumenthal, and gained a foothold at one end of the village. The younger men of the village held the bandits back, while the older men tried to evacuate the women and children in wagons to Tiefenbrunn. They didn't know, however, that the village was surrounded, and rode right into the hands of the bandits. About 27 men, women, and children were chopped into pieces, or shot, and a number of others were wounded. Our self-defense unit was sent to help, and we were able to drive the bandits away. After that they were never again successful in taking over a German village. Only at the beginning of March, when the Red Army came to the bandit's aid, were we unable to overpower them.

*(The Red Army had joined the bandits so that the villages were overwhelmed. Many tried to flee to Crimea. Dad's family went as far as Ohrloff. Then the father of J.B. Toews - Toews was the pastor at our Buhler, Kansas church in the 1940's - and his brother-in-law B.B. Janz went to the Red officers and asked them not to harm them. The officers made promises so that some - like Dad's family - went back home. The promises however, were not kept by the Red Army. -M.Enns)*

The first deployment of the self-defense unit took place on December 5, to Tschernigowka, and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1919, it was dissolved at Waldorf. When we returned from Blumenthal, great unrest ruled our villages. Everyone spoke of fleeing to Crimea. We loaded our wagons with everything possible and set off for Ohrloff. We had to set all of our cattle free beforehand. The road was very muddy, and everything stuck together. We stayed in Ohrloff one night and then went back. Very few traveled farther. A number of men had been sent ahead from Ohrloff to negotiate with the Reds at Halbstadt. The Reds had promised everything possible and advised the families to go back. Later, however, they did not keep all of their promises.