

# THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF SAM EFFRON

## PART II

### Induction

After the holidays the winter was approaching. After Chanukah the winter set in with lots of snow and deep cold. I was approaching my nineteenth year, and father began to think about my military service. He decided that I should make an application for the appraisal of my age to the proper authorities. If my age is appraised as 21 years, then I would be called that year for examination for induction. Then, I might get a "third degree" exemption – because my brother Tanchun was in the army, I had a right to a third degree exemption. So I went to a certain committee for the age appraisal in Grodno. I was tall, not heavy. I had on a heavy overcoat and stood before them. They appraised me as 21 and I would have to go again in November to be examined as to my fitness for military duty. All of this happened during the summer of 1893.

Then the High Holidays came again. We went for the holidays to Amdur, as usual. In Amdur there were quite a number of boys whose time was up to appear for military duty. As a rule, this group kept together, and included me. After the holidays I was coming to town more often to see the boys. The closer the time was moving toward November, the more excitement there was with us. Some of them used to get drunk and march through the street, singing and sometimes getting into a fight, especially with the boys who had only a first or second degree exemption. Their argument was, "You are going to remain home near your mother, and we must go to serve the (Jare) fatherland." Any boy from a decent family didn't follow them. The troublemakers were those such as tailors, shoemakers, masons, or carpenters, mostly workers.

When I came to town, I kept away from them. The last week before November, on the market day, I came to Amdur. The gang found that I was in my uncle's house. Six boys came to see me, some of them half drunk. They began to argue with me as I refused to march with them to the representative of the Kahll of the town. The boys wanted some money from the balabatim because they were going into the army. They wanted to get into a fight with me because I refused to go with them. My father was there and my brother the dairyman, my uncle and his son. They warned those boys that if they wanted to fight, we were ready for that. So they walked away without a fight.

Time was getting close for my leaving for Grodno where the induction took place. Mother was crying all the time, as she knew that I would be accepted in the army, and my third degree exemption, because my brother was serving, would do no good on account of the quota. Every district or town had a quota, to give so many men to fill the standing army. Many young men among the Jews left the country before they were called up for examination for service. Some young men made themselves into cripples to not pass the doctor's examination. Some were crippled for life, too, just not to serve in the army. All of them that were rejected or were missing at the time of induction made the quota short, so the men that had exemption of the third, second, or first degree were taken in their place. So my third degree exemption didn't count, and I was ready to go into the service.

It was the early part of November, 1893. My father went with me to Grodno to the induction center. As to my recollection, we got there on a Thursday, and the physical examination was on a Saturday. It began at 10 o'clock in the morning in the military offices. There were military officers sitting around a large square table with secretaries. Two doctors weighed and measured and examined each man and gave the report to the officers, whether fit for service or not. My turn came in the afternoon. I undressed and waited in line to be called. When my name was called, I walked into the large room. I was put on the scale, measured, examined, and pronounced fit for military service. Then I put on my clothes and waited with the many of the men that were accepted.

We were waiting there until the evening, until the induction was finished for that day. Then we all took the oath of allegiance to the Tzar and the country, to endure privation and hunger and cold, and even to give our very lives for the Tzar and country. While we were all standing there and taking the oath collectively, following the words of the man who was giving the oath, and repeating after him that we would be ready to give our lives for the Tzar and country, I imagined that every one of the 25 boys standing there were thinking to themselves, "Dying for a country that took away all my rights. Hah!" But all we were able to do was to think and keep our mouths shut.

We were 25 Jewish boys from the district. The induction of the Christian men was about one week later. The Christian men, after they were accepted and sworn in, were given two weeks time to go home and get prepared for service. When they came back they were assigned to certain military units. But the Jewish men they didn't give time to go home and prepare. There was a reason. About 1880 or so the Russian government saw that many of the Jewish boys were leaving the country when their time came to serve in the army. So a law was promulgated that any father that does not produce his son for military duty when he reaches the age of 21 must pay a fine of 300 rubles. That fine was collected by the officials of the district. If the father was poor and had no money to pay, they came and took from the house anything that was of any value, for example, furniture, pillows, feather bed covers, blankets, brass candlesticks or copper utensils. They held it in a warehouse until the father comes up with 300 rubles and redeemed them. Otherwise, they were sold at an auction. So many of the men, in order to save the 300 rubles, didn't leave the country before their time came to produce themselves for induction. They presented themselves, were accepted, and sworn in as soldiers. They were given two weeks time to go home and prepare themselves and return in a certain date. But by that date they were on their way to America or South Africa. In those cases, the father didn't have to pay the 300 rubles. When the government saw this trick, it was decided not to give the Jews two weeks to prepare. As soon as they were accepted and sworn in, they held them in the barracks of the military units in Grodno for a couple of days, assigned them to units in different sections of the country, and whisked them away direct to that regiment. But anyone that made up his mind not to serve the Tzar and his country got away even from the regiment.

### **The Ostrolenski Barracks**

That Saturday night, when all was finished, we were taken downstairs to the street, were put in lines by twos, and a sergeant gave the order, "Forward march!" There were soldiers with fixed bayonets on each side, and also on horseback from the cavalry to watch that no one should run away. In this way we were escorted to the outskirts of the city to the barracks of the artillery brigade. We were assigned to these barracks until our departure to the regiments. About 10 men, including myself, were assigned to the sixth division which was stationed near Warsaw in the government of Lomza on the Narva River. Father sent word to mother that she shall come to say goodbye to her "musinici," the youngest child.

She came with her eyes full of tears, and so were mine. She brought me some underwear to take along. My father went and got for me a small cupboard with a lock to keep my personal belongings under lock on arrival at the place of service, otherwise everything would be stolen. He got me shoe polish and two brushes, for clothes and for shoes, and needle and thread. In the army a soldier must be a good tailor to patch his clothes, as the Russian government didn't give out new clothes. In the Fall, around September, the men that served the four years go home to the reserves. Of course they leave the clothes that they wore. Then the new recruits, on their arrival, got to wear the same clothes. One can imagine in what condition the clothes were left in by the outgoing reservists. Some of those suits with the original material disappeared, so all there was left were only patches, and then you had to patch the patches. There was an inspection of clothing every morning, especially during the first four months of service. So each and every soldier had to have needles and black thread.

