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[L.1]

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A story of a collective farmer Alekseeva

When the Germans arrived, they kicked us out into the trenches, while they themselves lived in huts. He put me right in the oven twice saying that I wasn't taking good care of him. I didn't wash his laundry since there was an abscess on my finger, and he flared up at me, grabbed a knife, threatened to cut off my finger. I ran, he grabbed my ponytail, he was angry. He kept saying, "Woman, go do the washing". I said I wouldn't, and he came up to me with a knife, saying he was going to saw my finger off. I started running away again.

I used to come up to the stove, and he shoved me right by my collar - whoosh - with a whistle, yes, they were all the same, first sign of trouble - now whoosh, and - out. There was one, such a mischief.

Once he came, we were heating our stove, he looked and left. And I didn't throw any more logs. So my son and I were standing near the stove, suddenly he came in, grabbed my son by the collar and threw him down on the ground. I was scared to death and my boy got scared. He pushed us aside, went away, brought two logs and then ran somewhere again. I ran away from the hut, to hell with the hut. And he came from another house. They were waiting for their commanders and they wondered why I stopped heating the stove. He collected some logs and started throwing them into the oven. Then he went to catch geese. I ran to my neighbors, I was standing by their house and watching what would happen – whether he would get hold of a cow or geese. And he kept coming here for milk. He shoved me the pot, as if he showed me to give him milk. And then he wanted to milk the cow himself, but you couldn't really approach her, she hit him with her head. And then he took three geese. A goose remained. I went into the courtyard and I thought what to do with it, if I took it, he would come and kill me for it. I saw him rush again. I went to the Kondratyevs again, and saw – he took the last goose. And we could see everything from the window. He dragged it, looked everywhere on where to go.

[L.2] Another one ran to him, he gave it to him, and I kept looking where they would go, and he kept walking with it, carrying a goose around the yard, he didn't know where to go with it. He walked, walked, and went into the hut. So they ate 4 geese. And they caught chickens right with a stick – on the go, as they started throwing, they caught them. Or he took a pole from the barn and – bang – and the chicken was done with. And he took the chickens from Marfusha's right out of the closet. At least I hid seven chickens. And she had them in her closet, - she thought, perhaps, he wouldn't look – a policeman came, saw them and put them right in a sack alive, and the chickens were yelling.

Once I put my milk to sour. “Mother, mother – butter”, “No”, “Then what?”, “Milk”. “Gut”, he said, and went to pour it out and the bucket fell down and he spilled the milk. And they poured some rye at the Kondratyevs’ barn directly into baskets and carried it to the horses. And the mistress said, “What are you doing?”, and he said, “Nichts, nichts”, so to say, do not dare speak. Sometimes he would come to the hut and just start pounding and pounding with his feet, and the door was on a hook. And he also made a bolt, otherwise we would get cold in a trench and come here, and he was angry – go away, why did you come. They stoked the stove all day, and they could burn the hut, they fried something for themselves, cooked all day. Their food was bad. They were given 600 grams of bread, and the bread, though seeded, was somehow tasteless. They did not have any cereals, only beans and lentils, and peas were such that they wouldn’t be boiled soft. I already argued with him. He once shoved me by the stove, and I even started shaking.

Then they had a red cross, rather a robber’s cross – just real crooks. He didn’t say, “Take the dishes”, but simply started throwing and breaking everything, and just threw everything out of the oven. I thought that devil would break all the dishes. He once grabbed a steelyard balance from me and wanted to throw it, and I grabbed it and so we were fiddling with him and fiddling, he later wanted to beat me with the steelyard balance. [L.3] And I took away the steelyard balance from him despite the fact that I was old, and he was young, I took it away, and threw it into the manure, so that he couldn’t get it. He made me so angry that if they brought him to me and said, “Old woman, poke him”, I would poke out his eyes with a fork, for sure.

In Terniki, the entire village was evicted behind Maly Yaroslavets. The village was in the forest, they said that the partisans would come to you and the whole village was taken out. And when they were liberated, they said, a captured German was brought to them. The women attacked him violently – one poked at his eyes, another one shoved him with something, they literally went into frenzy.

