

Chapter 9

Report on the Time of Machno

by Walter Burow

At this time I was in the White Army at Kiev. Burow, son-in-law of Herman Neufeld, describes what took place during that time – Herman Enns

It was Friday, September 5, 1919 when we returned to Halbstadt from Crimea. Thanks to the loyalty of our workers and employees, we discovered that during our absence, everything at our place had remained pretty much in order. Here we found our administrator Johann Duerksen, father of the School of Commerce student Hans Duerksen, and his family. He had had to abandon our large estate Emiljanowka at Chassaw Jurt in the Turkish area, because the property had been plundered by the native Tatars (Obreken), and the entire herd of cattle had been driven away from the estate. Besides, the Tatars would no longer tolerate any foreigners in their territory.

Duerksen then took over the administration of the Crimea estate Kasantachi. On September 19, he left with his family to go there. His son Hans, stayed with us in Halbstadt, in order to continue his studies at the School of Commerce. Life returned to its former routines. I kept busy again at the factory. We had beautiful late summer days.

Rumors came to us from the upper villages that Machno was very active again in Pologi and Gulai Polje, and the surprise attacks there had to be dealt with. The Whites had pushed well past Charkow, but had left the area behind them under very weak protection. However, we were able to get little information about Machno's renewed activities. Then, on a beautiful, quiet, sunny autumn afternoon - September 25, 1919- a cannon shot was heard coming from the direction of Bolschoi Tokmak. I heard it at the back of the brewery yard. Everyone gathered together immediately, and we soon learned from the White Army and civilian refugees, that Machno's gangs had captured Great-Tokmak two hours before. According to that, they would be in our area the next morning. The bandits didn't like to be too adventurous at night - they would rather be drinking.

We had a family meeting, and agreed that Herman, Katja and I should leave Halbstadt. The safes in the office were emptied and each one of us took a sum of money; Herman hid the rest of it. However, he forgot about the money in the safe behind the wall tapestry in the bedroom. No one who remained behind knew of its availability, but more about this later.

Herman left in the first carriage, and headed for Gnadenfeld. Katja and I followed, each with a suitcase in hand. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and we drove to the hospital in Muntau. There I called the hospital administrator to the carriage and inquired about the situation. I turned around then, and went back to our yard because I had forgotten something - my revolver, I think. From there, it was off to Mrs. Enns' (sister of my father-in-law) in Schönau. We stayed at her place overnight - Sept.25-Sept.26, 1919. The next morning at about nine o'clock, we received news from Halbstadt, that the early morning hours had brought marauding bandits. They did not belong to Machno, however, but were riff-raff made up of gypsies, Greeks, etc. and were moving very quickly. *(Dad said these were groups of different nationalities {Poles, Greeks, Latvians, Gypsies, etc.} who lived in the cities and had different kinds of businesses. They joined with the Communists. - M. Enns)* They would be in Schönau very soon. While the women were busy hiding clothes, etc., I found a hiding place in the barn. It wasn't very long before the first gypsies found their way into our yard. From my hiding place under the straw in the barn, I could clearly hear the racket they made. Then I heard screeching and screaming coming from the house. I found out later, that the bandits were trying to take the gold wedding rings from the women's fingers, and then they pulled apart our cupboards and suitcases. As they threw everything that suited them on a pile near the door so they could load it quickly later, the Enns and Neufeld daughters succeeded in taking some things from the pile and saving them. The bandits were in a great hurry, as they had a healthy respect for the Machnowzen who were following. These foreigners plundered on their own initiative. They were in such a hurry, that one of them, while running changed into a pair of trousers he had just stolen from Mrs. Enns.

The first party had removed itself. I came out of my hiding place, which hadn't pleased me at all - there was no escape in case of emergency. If the bandits had dug through the straw, I would have had no opportunity to escape and would have been available to their destructive whimsies, for better or for worse. I had become very nervous through all this, because in my hurry I hadn't been able to find a suitable hiding place. I decided now to climb up into the dovecote about 5'x4'x4', which was built on a thick post in the middle of Mrs. Enns' yard. With the help of a ladder, I climbed up and had just enough room inside to lie stretched out. Through the holes I could keep an eye on what was going on in the yard and on the street. I smoked cigarettes up there, and food was brought to me from the house.

Toward noon Machnowze advance-riders appeared on the street, carrying their black flag with a white skull on it. They passed through quickly, heading toward Muensterberg -Lichtenau. They made no stops at yards. The main group followed without stopping in the village. After about two hours the whole group had passed through, and peace and calm settled in.

During this time we discussed what we should do next, and made the decision to go at dusk to the old folks' home in Rosenort, to Mr. and Mrs. Willms. One of the Neufeld or Enns boys drove us there. We met not one person on the way. Mr. and Mrs. Willms, administrators of the home, gladly took us in. We spent several weeks there during beautiful autumn weather. Now and again we received news of the circumstances in the various villages. The cashier of our shop in Halbstadt, Mr. Willms, came to visit us. From him we learned that an underling of Machno, a man named Patalacha, had set

up staff quarters right on our yard. So far, none of the homeowners had been molested by them. Naturally, they allowed themselves to be waited on, and demanded food day and night. At night they were mostly in their quarters, drinking as much as they could hold.