While we were in the barracks of the artillery, the food for us came from the commissary of that unit. We got a ration of bread, three pounds for the day. At noon there was soup, a half pound of cooked meat and Kasha. I took the bread but I didn't eat the soup, the meat, or the kasha as I didn't feel like eating

the treif food, right on the first day. But I knew that I would have to get used to it little by little. We stayed in those barracks for two days. Father and mother stayed in Grodno for one day, and they parted from me crying. Father gave me some religious instruction: not to forget that I am a Jew and to observe certain Jewish laws, as much as possible, and God would help me.

When the time came to leave the barracks for our assigned destination, there were about 20 of us going in the same direction toward Warsaw. Most of us had those small clapboards. We carried them on our shoulders to the train. When we embarked on the train there was only one soldier, from the 102nd regiment in charge of us to take the whole cavalcade to the places where we were assigned. If anyone wanted to get away and not serve, he had all the opportunity to do it. The soldier in charge wasn't able to stop any of the men from leaving the coach at a station stop. There were many civilian people getting off and on, and we were in civilian clothes.

That train was the St. Petersburg/Warsaw train. She started at St. Petersburg, which is now Leningrad, and ran south to Vilna, Grodno, Kishnitsa, Sokolsky, Bialystok, Malkin, and Warsaw. We didn't go all the way to Warsaw. We stopped at Malkin and disembarked. About 12 men, including me, were assigned to the 22nd regiment of the sixth division that was stationed in the city of Ostrolensky. It was a distance of about 60 miles from Malkin. There was a branch of a single track running from Malkin to Ostrolensky, but the government said that for this small distance of 60 miles the new soldier can walk, in order to save expenses. But how can we carry our baggage such a distance? Our escort didn't know anything about our baggage, all he knew was to deliver us and the documents to the staff commandant of the 22nd regiment. We asked him if he will allow us to hire a team to take our baggage, and possibly instead of walking the distance, we can ride. He didn't object to that. Yes, he said, he would prefer riding to walking. So we got a Jewish expressman with a large covered freight wagon and two poor horses. The 12 of us climbed in with our baggage in the wagon with the soldier escort.

It was noontime and we started out for Ostrolensky. There was a good highway with a hard surface all the 60 miles. But 14 men including the driver was a little too much for the poor horses, and they were dragging along slowly. All the men began to think that the sooner we got accustomed to army life, the better. The only bad thing is that you have to be under the army discipline. Otherwise, you are provided with food for your stomach, you get some kind of clothes to cover your nakedness, and there is always a place to sleep – even if it should happen to be on the bare ground. So, we had nothing to worry about. Oh yes, I didn't mention, we got a little cash, too – 45 Kopeks every two months. That was just enough to buy shoe polish and needle and thread to patch our clothes, or rather, the government's clothes, that they gave us to wear.

For the first couple of hours we were doing a little talking. Each one had some small story to tell, just to break the monotonous time. As there was nothing else to talk about, some one started to carry a tune of the past religious holiday services. Some one suggested that I shall sing a Yiddish song. While we were in the barracks in Grodno, I was singing a couple of songs pertaining to the army life of a Jewish soldier, and everybody loved it. When I was a young boy I knew many Yiddish songs. I didn't have a very great voice, but I was able to carry a tune. So I entertained them with all I had. But after a while, the songs gave out, and we were sitting quiet for a while. Then everyone began to complain to the driver that he was going too slow, and why didn't he drive a little faster. But the poor horses were very tired. He stopped on the way and put on their feed bags and gave them some refreshments. It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon and we just made about half the distance to Ostrolensky. After the horses swallowed some food, we started again. Everyone started to make fun of the driver and his horses. We went off of the wagon to make it easier for the horses, and walked a while. The expressman was some kind of schlemiel. We called him Etche Maer, like a Galitzianer. Some of the men made him so mad and uncomfortable that he began to cry like a woman. Once he left the wagon and threatened to stay there if we didn't stop teasing him. I felt sorry for the man. Then it got dark. We were all tired, and some of the men fell asleep. He was dragging along with the tired, beaten two horses until nine o'clock when we finally came within sight of our regiment. It had begun to rain, so we were lucky that it didn't rain all the way. We paid him what we had agreed, and he went on his way.

We were assigned to a certain barracks to sleep overnight. The next day we were given our ration of bread. We got some hot boiling water in the clany and tea and sugar, and we had our breakfast. The bread was pumpernickel, and we had sweet tea for the morning. At noontime, a brass kettle was brought in the barracks with hot cabbage soup, and another kettle with greasy Kasha. This was placed on the concrete floor. There was no such thing as a mess hall. The soldiers ate in the same place where they slept. Every man had his own wooden spoon in the shape of a half cup, with a short handle of about five or six inches. A high grade lacquer or varnish kept the spoon sanitary. Each man bought the spoon himself. If he had no spoon, he could not eat. Every time he went to eat, he had to bring with him that spoon. You ate while standing, with the kettle on the floor and the whole squad around it. Each dipped his spoon into the soup or kasha and ate standing. Meat was rationed for every man, and was cooked in the soup. Then it was taken out two hours before dinner time and cut up and divided into portions, a half pound for each man. The cooks cooked the soup every day in a large copper pot, possibly 60 gallons, and it was for dinner and supper. Meat was given once a day, soup twice. It was inconvenient and difficult, the first time, standing with all the men eating the treif soup and meat. But that was only the first couple of days. After I got used to it, it didn't taste too bad after all. The greasy Kasha was very tasty. As for the soup, one day they would give cabbage soup with ground peas in it, and sometimes we would have millet or barley soup. The meat was always beef. Never pork. The kasha was buckwheat or millet, and always had a lot of grease in it.

