

A Chat with "Charlie"

By Esther (Herschman) Rechtschafner

This is interesting material, which was received from a Christian Englishman, who is of Lithuanian background. His Grandfather had come from Sveksna and had told him much about it. The article Sveksna: My Town had provided him with important historical information, and some information corresponded with what his Grandfather had told him. An "MSN CHAT" provided additional information.

It became clear to me that his Grandfather was a Nazi. (As understood, his name has been changed).

Here are two key sentences from this CHAT:

1. In particular there is a small valley in Sveksna which has a small stream running through it. He witnessed there the murder of a group of Jewish people, he said it was an awful sight to see, and the stream ran red.
2. I would like to tell you though that my grandfather was in the SS, I often have wondered whether he partook in the brutal atrocities as something he could not talk about. He always told me he saw so much, but would never tell me if he did anything to any of the people. He told me about the rejection of the Jewish population before the Germans and the war came.

Here is the actual CHAT:

CHAT "CHARLIE": 11 February 2008

"CHARLIE":

Hi Esther?

It's "Charlie" here, we've mailed regarding Sveksna. I'm available to chat but must go around 4:30pm GMT. Would be lovely if we could perhaps chat. Ill be around so please bear with me if i do not reply straight away.

ESTHER:

Thank you for calling. I have a bit of time now.. May I ask you a few questions, please. When did your Grandfather leave Sveksna? Have you ever been there?

"CHARLIE":

My grandfather left Sveksna during the war. I have been there yes.

ESTHER:

Where do you live now? How did your Grandfather travel during the war? What general route, by what kind of transportation?

"CHARLIE":

I live in the UK. My grandfather was at first fighting for the Russian army until he deserted.

He left while there was severe fighting near what is now Kaliningrad Oblast.

ESTHER:

We live in Israel. My Grandfather went from Sveksna to Manchester England at about the turn of the century. Did your Grandfather return to Sveksna before he left for England? How did he travel?, escape from that area?

Please forgive my dumbness! Where is Kaliningrad?

"CHARLIE":

My grandfather as I said was drafted into the Russian army at first, I know that he was a translator and for a little while munitions driver. He was involved in fighting in Kaliningrad (a small Russian enclave between Poland and Lithuania).

He deserted the Russian army and headed towards Germany, where he was captured and drafted into the German army.

At this point he was taken back to his home country to fight....

ESTHER:

How did your Grandfather find out about what happened in Sveksna during the War?

I know when he was taken back he was used as a translator to begin with near his home town, during which time he witnessed the decimation of the Jewish population within the Silute and Taurage region.

ESTHER:

This is all extremely interesting for me. Do you know if there is a way I can transfer this chat to a document in order to save the information which you are so kindly writing me?

"CHARLIE":

In particular there is a small valley in Sveksna which has a small stream running through it. He witnessed there the murder of a group of Jewish people, he said it was an awful sight to see, and the stream ran red.

I would not mind writing all this in a document for you and mailing it, there is so much to tell not only before, during but afterwards too...

ESTHER:

Tell me did you find Sveksna to be a very attractive place when you were there? Do you still have family there?

ESTHER:

I would really appreciate it, if you could do so. Thank you for your kind offer!

"CHARLIE":

I don't have any family in Sveksna anymore, I have much family still in Lithuania, but the majority trapped in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

I would like to tell you though that my grandfather was in the SS, I often have wondered whether he partook in the brutal atrocities as something he could not talk about. He always told me he saw so much, but would never tell me if he did anything to any of the people. He told me about the rejection of the Jewish population before the Germans and the war came...

ESTHER:

Are they still in Kaliningrad? Do they speak Russian or Lithuanian there? I have a copy of the Sveksna telephone directory of 1938. Would you like to see it? I can email it to you?

"CHARLIE":

Yes they are still there, they speak Russian, many of the people there are Baltic people dispersed by war.

Yes I would love to see.