One must observe with surprise that Nestor Machno (1884-1930) had a huge following, and had taken possession of a nearby territory as large as Saxony (Perekop, Zaporoshje, Melitopol, Berdjansk, Kachowka). His troops numbered at least 50,000 men who were organized as military, equipped with tanks and artillery. In the following years he caused a lot of trouble for the White as well as the Red Army. Finally the Red Army was able to push him back as far as the Rumanian border, and one day he crossed over to Rumanian territory and finally ended up in Poland. Poland was at war with Russia. Machno came from Gulai-Polje and was well known to the landowners there, because he had worked for them as a farmhand before World War I and before he was banished to Siberia (Bank robbery in Mariupol).

I occupied myself in the home for the aged, chatting with the old folks and looking them up in their rooms each day. Other than that, I spent a lot of time outdoors in the beautiful autumn weather and visited the neighbours- among others, the gardener Gaede at the Mennonite experimental garden. I didn't suffer from boredom. Later, a certain Mr. Wiebe from Halbstadt, also found his way to administrator Willms. He owned property near the home for the aged. Pig butchering also took place during this time. We were aware of almost nothing from the bandits. One day a troop was moving in the direction of Rosenort, and passed on the road about 200 meters from the home. One rider separated from the troop and rode up to our building, in order to inquire what kind of operation we had, then rode off. They took no further notice of us. On Sunday, November 2nd, at dusk, I became aware of a dozen vehicles on the before mentioned road. It was a troop of German colonists, made up of Lutherans and Catholics, among them Sergeant Walther of the German Reich, a Russian Lieutenant Gloeckler, Opel-Sudermann and Matthes from Halbstadt, and several others. They had found out that Patalacha was situated near Blumenort, 10 km away from us. Now their intention was, as Matthes told me later, to capture the chief and his staff. They reached Blumenort unnoticed, since darkness had fallen in the meantime. They scouted out the house in which Patalacha lived at that time with his group, and lay in wait because they knew that he would go back to Halbstadt that night. They didn't have to wait long before a vehicle drove out of the yard of the house they were watching. A shot rang out, and a badly wounded man fell to the ground from the coachman's seat and lay there groaning.

In the general confusion that now took place, the vehicle managed to escape. As Matthes told the story, the wounded man on the ground was a huge Ukrainian, and Patalacha had escaped. Opel-Sudermann killed the Ukrainian with a dagger (Kaukasus-Kinshal); this same Sudermann later committed suicide in Frankfurt. The troops left again, leaving the residents of Blumenort to their fate. What an act of heroism, to distance themselves after this sudden attack. Because of this inconsiderate course of action, many innocent people of Blumenort had to give up their lives the next day. Promptly the next day -Monday, Nov. 3, 1919- a large unit of troops appeared from Halbstadt and surrounded the village. Machine guns were set up at every entrance and exit to the village. They set all the barns on fire on all the farmsteads, and shot every person they saw. Then they herded all the male population they could get a hold of into

the cellar of the mayor's house, locked them in, and threw in a hand grenade. Twenty-five residents died this way. Among them was the brother of our cashier, Willms, who had been shot crossing the yard, and he bled to death before he could get medical help. Patalacha came back to our yard in Halbstadt that night infuriated, but he did not bother anyone.

(Dad said that the incident which has been described happened at Blumenort. Dad was later told by Jacob Nickel that he had been the leader of the group of men that came to get the Kommissar of the Red Army with the intent to kill. They instead killed the wrong man- the driver. In revenge, the Reds killed the many people in Blumenort. The man they intended to kill was Patalacha. Patalacha stayed in Neufeld's house. The Selbstschutz was active at this time - the Germans had already left the country. This happened in 1919. Cornelius Wahl's father and brother were killed in the Blumenort massacre - they were mother's relatives. Mother had not yet entered nurses training. -M.Enns)

On Thursday, Nov. 6, 1919, a landowner named Olfert, who lived at the east end of the Kuruschan valley toward Tiegerweide, came to the Old Folks Home and invited me to be his guest for a while. I accepted and went along with him, and on the 7th, around noon, Katja joined us, since she was very restless at the home without me. Just as we were all sitting down for the noon meal on Saturday Nov. 8, I looked out the window and saw a troop of five riders on the road that went from Tiegerweide to Rosenort. They were about 500 meters away, separated from Olfert's estate by the Kuruschan valley. Having reached our approximate elevation, they left the road, and came directly towards us. With a shout, "Now they're coming here!" I jumped up from the table and disappeared with Katja, straight across the yard, into the teacher's small side building. Meanwhile, the first rider had reached the yard, and shouted, "Who was it that just ran across the yard?" The teacher fell to his knees in front of me and fervently begged me to leave the house, or things would not go well for him. I didn't let him plead very long, but went back into the yard and ran right into the hands of the five armed riders. Two of them immediately approached me - one had stepped down from his horse - and ordered me against the wall. Then one of them raised his gun and aimed at me. Katja threw herself into his arms, for which she got a heavy clout on the head from one of the mounted men. The one on foot now came to me, twisted me around several times, went through my pockets and took all my money. When I said, "Surely you won't take everything I have," he gave me back exactly 20 rubles. We then made it clear to him that we were here only to visit, and that we had come from Siberia. When I showed him my papers, he dismissively hit me on the head with them - so hard that they tore into pieces. Then they left us and headed for the main house. There they created terrible havoc after they had attacked the maids. Some time later we heard more crashes from the house - the smashing of dishes, household equipment and furniture.