We were at the regimental station there until about December first. While there, we didn't do anything. As yet, we were not assigned to a company unit. They were waiting until the whole new draft arrived which was two weeks later than when we came. The Christians, after they were inducted, they were allowed to go home and get prepared, which we were not. On the arrival of the new men to fill the ranks, I was assigned to the 13th company in the 4th battalion. There were three more new Jewish recruits in that company. As a rule, the Jewish men always kept together as much as possible. There was a fellow in my squad, just like me. He had a second degree exemption. So we became very close buddies. Our battalion was staying out of the "Shtale" for winter quarters in a small town called Pasa Mishitky, as there was no room for the whole regiment in Ostrolensky, in the new barracks. So the 4th battalion was sent outside, and stationed among private houses, in squads. So, when the new men arrived at the Shtale, the 13th company commander sent the army rig, in the charge of two men, to pick up the baggage of the men assigned to the company. The men had walked a distance of about 40 miles. The town was about two miles east of the German border. The town was just like the rest, mostly Jewish people. We were stationed, together the whole squad, together, ten men. It was a Jewish house. The owner was a harness maker. It was a double house. He was living with his family on one side. He also had his shop there. Our quarters were across on the other side, ten recruits and three noncommissioned officers: a corporal, an under-sergeant, and top sergeant. We had two good size rooms.

In one room there was a good size platform, about two feet above the floor. That was our bed to sleep on. Each man bought a good strong linen bag, about six feet long and 24 inches wide. We filled it with straw, which the company provided, and we slept on it. Also, each man had a heavy blanket to cover himself, which you bought it yourself. There was no sanitary plumbing nor public water supply. It was just like all the rest of the towns in the Russian empire. There were a few wells scattered about town. Anyone needing water went and got it in pails for the use of the day. For fire fighting, there was no such provision. As to a toilet, there was a privy vault in back of the house, or, sometimes, wherever one could find a place to relieve himself.

So, there in that house, one flight up, was where we received our basic training for four months. We received clothes as follows: A long gray coat, a pair of trousers, a jacket, and a cap with the number on the front, 22nd Regiment. On the lapels of the coat and jacket was the number 6, the division. For boots, we used our own. There was a black belt and a "bashlick," made of brown cloth. I can't describe the shape of it. They wore it on the back, especially in the winter in the very cold weather. It was protection for your ears and head so as not to freeze them in severe weather.

We were three Jews in the squad, my buddy and a fellow from Bialystok by the name of Lipshitz. He was the only one left to his mother. His father was dead, and he was supposed to have a first class exemption. But as long as there were not enough men to fill the quota, he was taken in. He was an intelligent boy, well bred and well educated. A good penman. But as far as the army was concerned, these qualifications didn't count much. All the army needed was good physical ability, but those qualities Lipshitz did not have. He was kind of a weakling. But he had money which his mother kept on sending.

We all received our ration of bread. A loaf of nine pounds that was for three days. It was made of ground up whole rye, just as it came from the grist mill. Nothing was added to it, only water. It was baked without salt. And it was baked, not too hard. When it was fresh, it was kind of soggy. The soup and the meat and the kasha were brought in by two men from our squad at noon, and again in the evening, in two brass, shiny kettles and placed on the floor. Each man went at it to help himself with his spoon. Our intelligent Lipshitz did not participate in the soup or meat or kasha. He was not compelled to eat by the officers.

### **The Military Way**

When we were settled down with everything, then the basic training began. The whole squad was awakened at 4 o'clock in the morning by the 3 non-coms, as they slept in the same room. The command was given, dress and get ready for inspection of clothes. Every man was inspected. The boots and the black belt had to be shined. The brass buttons had to shine like gold. Then the inspection of the coat, the jacket, and the pants with the many patches on them. If the corporal didn't like the patch, he tore it off, and you had to patch it on again until it was satisfactory to the corporal. Then they began to make a soldier out of you. First, to stay at attention. The under sergeant placed every man separate and at attention. He showed us how our standing should be, in what position for our heels and soles, body and head, and how to wear the cap on our heads. After he showed each one all the tricks, he gave the command "Attention!" So everyone remained as such, and he let them stay in this way for about five minutes. Then he commanded "At ease," and explained what it means: at ease. Then, "Attention!" again. He kept this up until about seven in the morning. Then, one hour rest. Then we were ready to have something for breakfast. So we made tea and black bread. Being hungry, it tasted good. Then from 8 to 11 o'clock, again attention, standing and turning in all different shapes and manners. At 11 it was rest until 12 o'clock, getting ready for (Obied) dinner. Dinner was composed of soup, meat and kasha. That was a good solid meal. Everyone ate the soup everyone ate with bread. After dinner, rest until 2 o'clock. Then on the go from 2 to 4. Then get ready for supper. We had soup with bread. No meat. In the evening we made tea.

As I said before, my buddy and me kept together, and we paid attention to all the instructions, and we did accordingly. But our intelligent Lipshitz didn't take it so good. First, he wasn't strong enough to execute all the mechanics of physical exercise. So he began to smear the non-coms with presents, and sometimes a little cash. For a while they favored him. But the captain of the company used to come in and saw how the new men were progressing. He noticed that Lipshitz didn't take part in all the training. He asked the non-coms why they neglected Lipshitz. So his presents didn't do any good. My buddy and me felt sorry for him. They used to wake us up 4 o'clock in the morning and begin physical exercise for three hours. When it came 7 o'clock we were all wet with sweat, especially for the first two or three weeks. It was very hard on every one of the new men, especially on Lipshitz.

It was too much for him. He expected to be allowed to go home on account of he was the one to care for his mother. There was some man from his district in the hospital. As soon as that man got well, the induction officials would send him back to the army in exchange for Lipshitz. But that fellow was still in the hospital, or he was sent home for 1 year to recuperate, and then to come again for examination. That happened to many men. So Lipshitz was in for the duration. His mother came to visit him several times. She was a good looking woman. When she left, she gave some presents to the top sergeant. For a

day or two he showed a kind of friendliness toward him. But he insisted that Lipshitz shall do better than he was doing.

As for my buddy and me, when there was a bottle of vodka on the table near the sergeant, we used to ask him for a drink sometimes. He would say, why don't you buy a bottle sometime, and treat us like Lipshitz does. Our excuse was that we haven't such a rich mother as he has. There was always plenty of tobacco on his table which Lipshitz provided. Quite often, we used to help ourselves to have a smoke from his tobacco. The non-coms knew of every man whether he had money or not.

When the captain of the company came in the rooms one of the non coms would give the command "attention," and everyone stood at attention. Then he would ask a question "healthy Brethren?" Then everybody would answer in unison, just like one "Wishing good health your high title." He was a married man and had no children. Most of the army commissioned officers were not married. A lot of them had common wives taken out from the brothels. The name of our captain was Krivich. He had the title of Stalis Capitan. He used to come almost every day to see how we were progressing.