He wanted respect, but if you didn’t respect him, he would do something bad to you... But this was just a pig, he was sitting all the time: a German soldier was kind, cultured. Come on, he demanded warm water. As soon as he got washing himself, he poured the full hut of water. And if he wanted to take it out, then you were running yourself, otherwise he would pour water right at the entrance and everything with some kind of malice. If there was a chest or a coffer, so he would strive, damn him, to spill some water on the chest. As if it was too hard for him to go out the porch. We just said, “Why the hell are you, prick, spilling water around? And he was just staring and getting angry. If you talked to him with a smile, although he did not understand, it was all right. But if you started talking seriously, he also got angry. He would reach right into the oven, drag whatever he needed, just grabbed the oven fork and went for it. He threw everything around, sometimes you got angry, yelled at them – it didn’t matter if they killed you, so let it be. They didn’t kill us, but they did beat us. One woman was beaten – so she turned blue and lay in the attic, she could not get up. And her little son stole a cigarette from them. And the German beat her till she turned blue.

And they all stuffed themselves with coffee. Once I said, "Mister, let me have some coffee." And they had such small mugs. I had some and spit, because their coffee was sooo bitter. He said, "Nichts, [L.4] it's war". They did not give us any sugar, but their cookies, good grief, were like a juniper, you chewed them and chewed, and weren't able to chew.

All they thought about was just to steal something. And, if our plane fell, they would certainly sneak something – either some boots or something else. Once our plane fell, they all jumped up, hollered, laughed like parasites, they rushed out unarmed and ran. There were two pilots. One crashed, and the other's leg was injured. He wanted to shoot himself, but only damaged his eyes and went blind. So a woman took him and fed him with a spoon, and he kept saying, "Mom, mom". Then he was taken to Maly Yaroslavets. And when their airplanes flew, they said, "Woman, a German airplane is flying", and they flew like bees here.

When they started leaving, they started setting fire to things, and our soldiers just entered. As soon as they lit a collective farm shed and then another one, our soldiers arrived. Our skiers came here too. We were sitting in the trenches, and they shouted, "We are Russians, Russians." They were wearing white coats, they ran towards us, and there were three trenches here. They said, "Where are the Germans? Far?" And they fortified not far off. We said, "Not far." And then they started firing heavily. We recalled all the saints in the trenches. We only thought how the Lord just brought them. The Germans didn't want to leave, but nevertheless they were made to. But then they were bombing our troops for two days, shooting so much that our soldiers kept falling down on the highway.

As the war began, they started bombing. Once they flew and kept dropping incendiary bombs. We took our stuff and scooted to the forest. "Keep quiet, keep quiet", we said, but in fact we were so afraid. During the day we had to work at the collective farm, and in the evening we ran, fires started here and there. They bombed both the highway and the railway, [L.5] but they would miss, only burned a lot of things.

Some Germans later said, "Nichts gut Hitler", that is he was bad. And sometimes they said that Hitler was gut. They would put up a portrait of Hitler. "Is he kind?", they asked. "He is", you said. "Isn't Stalin kind?", "No, he isn't". And then, as they started being kicked out, one of them pointed at Hitler and asked, "Is he kind?". Well, I said, "He is". And he told me, "No, he isn't kind, but Stalin is". Some Germans said, "Your Russian soldiers have warm clothes and shoes, while our soldiers are kalt." We had an officer, whose orderly said, "Woman, it's cold, I don't want to fight, ugh."

And once my son had to take a pass because nobody was allowed to walk around without one. He went to a translator. The latter ran to an officer, they talked for some time, and then they called him and ordered to sew shoe covers – sort of like felt boots. The officer put them on his boots and said, "Gut". The officers cleaned their boots till they shined, and over them they put on bast shoes and walked like that.

A German wanted to take off some woman's boots, but she didn't let him. He took one boot off, but he could not take off the other one and left. And all the same, he

left with one boot. When they tried to put on boots, it was a disaster. They kept kicking the threshold. My whole threshold was broken, since the boots were narrow, they barely fit, so they kicked trying to put them on. Or they cleaned them up and put them on the stove. I said, "Damn you, they will burn." They were wearing garrison caps, gray jumpers, thin ones. I used to say, "Your hat is not gut, you should get rid of it, our Russian hat is gut." And he rolled his eyes, "Nichts, nichts", he said. Once I saw a German wearing a woman's sweater, a knitted jumper. I said, "It's our sweater, the Russian one". And he said, "Nichts", but it was ours. Once the Germans came to us, all dressed in Russian women's sack-coats. And the last [L.6] bunch was wearing our sheepskins. We said they were Russian, and they said, "Nichts, nichts". They brought a whole cartload of something. They were sitting, and we, sinners, went to the cart to see what they had there. And when we started going to bed, they dragged everything to their place. I said, "Oh my god, they are taking everything".