The bandits then left the house and ordered Olfert's oldest son - the only family member they could get hold of - to prepare the wagon and hitch up the horses. (All other family members had disappeared from the scene, and must have found a very safe hiding place.) The wagon was loaded with blankets, bedding, home canned fruit and every kind of food. As young Olfert was hitching up the horses, I noticed how one bandit was aiming directly over Olfert's head at the pigeons on the barn roof, and shooting them. Olfert hadn't seen this, thought the shots were meant for him, and sank to his knees,

crying. A clout with a stick brought him back to his senses. Finally everything was loaded, and the horses hitched up. The group rode off across the country in the direction of Gros-Tokmak, with young Olfert as coachman. In my opinion, all five bandits were residents of Tokmak, because each one had a thick shawl wrapped around his face so only the eyes were visible, in order to remain unrecognized. *(Dad said the Tokmaker natives were the Russian bandits who came from Tokmak. They brought their wagons to take back the loot they stole -M. Enns)* After three hours young Olfert returned. After dark Katja and I made our way through the Kuruschan valley back to the old folk's home, avoiding all roads and footpaths. After several hours, without being bothered, we reached home at about 10 p.m. Since Katja was pregnant, we were concerned that the agitation and the hard clout on the head might have serious consequences for her. Luckily, nothing bad happened.

For some time now reports had been circulating that the Whites had begun the purging of their rear areas, and were now advancing. On the following Sunday, Nov. 9, 1919, we heard the wonderful news that the White troops were in our immediate area. That evening the first of the Terekan Cossacks arrived. On Monday, Nov. 10, 1919, we received definite information that Halbstadt had been free of bandits since Sunday. Our cashier Willms came to pick us up in a wagon on Tuesday, Nov. 11, 1919, after he had paid a visit to his sorely tested relatives in Blumenort. By afternoon we were home again on our yard in Halbstadt.

During our absence, the following had taken place: In our yard everything had run quite smoothly at first, but the behaviour of the bandits became suspicious, cautious, and even tense when they learned that Hans Duerksen and his friend Heinz Schroeder had planned an attack on Patalacha. Besides that, Hans Duerksen had stolen a gun from the bandits in our house. This is what the stupid boys actually had in mind, as I later found out. It was well-known that Hans Duerksen lived at our house while he attended *Kommerzscule*. The result of his thoughtlessness was this: every nook and cranny in our yard, including chimneys, stove pipes and stoves, which were ripped open, was searched for weapons. During this, a lot of clothing and other belongings were stolen from us. This caused a lot of agitation and terror among the women. The bandits discovered a small wall safe behind the tapestry in the bedroom. They forced it open and stole the money, luckily only paper money. Other valuables were no longer in the safe. *(I asked Dad how the news that the bandits were coming was spread from village to village. He said the news of their whereabouts was probably carried from one village to another by riders on horseback. -M.Enns)*

In the White Army under Denikin

When the self-defence force was defeated, the Reds moved in. However, they only stayed for a few months, because Denikin came to our area with the Cossacks and drove them out. Soon after that, the young men in our village were mobilized. I, along with two neighbours' sons from our village, were sent to Jeketerinslaw and put into a Guard regiment. Not long after, this regiment was loaded onto trains and sent to the port at Poltawa. First we went into huge forests where the partisans operated. *(The Partisans were those who wanted to separate from Russia - they had a huge green flag. The Communists had a red flag. The Machno bandits had a black flag with a white skull displayed on it. The Russian officers had the Russian flag of the Czar. – M.Enns)* They tore up the railway tracks and destroyed the bridges. For that reason we carried all kinds of materials with us, in order to repair any possible damage. For weeks on end we lived in our clothes, because we had to be prepared for an attack at any time. The locomotive at the head of the train was always kept under full steam. We brought the fuel from the forest during the day. Finally we came out of the forests, back into open areas, and reached the town of Borispolje - a large Russian town with a population of 20-25 thousand. We were billeted with the farmers. This was an area known for growing sugar beets, and therefore, there were a number of sugar refineries in the area. When we needed sugar, which was already scarce at that time, an officer would take a couple of us in the locomotive and we would go out to the warehouse and get several sacks. Here we saw how the syrup, the by-product of refining sugar, was collected and stored. The farmers in the area would get some of this syrup and use it in their cattle fodder. We heard rumors that girls would throw illegitimate babies into the syrup container because they knew that nobody would look for them there.

We also learned to know some of the customs of this area. One day a Russian with one horse hitched to his Duga drove slowly onto our yard. *(The Duga is a cart which the Russians used. The Duga itself was a bowed piece of wood, which was put over the horse's neck to guide the horse and pull the little cart. – M.Enns)* Sitting in the cart was a young woman dressed in white linen, with her hair full of flowers. As she reached the door to the house, she bowed down, turned around, and slowly drove away. When we asked our people what this meant, they told us that she was a bride inviting us to her wedding.