After about one month instruction on standing and marching and all the physical exercise they gave us rifles, the same type of a rifle like the Springfield here in the U.S. That was something new in the Russian army. Until 1893, they had a rifle that loaded only one cartridge at a time. The new rifle had a magazine that you loaded five rounds at one time. I suppose it was copied from the Springfield. Also, it was lighter by one pound than the old rifle. Then we got new instructions began about the rifle: name the parts, how to take care of it. And the principle thing, how to use it – either by firing or with the bayonet. Then they took us out in the city square. There, we marched in single file, then double, with full pack and ammunition. And then double time on the run. At noon we were glad to be back in the house, and we were tired. After dinner, we had a good rest for one hour, and then back to work again.

There was a lot of mental work to be memorized, and to know perfectly. For instance: all the names and the titles of the Tsar's family, and how to salute them. Also generals – two star, three star and four star, and how to salute them with their titles. Then to know all about guard duty. There were many things to be memorized. When the captain came for inspection and put a question to a man while he was on guard duty, he had to know the answer, otherwise, the sergeant would get a calling down from the captain and the sergeant would turn this man.

There was a manual of ethics in book form. Anyone that took an interest in his work looked up all the questions and memorized them all. Then the time came when the sergeant gave a lecture and then asked for answers which he had already told several times what they were. But many of the Russians could not take it in their heads. When the sergeant told him the answer half a dozen times, and then turned again to a "Chernigove Chachol" and asked what the name of the Czar or Czarina was, he would stand there mute and didn't know what to answer. The man next to him couldn't help him unless the sergeant told him to do so. Once, the sergeant told me to give him the answer. I did. Then the sergeant told me to give him a slap in his face. I did, but very carefully, that it should not hurt him. Then the sergeant turned to me and lands one on my cheek, so hard that he nearly knocked me out. "That is the way you should have done it. Obey the command of your officer!"

I was writing often to home. My father wrote often to me, he answered my letters. I also wrote to my brother Tanchun, the one that was serving near Moscow. He was serving in his third year. He was a company drummer. I often had letters from him. That winter I wrote a letter to brother Dave in America. I asked him to send me a few dollars. In a few weeks, I received five dollars, that is, ten rubles. The mail came to the company, of course. The ten rubles came from the Bank of Jarmulowsky on Canal Street in N.Y. When that letter addressed to me came from America, they reported it to the captain. My sergeant told me that the captain wanted to see me. The corporal went with me. There, the captain showed me the money. And there was in the letter included some advertisement from a steamship company, that if any one wanted to go to America, they should travel on their ship. So the captain thought that my brother had sent me a steamship ticket to come to America. After I explained to him that it was not a ticket, and only an advertisement, he was satisfied. That was the only five dollars which I received from brother Dave. Father used to send me a couple of rubles once in a while, but I knew that money was very scarce at home

so I didn't ask for much. I had enough to eat, and a place to sleep. And I had the rotten clothes that first winter. But the next winter we got better clothes and the rotten ones we wore were turned over to the new recruits who came in the fall.

During that first winter when March came, our training was all outside. We marched with full equipment, in different positions, many times on the run, and also, goose stepping. Then there was plenty of athletic work, like jumping over barriers. They didn't give the recruits any rest. The only day we had off was Sunday. Saturday until noon was military drilling, and in the afternoon was house cleaning. We went over the beds and under. We had to scrape the floors, not with a machine or electric scraper, as is now done in America. (Though in 1894 America had no such thing. I remember in 1916, when I built 2½ South Clinton Street, Kuklin the floor scraper did it by getting down on his knees.) We did it the same way, on our knees. We went to a blacksmith and he made for us the scrapers. Two men were assigned to the job, and it was hard work to go at it, inch by inch. When you got through, you were sore all over your body. Each week there were different men at it.

Evenings, when there was no military work, the Russians used to sing folk songs. We also played games of different kinds, like cards. The older soldiers played cards as a gambling proposition. The officers were great gamblers in card playing. While in winter quarters we didn't know much about the officers' gambling in cards. But in the summer, while in camp, the officers' tents used to be in the rear of ours and we could hear what was going on there. Our battalion's commanding officer's name was Stankewitz. He was married, had a wife and two daughters over 18. At the start of the month he received his wages, but after the 20th, many days his family had nothing left for food. He was gambling away his wages. The daughters used to approach some soldiers, which they knew, and asked for a loan of some rubles. He was a gambler, but he was a good officer to the men in the battalion. When he was commanding the whole battalion, the four companies together, which was later in April, when the young soldiers were drilling together with the old, the day was a cinch. All he did was to command for ten minutes, then gave the command to rest and smoke. Our company commander didn't like it, as he was a strict man for drilling. But he could do nothing as the battalion commander was a higher ranking officer. So he kept quiet.

We were now approaching Spring. The Jewish Passover was near. There were in our company eight Jewish soldiers. The Jews of that community saw to it that all the Jewish soldiers would have a place where to eat on Pesach so as not to eat the treif food. My place was by the harness maker, across the hall. I had two meals a day for eight days. Some of the Jewish men did not accept the invitations to eat with the Jews. All the Jewish men were excused by the commander for the first two days of Passover. That was the order of the Russian military high command. When their Easter arrived, they set all the Jewish men to work, whether K.P., guard duty or work around the officers. They said, you had your holiday, now we want to have ours.

After the Easter holiday, again we were doing all kinds of drilling, and they began to talk of going into camp for the summer. That was a distance from the town of Mishenez of about 75 miles. On about May first, each man received a package. First of all, the new men received different clothes. Not exactly new, but in good condition, without patches. Then we got linen for two upper shirts. Undershorts? That word wasn't in the Russian dictionary, as no one wore any. They gave us leather for one pair of boots. You had to take it to a shoemaker to make them up. The same with the shirts. But most of the men used to sell that material, or send it to their homes, and at home some made up a shirt for them. The army had boots already made up, but not many wanted to wear them. They were uncomfortable, and they tore into pieces within one month, especially when they got wet. So most took the leather. Some of the Jewish soldiers became regular merchants, buying from the soldiers their leather or linen which they received from the army. Of course they were doing it on the QT, as a soldier was supposed to serve the Csar and not run a private business. But a bribe of a couple of rubles to the sergeant and he was not looking in that direction. Some of the soldiers would sell the shirt off of his own back.

