



A Dad's memories of World War 2 through the Eyes of his Daughter.

The Dad: Simeon Chodyko
Born 24 May 1924
Mogilev - East Belarus - Russia
Died 2 July 2008
Newcastle - NSW - Australia

Simeon was the eldest of 9 children, his brother Vasil lives in Russia, sister Raissa born in Russia 1928, died in Australia of cancer 1997. His sister Tania died in 1940 of typhoid age 4, there was also a baby boy who also died age 2 weeks of cot death and another brother Anatolia age 5 who died after he fell off a horse. Simeon's other 3 brothers are still in Russia. Ivan drowned in 1993. Nicholi and Demetrius live with their family in Siberia.

In 1940 Simeon lost an aunty, his grandparents, 2 brothers and a sister.

Simeon's parents Nicholas and Alexandria were part of collective group of farmers that traded goods with each other. What was left from harvest was shared between workers. People worked for food not money and would get what they were given. The government would get the first 1/3 of everything – they paid 30 eggs a year taxes and 300 litres of milk to own a cow.



Food traded was potato, cabbage, mutton, pig, milk, eggs, honey and fish. They used a see saw weight to get water out of wells and carry it half a kilometer to use in their homes. In winter they would cut a hole in the ice to wash the clothes in the river.

They lived in log cabin with wooden floors and a straw roof. Beds were stone and

clay bunks, built over the stove and everyone slept together to stay warm. They had no power and used kerosene lamps for light and split soft wood for fire

Age 6: Simeon enjoyed watching horses, helping around the house and farm.
Age 8: Simeon walked 4km to go to school with no shoes but in winter it was 2km he could walk across a frozen pond – once he fell into the ice pond and took him 2 hours to get to the school.

His schooling was 4 years of primary school then 4 years of middle school.
Age 13: Simeon went to High School. It was an 8km walk each way on his homemade oak skis.

There were 14 Subjects at school - geography, math, geometry, German, French, English, sport, singing, craft and painting, biology and human anatomy, chemistry, medicine, and industrial skills.

In his teenage years, Simeon loved catching fish from the frozen river with his bare hands and working on the farm with his family. Simeon made traps and hand lines from the hair of horsetails.

Simeon's uncle was an accountant and tax agent who let him work addressing the envelopes and other clerical duties. Simeon many jobs included farmer, fitter turner, clerical accountant, milk collector and volunteer brigade services.

Age 16: a notice was given that Russia would go to war. Age 17: Simeon and his family lived under German occupation. Simeon saw his uncle shot in the head for not wanting to work with the Germans. Early the next morning, Simeon was taken from his home to fight against the Germans. Simeon had no training, no shirt or shoes just his overalls and a jacket.

Both parents died believing Simeon was killed by a land mine in the war. It would be 10 years after the war before Simeon's family would learn that he survived.



The Nazi's attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. The Red Army had 4.8 million troops stationed in the western military districts. By the end of the war 5,756,000 ethnic Russians lost their lives

Simeon was one of 1600 men that made up the Stalin Grade 64 Division - only 45 would survive the war.

Simeon was part of 453 Regiment Penalty Corp, Group 6: more than half did not have uniforms. Simeon made shoes from bark to protect his feet. 2 weeks into the fighting, Simeon was placed in the team to find the position of the enemy and sent to the front line to fight with just a rifle and army hat. Simeon remembers an open field with a row of barbed wire followed by row of mine fields then trenches guarded by artillery bunkers.

They crossed the rivers and swamps crawling on their bellies with sound of German gun fire all through the night. Heavy fog covered the ground, the Germans secured the trenches, the Russian soldiers were surrounded. 6am the command "Short run forward to Berlin" was given

Simeon, aged 17, watched men dropping around him, the dying calling out for help with no one to help them. After 3 days of shooting, the Russian officers panicked and tried to form groups, but the Germans then bombed the groups.

Simeon broke away from his group in search of more ammunition and fell into the German trenches and grabbed food. With the thick of the fog the Germans didn't realize for a while that he was the enemy. The German soldier spoke to Simeon and he responded in German marching amongst them. Once the fog lifted and they realized he was in civilian clothing, he was taken prisoner to the bunkers and asked for information about the weaponry.





Over the next 3 days, 45 prisoners were collected, 15 heavily wounded. Simon had shrapnel from a mine blast in his knuckle. Once prisoners were questioned they were transferred 100km from the battlefield in to the POW camp at Berezino Mogilev region

After 5 days with no food or water they were given 1 litre of soup but couldn't eat it. They spent 3 months at this camp and were given 1 piece of bread between 8 men, and soup once a day. They were given 1 packet of smokes a month which Simeon traded for more bread. They stole a horse for meat.



German Bread



They were then moved to **Stalag II-B** which was a German prisoner-of-war camp situated 2.4 kilometres (1.5 mi) west of the village of Hammerstein, Pomerania (now the town of Czarne, Pomeranian Voivodeship, Poland) on the north side of the railway line. It was built in June 1941 to accommodate the large numbers of Soviet prisoners taken in Operation Barbarossa. The 45 men were all kept in 1 room.

In November 1941 a typhoid fever epidemic broke out an estimated 45,000 prisoners died and were buried in mass graves.

A few months later, groups of 28 prisoners were transported in the back of trucks to unload the barges. They were given as much bread as they could eat. The work was hard but Simeon put on 28kg in that month.



Simeon remembers being sent out to collect mushrooms. He also worked as part of a woodworking crew, chopping wood for buildings. They worked 12 hour days and washed on Sunday. A German officer smacked Simeon in the mouth for being too slow repairing floor boards.

The Americans landed 8 bombs into the 4 buildings on the campsite. Simeon received a cut to the back of his neck in the explosion and was taken to the German hospital for treatment. Of the group of 28 prisoners, 4 were killed that day. After he was released from hospital he had more freedom to move around the camp. Simeon had to remove dead bodies and unexploded bombs from the buildings. There was no water for washing for 2 weeks. The Germans then transported a group of 45 prisoners in a Red Cross cattle train. All were placed in the same carriage and they only travelled at night for 5 days.



The prisoners arrived at the Swiss boarder along the channel. They dug trenches as the walked from the Swiss border into French territory.

Simeon worked for 2 months in the French kitchen for Red Cross where they finally removed the shrapnel from his knuckle. In the kitchen he was able to have as much soup as he wanted. Simeon had 8 litres in one day and was still hungry.

In May 1944, a German officer was given the order to shoot the 24 prisoners. Simeon and another man were taken to the shower block and forced to their knees. Simeon spoke German to the soldier and said “we are all the same, just men don’t kill us” – the officer struck both men with the back of his gun and left. When they regained consciousness the war was over and they walked free.

My dad would seldom speak of the war and lived in the moment. As I got older and went fishing with Dad, I asked him each time to tell me a little about what he remembered of the war.

Dad would tell me that he saw enough hatred and sadness to last many lifetimes and often just change the subject.

Over the years I would jot down little memories that he shared and finally 8 years after his death, I have put together my pieces of faded note paper so others could get to know my dad.

He was a simple man with a big heart, a gentle soul that never had a bad word to say about anyone. My dad was grateful for all he had and would openly share his life with others till the day he died.