I already mentioned that sugar was scarce. At that time we had a large number of Cossacks in our regiment. The regiment consisted of many Cossacks and only 16 Mennonites. *(The Cossacks originated when the Russian criminals released from prison*

went to Ukraine. In the Czar's time they were employed as security men in banks, etc. – M.Enns) When they got a hold of a sack of sugar, they took it and sold it at a good price to a Jewish merchant who had a stall at the bazaar in the middle of the village. Then they went and told their comrades what they had done. These comrades went to the bazaar and asked the Jew if he had any sugar. Naturally, he denied having any. After they used their riding whip a few times, he changed his mind and gave them the sack of sugar. They took it and sold it to the next merchant. And so the sack of sugar went from hand to hand, and the Cossacks had whole bundles of money hanging from their saddles.

From Poltava we went to an area near Kiev and stopped at the village of Darnitza. This was a large Russian village, with many Jews living in it. I, along with a Russian, was billeted with a Jewish family who owned a bakery. Because of the unrest, the bakery was not operating at the time. The two of us who were billeted there, were told we had to bake the bread for our unit. Since neither of us had ever baked bread before, our landlord had to teach us. The large baking oven was heated with wood. Then the ashes were removed and 56 loaves of bread were put in with a long-handled shovel.

This bakery was near the train station, and we had the opportunity to observe how our soldiers walked along the incoming trains, searching for Jews. The Whites hated the Jews because they were disposed towards communism, and therefore supported the Reds. However, the Armenians and the Greeks were very similar to the Jews, so the soldiers used the word “Kukurusa” to find the Jews. If a person could not pronounce the “r”, they were pretty sure he was a Jew. They searched through the women's hair for gold and valuables, and took the men along to a nearby barn, where they pulled down the men's pants to search for Jewish characteristics. When they were sure the men were Jewish they beat them with the steel rods they used to clean their weapons. They had woven willow twigs around these rods beforehand. One day I met my friend A.K. on the street, and he was outraged. The night before, their soldiers had robbed Jewish families of their clothes and had also inadvertently robbed a Russian family. The woman had gone and complained to an officer, who then ordered my friend to go out and collect a sackful of clothes from Jewish families to give to the woman. This was very difficult for him, but an order was an order, and so he had to do it. Another time I met a different friend, A.P., (*refers to Abe Penner who was in a different battalion. – M. Enns*) on the street, and he told me that their officer had been wounded a number of times, and now couldn't sleep at night. He collected a number of volunteers, and they went out to kill Jews. They hanged more than twenty.

We got along very well with our landlords. However, they didn't give us any pots and pans for cooking, so we had to borrow some from our Russian neighbours. Our landlords believed that we might use the dishes that they used only for milk or meat. They didn't want us to whistle in the bakery either. However, they sometimes brought us some of their delicacies to taste. These consisted of little rye loaves dipped in garlic juice. In Poltava the landlady brought a bowl of sour cream to the table, and we dipped our bread into it. Both customs were unfamiliar to me.

One morning our landlord came to us in the bakery, looking very pale, and told us the Whites were killing all the Jews in the town. On the neighbour's yard they had beaten all the women and killed all the men. We went to see what was going on. We found three of them hacked up outside, and two inside who had been shot. One sat on a chair,

and the other on the bed, and both were still alive, groaning. We went back outside, and as we went my companion said, "Straschno" (terrible). But he went back every half hour to see if they were dead yet, then took the good overcoat off the one on the bed, and also took an iron.

At noon he went off into the village, but soon came back, and wanted me to go to Kiev with him. The military had received permission to rob and kill the Jews in Kiev for three days. I wasn't interested and so he went alone. Apparently the Jews in Kiev had poured boiling water and hot tar from upper-storey windows onto our Cossacks as they rode into the city. The Cossacks had then retreated and called on the artillery for help. They went in and left the Jewish Quarter in ruins. This is why the troops had received permission to kill the Jews. In the afternoon I had gone into the village for a while. During my absence other soldiers had come into our house and had stolen our landlords' best dishes, although they did nothing else.

Several weeks went by, and then the situation changed very suddenly for the Whites. The Reds had made peace with Poland, then brought all their forces to Kiev. The Whites could not hold against the superior power and were very slowly driven back. There were 16 Mennonites from our village in this regiment. One of these was J.K. (*John Klassen - M. Enns*) from Fuerstenwerder. I had shared quarters with him when we both went to Centralschule in Halbstadt. He was serving on our staff as secretary to our General. He had in his possession a large number of furloughs signed by the General. When the situation for the Whites became worse, we got together and decided that we would get our friend on the staff to write passes for all of us. We would then board the train one day and travel to Odessa, which was the only route still open to us. Behind us, Machno had occupied Jekaterinslaw and the surrounding area. So we did as we had planned. When we reached Odessa we went first to the harbour to see if there was an opportunity to get to Crimea. We found a ship, loaded with Cossacks who were sick with typhoid, that was to leave for the Caucasus but was to stop in at Sevastopol. We decided to make use of this opportunity, and to go along. We stayed up on deck so we wouldn't come in contact with the sick passengers. When we reached Sevastopol, the port authorities would not allow the ship to enter the harbour, when they found out there were passengers with typhoid aboard. We had to go back to sea, and hoped we'd be able to stop at Theodosia. After we had traveled a short distance, something went wrong in the engine room and everything came to a standstill. It took four days for the crew to get the machinery working again. Meanwhile, we had run out of drinking water on the ship. Finally, we reached Theodosia, and we were allowed into the harbour. During this time the weather had deteriorated - it was already late autumn. As we left the ship a cold rain was falling. One of our group, N. from Blumenort, had a high fever when we landed, and we knew it was typhoid. It was impossible to take him along any farther in this weather. So we persuaded him to let us admit him to a hospital, since we didn't know how we would cover the last several hundred Werst (*1 mile = 1.5 Werst*). When we got to the hospital, they refused to admit him when they discovered he had typhoid. Now we were in a quandary because it was impossible to take our sick friend any farther. So then we discussed with him that if we bedded him down in the hall and the staff found him there, they would find room for him in the hospital. So that's what we did. I had a small Testament with me and read several comforting verses to him, covered him up, and we