## **Training at the Ostrovno Camp**

When May first came we were no longer recruits as we had finished our basic training, and we were drilling together with the whole company. After May 15th the whole battalion began to make preparation to leave the winter quarters of the town of Mishenetz to go to summer camp for the three months of June, July and August. The camp was on the outskirts of the city of Ostrovno, a distance of about 20 miles east of Ostrolensky. The company horse and wagon took our personal baggage, like our small trunks with our belongings, down to that camp. The company marched on foot with all their equipment, which consisted of a small box covered with calfskin leather. All around it was fastened with straps on to your back and around your waist, and to the wide belt which everybody wore. In that box there were extra shirts, another pair of boots, and socks or foot wrappers. Also in there were all the materials for cleaning the rifle. To your belt was attached a small spade or hatchet, a water flask, and a copper pot with cover to get food in. The long coat was folded over your shoulder to the right side. Then you had your rifle and the bayonet. All together it was quite a load to carry all day on the march. After May 15th our company left Mishenetz for Ostrolensky to the regiment. There we stayed in the barracks for several days. Close to June first we left for camp.

That camp was very large. The whole sixth division was there and several Artillery brigades. When we arrived there the tents were all ready. Each tent accommodated 16 men and had wooden platforms on each side which were to sleep on, with a bag of straw. There was a rack in the center of the tent where the rifles were kept. A small trunk went under the where we slept. If we wanted to do some letter writing we sat on that small trunk and the bed was the table. Of course a soldier is used to anything, so it didn't take us long to get used to tent life.

The drilling began. First there was company field drilling, then battalion, and sometimes regimental. The commander always had in mind the end of the summer when they and would have maneuvers and stage sham battles. He had to have the men ready for that. The captain used to take us out about nine o'clock in the morning with full pack about three or four miles distance from the camp. He was on horseback. There we drilled as if in sham battles, all the non-com officers were watching for an enemy surprise attack. Many times, on the run, we would lay down, shoot, and then up to march and run again. We would return back to camp at twelve or one or sometimes two o'clock for dinner, to the same food as always. A portion of meat, a soup of cabbage, barley or millet, and potatoes. In the summer in hot weather there was no refrigeration of any kind, anywhere. You can imagine the taste of the soup or the meat. Many times, instead of the meat or the soup, we went to the canteen. There, there was a kettle with boiling water for tea. Then we bought sugar and tea. We had our meal of bread and tea, my buddy and me. But you couldn't live on bread and tea right along. So in time you got used to the mess. It was hard going, but after drilling in the field a person didn't care much about the taste of the meat and soup, as long as you had enough to fill your stomach.

## **Cholera**

That summer an epidemic of cholera appeared in the camp. One soldier was stricken in our company. That was a terrible illness. When that disease got into a town or a large village, many people died. The doctors had no cure for it and it was very contagious. If a person wanted to curse someone, he would say "the sickness of cholera on you." That meant sure death. It mostly appeared in the summer, especially where communities were living close together. When it happened to one in our company, the doctor came and looked at him and saw what kind of sickness it was. He ordered that he be removed immediately to the Lazaret hospital. The hospital was about one mile away from the camp. It was an army hospital. So the Sergeant assigned four men from the company to take him over in a stretcher. My buddy and me were two of the four men. He was covered up with a blanket, so he could not be seen. So we carried him all the way to the door of the hospital. A doctor came and took a look at him. He was burning up with fever. He didn't let us take him inside the hospital, but there was a small house about one quarter

mile in the rear of the hospital. He told us to take him there. The doctor assigned an orderly to attend him. He died the same day. The one that tended him died the next, we were told.

When we returned to the camp, our clothes were fumigated. It seemed that a fear fell on the men of the regiment, as several cases like that happened. All the men thought that Death is facing everybody. There was no singing or high talking among the men. Everyone was going with his head down, awaiting the end. The order was given that no one shall drink water unless it was boiled. To build up the morale of the men, every evening the regimental band of 60 pieces stood in front of the camp playing from six o'clock until 10 in the evening. All the men were there, some of them dancing and the rest looking on. That busted up a little of the sadness of the men. It seemed that the sickness was checked as not many men died. My buddy and me when we retired from that job of carrying that man and took off our clothes for fumigation, and put on different ones, both of us went to the regimental canteen and bought a small bottle of vodka, some cheese and salami. While we ate and drank we were saying that this may be our last meal, because everyone dreaded that word "cholera."

## **Learning to Shoot**

In the month of July the regiment began rifle practice on the range, to test how good each man and each company was on marksmanship. The shooting range was about three miles from the camp, next to a forest in the distance. There was a highway running in front of the targets, that was detoured while the practice was going on. The target wasn't a bull's eye target, but a board six foot high and 30 inches wide with a picture of a German soldier pasted on. Each company was practicing by themselves. We started out in the morning at about nine o'clock. Each squad carried a target and the ammunition all that distance to the range. Then practice began. They called four men onto the firing line at about ten feet apart. The target in front of each man was about 200 yards distance with the picture of the German soldier.

The company bugler gave the signal to fire. Each man had five rounds. He aimed at the target in front of him and fired. In the rear of the target there was a deep trench. Four men were sitting-there in the trench. When the bugler gave the signal to cease fire, the four men came out from the trench and each one examined the target. With a small, round red flag he showed where a bullet landed. If there were no marks of a bullet on the target, he just waved the flag – nothing. The captain or another officer was always there to mark the score. Each man announced in a high voice: "Captain!" and then all his titles, "I put in three (or four or five) bullets in the target!" Of course, the officer was watching the target, as were you. Then he marked down your score. Then again, four men go to the firing line, until every one in the company went through the practice for the season. They gave each man 50 rounds. The one that put in 45 out of the 50 bullets through the target was called a "strelak," or first class marksman. At the end of the season they would shoot for a prize.