Some of them were wearing glasses, they were very quiet. Once one of them came, babbled, babbled, I saw – they were starting to get ready. And they did not get ready as quickly as we did, they did so until lunchtime, it was so boring to look at them.

And as they were leaving, they started scouring, you could see them grab something, drag something else, and you were standing and shaking. "Why are you dragging everything?" They grabbed some stool, some dishes, "Where are you taking it all?" And they got embittered, they just grabbed things for what it was worth. Our guys once cooked soup on a fire. Here came their tanker, he just took off the pot and took the soup. I had a large cauldron, he grabbed the cauldron too and ran away. I asked and asked, "Give it back." They stole everything from us, no dishes were left. And the onions? There was some onion in our attic. So they started frying potatoes and kept coming. I thought, "Why are they sneaking around?" And then I saw him find the onions. They kept looking for sugar.

They were afraid of the partisans. If a German entered a hut and there was a man sitting there, he would immediately come up and take off his hat, checking whether his hair was cut short or not, "A soldier, a soldier", they said. They looked after the horses carefully, one of them brought his horse into the room, put some beds around the horse, and led it out through the porch. And once, when a prisoner brought and put another horse next to his, he got angry and stuck a bayonet in its leg – why did he put it next to his horse?

Then there was such an occasion in a village. They drove all the people into the church, both women and children. Everyone was afraid that they would be blown up, what would they do. And they set fire to the village and released the people, "Go, go, go outside". [L.7] And people didn't get anything out of their homes. And they put 10 mines in the church.

One of our girls fought with a German for potatoes. He came to their house and started looking for them, but she did not give them to him, he pushed her, and she took a rope with a ring, she hit him with it and pierced his temple. And he yelled at her, "Russian pig" and went away. And then the Germans laughed at him saying, "Go to that

Russian girl”. And he was looking for her, but she ran away to another house. In any case they were threatening us. And we got furious and said, “Well then beat us”. But they actually didn’t beat us.

When they were retreating, they took some people with them to Maloyaroslavets.

One woman was hanged in Ugodskiy Zavod, she was carrying some bread for her sister to the maternity hospital, but she was seized and hanged.

They robbed everything, I saw myself how they carried spring mattresses. They, bastards, had no soap. They took all our soap. And their soap was like clay, it didn’t wash anything. And he started washing his face, he, dirty bastard, didn’t have his own soap, so he took all our toilet soap.

The officers sometimes beat the soldiers. I saw it myself: an officer was walking, but a soldier was looking at something else and did not stretch out in front of him. And then he hit him, the soldier turned around. The soldiers honored their officers a lot. Once I was standing behind the stove, and an officer entered. And all the soldiers were sitting, as they figured out who that was, they jumped up naked and stood in front of the officer.

An officer took a packet of tea out of the cupboard, he opened it and put it on the table – that meant it became his. A soldier came, opened the oven, said, “Brot, Brot”, which means bread. And the bread was half-baked. I told him, “It’s not gut yet, you can’t take it now”, but he kept trying. I thought, “The fool will take it out – there will be nothing for himself or for us”, and the officer was looking for him – [L.8] he had sent him to get some straw. I showed the officer that he was there, in the hut. Well, he went after him, and he did not manage to take anything. And he already took the grip. And as the officer entered, he threw the grip and the flap.

The first time they came straight to the barn, I had some oats there. They saw empty bags, good white bags, looked – gut, and took them. They stole two watering cups with fat, we looked for them and they were gone. They ripped out the frames from the gates, took away all iron stoves – they just put them on the cars and took them away.

There were 9 people staying with us, two veterinarians. They brought lots of stuff, different devices: they had chisels, screwdrivers, braces, and the Germans took everything, both cleavers and axes.

And when they began to retreat, they started burning their cars.