left. After we had walked a short distance and looked behind us, we saw our friend following us with the blanket wrapped around him. We turned him around and calmed him down and promised we would let his relatives know where he was. He stayed there then, and we went to the train station to see if there was an opportunity to get to Melitopol. However, the locomotive did not have enough fuel for the whole trip, and this was to be gathered along the way. We decided to go along anyway. After we had gone some distance, we stopped in the open fields. We gathered up the snow fences along the railway and brought them back to use for fuel. We had to repeat this a number of times before we reached Melitopol.

We went home on foot for the last stretch from Melitopol, a distance of 30-40 Werst. As we walked north we met more and more of the White military moving southward toward Crimea. We separated when we reached the colonies. One group went through the Molotschna villages, and one went to the upper villages. This second group stopped in Blumenort and gave our friend's parents news of his circumstances. Our friend had a fiancée in the village, and she managed, through all the confusion, to get to the hospital in Crimea to visit him. However, it was all in vain, as he succumbed to his illness there.

When we reached home we found out that the last of the Whites would probably come through our village during the night, and in the morning we could expect the Reds to arrive. I buried my uniform in the garden that day, threw my ammunition into the well, my weapon onto the street, and decided to stay home. My friend, however, left the village that night with the last of the Whites.

The next morning when I woke up I had a high fever, and was stuck in bed with typhoid. I was very glad that I had stayed home. My friends, too, both had typhoid in Crimea.

The next morning the Reds came into our village, and also came into our house. Now, my sister had locked the door to my bedroom, and when the Red soldiers looked through the keyhole, they saw my military hat, which I had forgotten to hide, lying on the table. When they were about to break down the door, my sister unlocked it for them. They came right to my bed and lifted the blankets to see if I was wounded. When they saw that I had typhoid, one of them went out and got a bottle of rotgut whiskey and offered me some, but it looked so unappetizing that I declined. They left me alone then and went out the door.

Thanks to God's help and the good nursing of my family, I slowly recovered and got back on my feet again. In the sanitation train I had often had 48 typhoid patients in my car, and had never become sick. That it had come now was a puzzle to me.

In the spring I was elected as president of the Soviet Board/Council of the village, and later when the Whites came under the leadership of Wrangel, I was elected mayor. And so I was free of military service, and was very happy that I didn't have to serve anymore.

Chapter 11

Under the Reds 1919-1920

When the Germans had retreated and the self-defence forces had collapsed, the Reds came back into our area again. Soon, there was nothing left to buy - all the stores were empty. People paid enormous prices for a sewing needle or a box of matches. They were forced to keep the fire in the house going day and night, or get some from a neighbour. Hardest hit were the smokers who went to the fields in the morning for the whole day. So they took with them to the field a bucket full of embers and discs of cow dung. One from our village lost his whole wagon because of this. A gust of wind had blown sparks from the bucket into the straw on the wagon, and before the man could do anything, the whole wagon was engulfed in flames.

At one time my grandfather had owned a store, and there was still some sulfur lying on the attic floor since that time. I took and melted this sulfur, then pulled a length of yarn through it, and afterwards cut the yarn into short pieces. Then we took the core from sugarcane and dried it in the sun. We put the dried core on a piece of a broken plate, made sparks with a piece of steel, and got the core to glowing. When the pieces of yarn were touched to the glowing core, they burst into flame and we had fire.

We didn't have any thread, either, so we acquired some silkworms. We had enough mulberry bushes to feed them. The cocoons were thrown into boiling water, and the threads were spun on the spinning wheel. A lot of wool was spun, too, because there was nothing to buy, and so the women had to make everything possible from wool themselves. Peter Thiessen, the former industrialist in our village, built the spinning wheels. He just couldn't get enough made, so I helped him. The yarn had to be dyed, too. We boiled green walnut hulls, iron and salt to make the dye, then dipped the yarn into the boiling liquid.