It used to take until four o'clock until the whole regiment finished shooting practice. Then, a certain officer asked each company to give 5 men to go in the woods and pick up the bullets that were fired. There were altogether 80 men, without rank or file, and only one officer in charge. So there was a lot of fun. The officer gave commands on how to search for bullets in the woods. So everybody repeated his commands with sing-songs. He used to get mad by saying "I will send you men to the disciplinary battalion for not obeying my commands." When we returned to camp it was about five o'clock. The soup was cold and the meat had no taste. Even the kasha didn't taste good on account of it was cold. We didn't go every day to the rifle range, only twice a week. The rest of the week there were different duties.

About the 15th or 20th of August the army gave a two week vacation to all the army. No obligations of any kind. The large estates in the surrounding area they needed help for the harvest. They knew that the soldiers were getting two weeks vacation, so they came to the companies and asked for so many men to help with the harvest. Each man got paid a certain price. That was voluntary for any man who wanted to go. The pay was 50% for the man and 50% for the company – there were men left in the company to take care of things, so they were entitled to some of the pay. From our company 25 men went

to an estate to help harvest the grain. We were all under the command of a sergeant. On arriving there, we were lodged in a large barn and slept in a hay mow. We had a cook with us to cook our food. Bread we brought along with us for three days. Potatoes and some cereals the estate furnished. Milk and cheese came from the estate's dairy. Meat we didn't get much, but a couple of times they gave us some lamb. That wasn't as good as beef. It was too greasy.

Our work in the beginning consisted of the harvesting of rye. We had among us some big men from Latvia. At home they were farmers, and so they knew how to scythe. They were going out with the scythes and cutting down the ripe, standing rye. Then a group of men followed them, picked up the rye and tied it into bundles. Next, they stood them up in shocks. After two or three days we came with large open rigs and took those shocks into the barn. When we got through with the rye there was the oats to be cut and then buckwheat. That was the last crop.

We stayed there about three weeks. We didn't like it very much, but it was good for a change to get away from the discipline of the life of the regiment and company, and the drilling and saluting wherever you went. All I earned during the work days was not quite five rubles. As I said, we received only 50 percent of what the estate paid. Some Jewish soldiers went home on leave for the two weeks. They paid their fare on the train themselves. Otherwise, when the army gives leave to a soldier, the army gives a free passage.

## **Sham**

When the vacation was over, the army – or better to say the sixth division – started to prepare for the September maneuvers. The yearly maneuvers involved a large army, possibly eight divisions. Among them were infantry, artillery, ulans, sappers, and cossacks, with all their equipment. The sham battles covered great distances of territory. First, we were fitted out with all our gear. Everything was checked and double checked, the clothes, the boots, and the ammunition, just like you were going out to a real war. Then, one morning, we were on the march with full loads on our backs, possibly, altogether, 50 pounds or more. After marching until three o'clock in the afternoon, we arrived at a place to camp for the night. There the sappers laid out the camp for all the regiments. Each company had their place. The two buglers were at the head of the company. They stood there, one at each end where they had to pitch their small tents. The whole company fit in the space between the two buglers. The order was given "Stay! Stop!" First thing, the rifles were put in place by standing them, six together. We had been instructed how the rifles should be placed while on the march, then we unloosened the straps from the box which we had on our back and the belt with the two small leather boxes of cartridges attached to it. We then began to feel relief from the burden that we carried all day. Then the command came, "Pitch your tents!"

Each man carried, tied with straps to the box on his back a half tent, which was a piece of canvas about seven feet long and four feet wide with holes on two sides. Each man also carried a stick five feet high, one inch thick, and a straw mat. Two men built the tent. With a certain string they united the two halves of the canvas. One stick was in front, one in the rear. Two small sticks driven in the ground to hold the ends tight, and that was our tent for two. The straw mat was placed on the ground to sleep on and the box was used as a pillow.

When we were settled, dinner was brought from the kitchen. Each company had a kitchen on wheels that followed the company. First came the meat. While on maneuvers, each man got one pound of meat each day instead of the half pound. Then soup and kasha as usual. After a day's march, it tasted good. The command was no drinking of water, only if it was boiled from the kitchen. We used to make tea. Four men together got one cup of the copper pan's hot water. We put in a little tea, a small piece of sugar, and we had tea. After dinner everyone rested.

Then reveille was sounded by the bugler, and we went to sleep in our tent on the straw mat. If the weather was nice, you could fall asleep. But if it rained there was no sleep, as the ground was too wet to sleep. When the real sham battle was going on an emergency call could be given by the regimental drummer at any hour of the night. Within five minutes, everybody was dressed in the full marching outfit

because the enemy is making a night attack. An army must be ready for this emergency, and must dress at night in the dark, and in five minutes we had to be in line with full equipment for commands.

Then there was guard duty. After a day's march you were assigned as a guard. There were a certain amount of men and an officer in charge. The guard post was toward the enemy. Men were placed in positions a certain distance from one another. That was called the guard post. The men stood there, still, and watched that no spies should get through the line. The enemy had similar guards on the other side. If the guard saw something coming, he gave the command "Stay!" and if it didn't stop, he fired. There was the rear post also. That was about 12 or 16 men. Each man on the post stood for two hours. Then another took his place, and he went to rest for four hours. While he was resting, he was fully dressed, and couldn't even take a snooze. The officers in charge of the guard were going around from post to post to watch that no one should fall asleep. If it happened that a man was asleep on his post he was taken away immediately for a court marshal, and sent to the disciplinary battalion, during peace time. In war time, he was put in front of a firing squad.

While we were in camp on maneuvers, one night an emergency call was given, at about two in the morning. The command came from the non-com officer to get up and dress. Everyone jumped in a hurry and dressed, and within five minutes the whole company was in line. Then "Forward march!" in the dark of course. We marched until about 4 a.m. and then the order was given to stop. We stood there, possibly for an hour, and it got very chilly, for a strong wind was blowing. Our coats were folded, and they didn't allow us to unfold them. Also, there was no smoking, since the enemy might see a light if any soldier struck a match to light a cigarette. So we stood there until day break, when we began to hear the sound of the artillery in the distance. Then the command came again to march. When it became light we were told to lie down, for possibly 20 minutes. Then up again to fire at the enemy – although you couldn't see any enemy to fire at. March again and lie down. Then up again and fire. We could hear the artillery get closer and closer. Then, at about ten o'clock, we could start to see the enemy lines some distance in front of us.