The girls in the village had found a teacher who showed them how to make shoes, and they learned this craft pretty well. The heels were made of wood and covered with leather. The men made brushes from hogs' bristles, and tied brooms from reeds or millet. *(Dad said that, for bedding, the Catholics used corn silk from the ears of corn. It was put in bags, placed in a box, and covered with a sheet. Mennonites put straw into bags instead. They didn't grow corn because it used too much fertilizer. Catholic beds were much more comfortable than Mennonite beds. - M. Enns)*

In the summer of 1919 the Whites came and stayed almost until the end of the year, and then the Reds came again. Once the Reds were in control, there were always new orders handed down from above. I had been voted in as mayor of the village. The whole village was divided first into groups of five and then into groups of ten homes. In

each group one man was employed to search every yard before evening, to see if there were any strangers staying overnight. There was one person who controlled every 2-5 of these. *(Dad said the homes were grouped. Every group of 5 homes had one person who was to visit each of the homes to see whether someone was staying overnight. If so, these were to be reported. However, these visitors would hide. Two groups of five homes-making 10-would have a supervisor. -M. Enns)* At that time there were many people who were fleeing - former officers, businessmen, landowners- all of whom feared for their lives. These were the people who were being sought.

The Jews had figured it all out. Again and again men came to the village council, because they trusted us Germans, and asked for identity cards, because it was dangerous to be caught anywhere without one. We fulfilled their requests, in that we gave them signed and stamped identity cards made out with the names and addresses given to us, even though we knew the information was false. This was not without danger, because, had they been arrested nearby and forced to give their correct names, things could have gone very badly for us.

Ten hostages in our village were enlisted to constantly watch the telegraph wires and the railway bridges. As well, they had to ensure that the contributions expected from our village were given punctually. The Jews in Tokmak were insatiable. Over and over again, we had to give eggs, butter, cattle for slaughtering, furniture and who knows what else. *(Dad said the Jews [Communists] who were in control of the area had a system whereby they listed 10 important villagers who would be arrested if they didn't comply with these orders. -M. Enns)* In the neighbouring Russian villages they didn't get off so lightly. We heard stories of how the villagers had murdered commissioners here and there. When he came for eggs, they castrated him, and when he came for butter they carved the letters "Maslo" (Russian for "butter") in his forehead with a pocketknife.

When we had to supply eggs and butter, it wasn't so difficult to gather them together, because everyone had them. It was different with cattle for slaughter. No one wanted to give up an animal if his neighbour didn't have to. I would go out in the evening when the cattle came back from the pasture and count the number that went onto each yard. Those who had the most had to give up one. Naturally I didn't make any friends by doing this. I remember knocking on a door one day, and hearing the mother say to her children, in low German, "That black man is at the door." She was right - I never brought good news. Either I demanded a vehicle, or brought someone who needed lodging, or came to search the attic for grain. However, there was nothing I could do about the whole matter. I tried to protect our people as much as I could, but there were some boundaries I didn't dare cross.

It was midnight, and there was loud banging on our house door. I quickly slipped into my clothes and went to open the door. There stood a Red commissioner with several Red guards. I invited them into the room. They soon aired their concern. They wanted to know who in our village were hostile towards the Red government. Now I was in a corner. I knew only too well that most of us leaned towards the Reds as much as a radish - red on the outside and white on the inside. Naturally I couldn't tell them this. However, I had to try to convince them that we had no such people among us. I had to be very careful how I did this, or they could easily say that I, myself, was a White. I don't remember anymore how I managed to persuade them, but after a while they left the house

without taking anyone from the village with them. No wonder that no one desired my job at that time.

I must share an experience here. Once again we had to supply eggs, and already had about 3000 in laundry baskets standing in the council office. The office at that time was situated in a house belonging to a family that had fled to Crimea..A council meeting was scheduled there before evening. The meeting stretched on and on, and when we were finally ready to go home, one of those present had fallen fast asleep in his chair. (*The meeting was held in Henry Penner's house - brother to Abe Penner. The man who fell asleep was Jacob Reimer, my mother's brother. -M. Enns*) The rest of us got up very quietly and went out the door, while he slept on. Actually, we handled this quite foolishly. He could easily have toppled over into the eggs. However, it all ended well. When he woke up during the night, he cautiously made his way to the door, and went home to find his bed.

Chapter 12

In Hiding

During the unsettled time in Russia, when the Reds ran the government, house searches were carried out constantly in the villages. Every teenager, who was not even old enough to carry a gun, felt he had the right to search houses and to take what he liked. (*Dad said these were Jewish and Russian youths who searched the villages for things they might want. -M. Enns*) Therefore, the people were forced to hide everything that was of value to them. In some villages, an alarm system came into being, without anyone actually organizing it. In our village, someone whistled when danger was approaching. Whoever heard the alarm had the opportunity to prepare for the unwelcome guests. This was not always without danger.

One evening when it was already dark, another gang came into the village to rob us. One of ours was standing on the street leaning against the brick fence. He put his fingers to his mouth and whistled as loudly as he could. With that, a bandit jumped over the fence and gave him several firm whiplashes across his back, so the desire to whistle left him, and he ran away into the dark as fast as he could.

I want to describe several incidents of how the people tried to hide their belongings, and what the results were. At the end of the village lived the miller. He stuffed his best clothes into a sack and took it to safety up at the very top of the mill. At least, so he thought. One day a White armored train came by and those inside started shooting. The first shots were aimed at the mill, and one shot hit the miller's sack full of his best clothes. He had buried his silver dishes in the garden. As he told me later, he had done this in great haste and had forgotten to mark the exact spot, and now he couldn't find it again.

In one house a mother and daughter were busy bundling up their clothes and furs in order to hide them. They had heard the alarm, and knew that the house searches had begun again at the other end of the village. They discussed where to hide their things, and agreed on the ash pit. Decided - done. They covered everything with ashes. When the danger had passed and they went to retrieve their belongings, they were all on fire.

One man hid his family's gold rings and small valuables in a swallow's nest. He didn't think they'd search there, and they didn't. However, when the swallows discovered these, for them unnecessary things, in their nest, they carried them away in their beaks and let them drop anywhere.

In one place children were playing with real paper money. When their father asked where they had gotten it, they said they found it in the garden in the hedge, and that there was more. He got a ladder and leaned it against the eaves-trough in order to see if

the money he had hidden was still there. It was all gone. A gust of wind had blown it all away and scattered it.

My brother stuck his silver money into a sock, tied a cord around it, and threw it into the water. The bandits never found it.

One day I had to drive across the countryside, and there on the road in front of me lay an unexploded shell. I took it home with me, unscrewed it, emptied it, put my valuables into it, and buried it in the backyard. They didn't find that either. My clothes, however, (I had been in Germany during the German occupation of our villages, and had brought new clothes back with me) I buried in the barn in a suitcase. One day a Jewish commissioner rode onto our yard, accompanied by a large number of followers. The Jew, with a sabre in his hand, led the way, poking the ground. Where it was soft, his followers had to dig. They found my clothes and took what they could use. The rest they threw into the cow manure pit in the stable.

Every home in the village had a walled in brick oven. *(Dad describes the ovens. They were in the wall between the rooms in the center of the house. In the kitchen the oven was made of bricks, while on the living/dining room side it was made of tile. Wood was burned when it was very cold, and straw during the milder weather. Water was always being warmed on the stove, so humidity was always high. -M.Enns)* It always had a few bricks in the kitchen that were removed once a year in order to clean out the soot. People had begun to hide their valuables behind these bricks. The bandits, however, had soon found this out. They had only to give the first person they saw a few cracks of the whip, and he took them into the kitchen and showed them the spot. At the neighbour's they went right to the kitchen and inspected the stove without asking anyone. The same was done with the brush pile in the backyard.

A relative of ours was sitting in the living room in front of the stove with a neighbour late one afternoon. They were discussing the latest events that had been taking place in the area. A bandit walked into the room, looked around for a footstool, took it and walked to a specific spot in the room where a board had been nailed to the beam. He got on the footstool, reached up and took down a bundle of paper money, which had been hidden there. He stuck it into his pocket and went out the door without saying a word. At another place he walked into a house where a family was sitting at the supper table. He came through the door and said, "There is money hidden somewhere in this room, but the devil won't tell me where." Then he turned around and left. He was right, the people had hidden money in that room.

In Schönau, people also hid horses in strawstacks or in chaff compartments in the barn. That was usually somewhat risky, because the horses neighed when strange riders came onto the yard. We had three pigs in the pig barn. I said to myself, "If they ever see these, they'll never let us keep them." My brother and I dug a deep pit in the garden, and put a post in one corner. To it we fastened a crate with a pipe. We put two of our pigs into the pit, covered it with boards and soil, and on top of that we put a pile of brush. We fed them through the pipe and rolled a log over the top of the pipe when we were finished. We kept the pigs in the pit for several months, until we butchered them one night. The pig that we had kept back in the barn was taken from us. One day a Jew came into our village again from Tokmak, with a large number of Russian farm wagons. He

went from yard to yard, and wherever he found something that suited him, he had his men load it onto the wagons, and it went along to Tokmak. Our pig went along too.

At the beginning of the Revolution we all had so much wheat stored up, that the people didn't know what to do with it. They paid up to 6 puds (1 pud = 40 lbs.) for a needle, or for a box of matches. However, when the Reds came, things changed very quickly. The farmers had to take their wheat to the station in Halbstadt, and unload it under open skies. The area patrol riders let their horses at these piles of wheat. The horses dirtied the wheat, and when the rain came in the fall, it all started to stink. Then they poured oil onto the wheat and set it on fire. However, again and again we had to supply grain from what was still left. Since I was president of the village council, I had to go repeatedly from place to place and write down how much grain was still left. I warned the people then to hide as much as they could and not to leave it lying where it was visible, or it would be taken away from them and they would go hungry. Many believed me and did as I said, but others didn't, and later starved to death.

People filled the big water containers that were used in the fields in summer with wheat. One man filled sacks with wheat and piled them onto his wooden wagon, covered them with straw, and drove the wagon out to the field when danger was in the offing.

The bandits who patrolled the area had brought the cow plague to our village through their horses. A large number of our best cows, 48 in total, died from this disease. The villagers had specified a certain place where these cows were to be buried. Pits were dug in the ground, and whoever had a dead cow dragged it there and threw it into the pit. One farmer had used these pits to hide his grains, and he did not go hungry.