One of the opposing armies wore a white cover over their hats so as to be recognized as the enemy. Here, the battle was between the infantry for position. The shooting at one another was all blanks. We fired, then lay down, shoot, then up and on the run, shooting and running towards one another. The non-coms were in the front of the line with fixed bayonets, and everyone followed them toward the enemy with bayonets ready and on the run, and hollering with all their strength "Uray! Uray!" while passing through each other's line. And that was the end for that night's emergency attack, at about two o'clock in the afternoon. We walked about an hour and made camp for the night. Food was ready from the rolling kitchen. It tasted good after such a long strain.

We stayed in that camp for a day and a half. Then we were on the march again, with some small skirmishes with the opposing forces, and into a new camp for the night. They always managed to bring us to a camp not later than three o'clock. Then there was plenty of time to clean up from the dust, clean the rifles, and rest.

After wandering around through many villages and towns in several states, one Friday afternoon we arrived in a place where there were a lot of meadows. We camped there, the whole regiment, and stayed there until Sunday, noontime. Before we had our dinner, a barrel of about three or four gallons of whiskey was brought into the company. Every man got a good drink. We were told that there was going to be a lot of marching to be done that afternoon and at night. We had our dinner and then the order came: dress, break camp, and get in line. At four o'clock we were on the march. We kept going for about an hour. Then stay, smoke, and rest. Then on the march again. We came to the river Narve, and we would have to cross it on foot. It was beginning to get dark. The river Narve, is, I guess, about 75 feet wide, and quite deep. They picked a place where the depth was only between three and four feet. While we were waiting on the bank of the river, it was recommended we take off our clothes, tie them in a bundle, and fasten them to the top of our rifles, and be ready.

The cavalry, on their horses, stood in the river and made a channel on each side as we walked across. As soon as we crossed we put on our clothes and waited on the other side until all the units

crossed, especially the artillery with the cannon. There were several batteries of artillery, with six cannon to each. The river had high banks on each side. They had a job to get down to the river and up the other side to get up the bank. But, for an army during war time there is no such thing as "it cannot be done." The infantry waited until every cannon was across and found their positions. The infantry followed after them. It was about midnight when the entire army started to move again. We were glad to be on the move as a cold wind was blowing from the river. We had been sitting or standing on the banks, and it was very cold. We didn't have a chance to refold our top coats, as we expected the order to march again.

We started, in the dark, through very hilly country. We came to a place where there was a pass between high mountains. Our commander of the battalion, Stankovich was his name, I mentioned him once before, he was on horseback. His horse stumbled, and he fell to the ground and was injured. The army marched on. I suppose he went to the hospital, which followed the army. Toward daybreak it was still dark, but we could hear the sound of artillery in the distance. When it began to get light in the east our regiment was ordered to form a line of attack.

Then the order was given to fire at the enemy. There were different kinds of firing. If the enemy was a far distance away, the firing was done in unison. That was called "Galpom." Sometimes the command was given to half of the company to aim and fire, and everyone in that half discharged his rifle like one, even though no one could see the enemy. You aimed in a direction and the shooting was done in unison. When the opposing forces were closer, so that the men could distinguish them, the command was given to choose a target and fire quick. Then we were suppose to lay down, get out our spade, dig a little ditch, and put the dirt in front of you, to make a small protection against the bullets of the enemy. The noise all around was terrific, as the artillery was in the rear of us, on a high position, firing their cannon over us. In this way we got up, ran about five or ten feet and dropped down again and fired at will. Then, wait for a command as to what to do next.

If one of the commanding officers supposedly was shot, then another officer gave the orders by saying "listen to my commands now as to what to do." Sometimes the non-commissioned officers would give the commands if there was no commissioned officer around. In this way we were advancing, foot by foot, until both armies came close. Then the order was given to fix bayonets. The non-coms jumped to the front and hollered, "Follow me!" The opposing lines met and passed one another, hollering "Uray! Uray!" Everyone was so exhausted from running so fast that fighting with the bayonets couldn't be done – everyone had all he could do just to carry his rifle. Finally, the regimental bugler sounded the tune to cease fire, and that was the end of the maneuvers. Dinner was ready, the same as usual: one pound of meat, cold soup and kasha. Everybody was eating with gusto after being on the march for over 24 hours.

## **Back to Ostrolensky**

We went back to the regimental Shtabe, to Ostrolensky. That was about the first of September, 1894. On arriving there, the soldiers that served four years began to prepare to be released into the reserves. They started to carry on by singing and teasing the one yearlings that they had only finished one year of service. "Just think how many more years you must stay here and eat the cabbage or pea soup and kasha, while we're going home." Some of them were not happy to return home because they had nothing to do when they got there. At least in the army a man had his belly full. Coming home, the families were so poor that there wasn't enough to eat. Some of the non-commissioned officers remained to serve another four years in the army, as they were better off in the army. They had nothing to worry about. Those non-coms were called "Kapushnic" or "Garashnic," a cabbage man, or a peas man, because he liked the soups of cabbage and peas. That is the reason he remained to serve again in the army. Some of the men who had money bought civilian clothes. But for the ones who weren't able to do so, the army gave them a worn out pair of pants, a jacket, and a coat, all without buttons. They were cut off before the clothes were given out. The buttons were brass, and they had a value, but not those clothes.

On September fifth the reserves left for home. Those of us that remained felt kind of blue in our faces. We were in the regimental barracks in the city of Ostrolensky, a distance from the city of about

three miles. There used to be a forest, but the government cleaned out the trees and built the barracks to accommodate the 21st and 22nd regiments. But there still was no room to accommodate two entire regiments. So two battalions, for winter quarters, went out a distance among the villages. Now, while in the barracks, we didn't have much to do except some time K.P. or guard duty around the barracks. There was no drilling of any kind.

## **Even Ground**

The officer in charge over all the grounds and the barracks couldn't see so many men going around doing nothing, so he decided to keep them busy. He provided work for them – of course, without pay. All the ground was natural, just as the forest was before it was cut down. In some places, there was hilly. The hills were sandy. In other places, there were deep ravines. The contractors hadn't straightened out the ground, except where the barracks stood. Between the barracks the remaining ground was as nature provided, with hills and ravines.