At our place, my brother and I dug a deep hole in the barn at night. We put a chest into the hole, in which we had hidden our flour and meat. We covered the hole with boards and earth, and then laid bricks on top of that. We had to make a good job of it, because when the house searches were made, the men pounded their rifle butts on the ground to see if there were hollow places. In one corner we had made an entrance under the harness cupboard. No one ever found this hiding place, and we didn't starve. We sold some of our flour to strangers for 80 gold rubles. *(Dad tells where they hid their food, etc. - it was in the barn. The floor was made of brick, which could be lifted up. It was the place where they did the laundry. The laundry was done twice a year. All laundry was washed in a big round wooden thing (baulg) which was about 4 ft. in diameter, about 1 and a half ft. high, and stood on stilts. Two or three women could be hired (usually family or friends) to do the washing. Washing was done by hand, which resulted in very sore hands. Because laundry was done so infrequently, they needed many clothes. Herman Janz had about a hundred shirts when he was married. I asked Dad how they could butcher and smoke the meat without being detected. He said the butchering was done at night, and the meat was smoked in the smoke room or the chimney. The grain which Dad took to the mill, had been found by the Communists and they had ordered Dad to take it to the miller for grinding. The Willms Mill was across the street from the Neufeld brewery. Dad had hidden his grain, as had some of the other villagers. Those who did not believe the warnings lost their grain. Mr. Henry Penner (husband of the Braun girl who lived next to my mother's family) did not believe that the famine would really happen. He did not hide food, and eventually died. -M.Enns).*

One day, when I took the last of the grain still to be found to Willms' mill in Halbstadt, I asked the tailor Althosen's (translated- Old Pants) son, who was the administrator of the grain, why they took the last of the grain from the people and left them with nothing to live on. He told me that the coal miners in England were on strike and needed help, so the grain was for them. *(Dad mentions that I.G.'s mother was called the "poor widow" because her farm equipment, etc. was in poor repair since her husband had died so young. Mr. Neufeld had moved from the Kuruschan where the Neufelds had their estate. He died so young, and had not had time to build up his farm. Everyone seemed to have a nickname. -M.Enns)*

Now, people could not hide everything, for example, the firewood. They had to leave it lying outside. Some came and stole the wood at night, and others who were armed came during the day. Then my friend and neighbour came up with an idea when he noticed that his wood was disappearing at night. He drilled holes in a couple of pieces, filled them with gunpowder, and closed the holes. When he heard later that here or there a stove had exploded, he knew exactly where his wood had gone.

We also had a number of tree trunks lying in our backyard, which we used for firewood. One day a Jew from Tokmak arrived with a large number of Russian farm wagons. He went from yard to yard and had the drivers load up all the firewood. When I protested, he told me that I had taken the wood from the forest, which now belonged to them not us, so I had actually stolen the wood. From that day on, I went and only got one log at a time, just as much as we needed.

Late one night we had some Reds billeted in our home. I had just made a trade for a sack of millet meal, and it stood in the pantry. Since I didn't trust our night guests, I took the sack into the garden and laid it in the hedge that night. In the morning my sister came and woke me and said that she thought one of the Reds had found the sack of meal, since he had been in the garden. I quickly jumped into my clothes, ran into the garden and carried the sack to another place. Then I went back to bed. It wasn't long before the Reds had someone call me. I put my clothes on again, but didn't button my shirt. I buttoned it once I was in their presence, so it would look as if I had been sleeping until then. Now I was supposed to go into the garden with them, and we went out. In the garden we stopped at the place where I had hidden the sack. One of them said, "A short while ago a sack of millet meal was lying here. Did you take it away?" Another one spoke up and said, "This one couldn't have done it, because I know he was sleeping." They looked around some more, and when they couldn't find anything we went back inside. And so I escaped unscathed.

When the Germans moved in on us, those people who had dealt with the Reds were arrested by the residents and turned over to the Germans, who then shot them. *(Dad said that the Russians that lived in Austria, Poland, etc., -on the borders of Russia- fled into the villages of the Molotschna when the German army came. The villagers had to quarter them. There were some Mennonites who joined up with the communists because they believed their philosophy. -M.Enns)* There was also a Russian in our village who had been shot. I had absolutely nothing to do with it. I had taken back the Austrian gun that he had stolen from me, but I was not responsible for his death. Now, he had a bride in the village, and had had a child with her. She had reported me to the Reds, and said that I was responsible for her bridegroom's death. One day, several Reds came into our

house and arrested me. My brother, who dealt in Crimean tobacco, gave them a box of this. *(I asked Dad when Uncle Jasch had started smoking and he just said that his father had smoked quite heavily, and ate no breakfast. I also asked Dad if he was still the president of the village council at this time. He said he was in it until he left in the summer of 1921. -M.Enns)* They didn't take me along, but left me at home, with the understanding that I would go before their commissioner in Tokmak the next day. That morning Rev. Heinrich Toews, who lived in Schönau at that time, came to our house. He prayed with all of us, because everything was a matter of life or death. I then made my way to Tokmak on foot - I couldn't drive because they would likely keep me there. It was 18 Werst to Tokmak, and I didn't get there until afternoon. It was summer, and quite warm. When I finally found the right commissioner and presented the paper I had received to him, he was very sleepy. As I said before, it was quite warm. He took the paper, slapped it with his hand, and let me know that I wasn't to bother him anymore. No one was happier than I! I made my way back home with a light heart. That was also an answered prayer. It could have easily cost me my life. I was very thankful for it.