That officer asked each company to give him 10 or 15 men. There were a few wagons on four wheels around the barracks, but no horses. He provided shovels, and the wagons were filled with sand from the hill. The shovels were put on top of the load. Some men took hold of the shafts, and everybody pushed toward the ravine. It was a hard push and pull. There was no road, just soft sand. When the wagon came to the ravine, it was unloaded, the same way it was loaded, with the shovels. It was slow progress, as none of the men killed themselves. It was like playing, or having some fun. One shift worked two hours in the morning, and another two hours in the afternoon. There was a lieutenant in charge of the work. Eventually, it was noticed that some of the hills were removed, and the place between the buildings leveled. For Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the Jewish soldiers were excused and we went to the city. My buddy and me went to a shul in Ostrolensky for both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. After services we came back to the barracks. On Yom Kippur we didn't stay in shul all day. We took long walks through the city. In the evening, we went back to the barracks.

Around the 20th of October, 1894, one morning when we got up, we noticed that officers were wearing a black arm band on their sleeve. We were told that the Czar Alexander the third was dead. On the same day, in the afternoon, the whole regiment was assembled and we took the oath of allegiance to his son, Nicholas the second, as Emperor of All the Russias. The Jewish soldiers of the regiment were given the oath in Hebrew. It was given by the regimental Commander. He read from a paper with Russian letters, but it came out as Hebrew words. Everyone repeated, word for word, and then the regiment was dismissed back to the barracks. That day we didn't push the sand wagon. A day later, when we came back on the job, the lieutenant in charge saw that the work was going slow. So he decided to give the men piece work. He marked off a small part of the hill and told them, if you finish this, to clean it up, you can go back to the barracks. Every man got busy and began to work. In a short time it was cleaned up. But the next day he gave them twice the amount. So everybody laid low again and didn't kill themselves. That work was going on for a couple of weeks.

It was the end of September, 1894. On one of the estates they needed help, so they came to the regiment and asked who wanted to go to work for two weeks. Fifteen men volunteered, including myself and two other Jewish soldiers in the outfit. A sergeant was in charge. It was 15 miles from the regimental Shtal. We walked, and so it took us all day to get there. We walked.

There were a few Jewish families living close to that estate. The next day they found that there were three Jewish soldiers in the company that came to work on the estate. It was the eve of Simchas Torah, so they approached the sergeant and asked if we could go see them that evening. We did, and we had a grand time among the Jews. People gave us the best of food and drink. Then, at just about 11 o'clock, a messenger on horseback came from the shtal. There was an unexpected mobilization of the army of that "Okrug." We were to rush back immediately to the regiment. The order was given: "On the march!" Before we left, they filled us up with challah and cake to have on the way. We started out at midnight and walked all night. When we came to the regiment no one knew what was going on.

Mobilization? What for, no one knew. That questioning was going on all day. Toward evening the command was given to go back to the barracks. Nobody knew what it was all about. So we remained in the regiment, no more going to work on the estates. During this time the soldiers didn't do anything except K.P. or guard duty. But neither one very often.

In a few days, our battalion was ordered to go to winter quarters, to a large village on a state highway, between Ostrolensky and Lomza. It was just half way between the two cities. There were quite a few Jews in that village. They had a shochet there but no rabbi. There were two general stores conducted by a Polish man. The population was mostly Polish. There was a Catholic church, and a priest with his deacons, and a couple of nuns. The 13th and 14th companies were billeted in this village which bore the name of Miastkova. The 15th and 16th were staying in two different villages, not far away. A temporary bath house of steam was built in this village and it accommodated the whole battalion. Once a week, every man of the battalion came to the bath house to take a steam bath. That was compulsory. Also, every man was inspected by the battalion doctor for venereal disease once every month. We were billeted in private houses, if there were two or three rooms in the house. There was assigned to each house about eight or ten men. The usual platform was erected, with long bags filled with straw to sleep on. The company's kitchen provided two meals, dinner and supper. There was also a bakery to bake bread for the men twice a week. Each man received a loaf of bread of nine pounds, for three days. There used to be some men who were big eaters. They nearly consumed their portion of bread in one day, and then they used to go around begging from their comrades, sometimes even stealing a slice. The old soldiers didn't have much to do, especially in the winter in the village, so they were always thinking about food and women. There was no drilling for the older men, just sometimes K.P. or guard post.

A small distance from the house where our squad was staying there was a large estate. They raised potatoes, and they stored a lot of potatoes in the field during the winter. How? They dumped a lot of potatoes in a heap five or six feet high, about two or three hundred bushels. They covered them with rye straw, and on top of the straw they placed a lot of dirt. In this way, the potatoes were kept from freezing. Those potatoes were to be sold to distilleries to make whiskey. So the soldiers from our squad got to them. At night, two men used to go with a bag and brought back a mess of potatoes. They dug into the bottom of the pile and made a small hole that wasn't noticeable. They would buy a pound of bacon, cut it into small pieces and fried it. They made the mashed potatoes with plenty of grease in it. We had a great feast on those potatoes, but it didn't last very long. The workers on the estate found out that the soldiers were stealing the potatoes and a complaint was made to the commanding officer. He didn't punish anyone, but he ordered that it would not happen again. In a short time, the potatoes were removed from the field.

That was my second winter in the army. I used to get letters from home, but nothing important. They used to send me two or three rubles once in a while. But they were poor. They were existing. They had hardly enough to eat, so I didn't expect much from them. I wrote several letters to brother Dave in Poughkeepsie, asking for a few rubles, and once he sent me five rubles. I didn't need much money, and if I got a couple of rubles, I held on to it tight, having in mind that I might need it some day. I found that I was right. It came a time later that I was in need, and I had money for the purpose.

That winter, we didn't have much to do, except K.P. Sometimes I was sent with a couple of men to cut up the wood which was brought to the commander of the company. When we finished, his mistress would bring out a bottle of good whiskey, and gave each man a drink. Once a month the whole company used to go out to camp overnight in the field, provided that the temperature was not lower than five degrees above zero. The company used to take a walk with full pack about ten miles. Then we put up a large tent. A lot of wood was ordered. A log fire was started in the center of the tent. Everybody was up all night as it was too cold to sleep. That was done to get the men used to camping in the field in case of war. Even with the fire, most men were freezing all night.

**END OF PART II**