ESTHER:

How did the Lithuanian population of Sveksna react to what happened to the Jews?

"CHARLIE":

Before the war I know that there was resentment towards them, because my grandfather said many people didn't trust them or like them because the majority of the town businesses were under Jewish people (apparently).

ESTHER:

Do you know the approximate date of what happened at the stream? Is this the stream/river that is in Sveksna? Or in the outskirts of the town?

"CHARLIE":

You have to remember that this area of Lithuania I think was Memel which was a colony of German folk before the war.

"CHARLIE":

I have no idea about the date, it was 1998 I was last there, so it's hard to remember, I'm sure it's in the town....

ESTHER:

Did you find the town attractive because of the Duke's castle and park and the nice grounds and gardens and the stream? I am referring to natural elements.

"CHARLIE":

I don't know I suppose I'm attracted to it because of the history/roots of my family.

"CHARLIE":

I can't remember what the area is called where the murders took place I know one was at Inkakaliai .

ESTHER:

The Memel area was conquered by the Germans before they actually went into the rest of Lithuania.

"CHARLIE":

That's correct.

"CHARLIE":

Inkalkaliai is on the road from Sveksna. That is where the women and children and few men who were left in Sveksna, after all the men had ben round up and taken, were taken and murdered.

"CHARLIE":

That's right..

"CHARLIE":

It's so hard to remember some things because my grandfather has been dead for sometime now...

"CHARLIE":

About how many families live in Sveksna now? Is there modern housing. 1998 is not a long time ago. What made you want to go to see Sveksna? I hope that I am not asking a very personal question.

ESTHER:

I can well understand your Grandfather for not wanting to answer all of your questions.

"CHARLIE":

My grandfather until independence was not allowed into Lithuania, we went in 1998 for the Baltijos Jura festival I had a relation from Klaipeda singing there... It was very interesting as all of my family met there. We went to Sveksna to see my grandfather's house where

he grew up, he showed me the stream, talked about the Jewish population there, battles nearby, and we moved on, I think he knew

"CHARLIE":

..that he would not go back there again in his life...

ESTHER:

People can be forced into doing what they don't believe in. This happens very often here, in the Israeli army. It can sometimes be a problem caused by political views.

"CHARLIE":

I understand.

ESTHER:

Do you speak, read Lithuanian? I studied Latin in high school and can see the resemblance in word endings. Was your Grandfather happy to go back to his boyhood home? Did he meet any people there that he knew when he was young? What was his name?

"CHARLIE":

My grandfather was very happy to go home, he didn't see anyone he knew, many people he would have known would be passed on I suppose or moved.

ESTHER:

Did he have problems of nationality when he got out of the German army?

"CHARLIE":

No he was injured badly and was captured by the British.

"CHARLIE":

He was brought to England on a stop over to the states, for some reason they kept him here...

ESTHER:

This is all very interesting and thrilling for me. I would appreciate it so very much if you could write it in an email and send it to me. Perhaps you would like to have it written down for your family to be able to read and know?

"CHARLIE":

I think if I ask my family I would be able to find more information, unfortunately the older members still in Lithuania are now passed on too, but I have photos I think somewhere and family I can still ask.

ESTHER:

What does "kept him here" mean. Wasn't he free to do/go where he wanted to?

"CHARLIE":

He was a POW and too ill to travel on, he was blown up in a tank during battle.

ESTHER:

All that you have just written me now, is very important to me. I thank you very much for it. Of course I would like to know as much as possible. Did your Grandfather show you the Jewish neighborhood when you were in Sveksna? After he recuperated was he a healthy person?

ESTHER:

Do you speak/read Lithuanian?

"CHARLIE":

I would be able to tell you more about his movements during the war but I lost the document, it is possible to obtain another from the Deutsche Bundearchiv.

"CHARLIE":

I can't remember seeing the Jewish area, he told me he had a Jewish friend but name and age I have no idea, he was ok in health I suppose until an accident here and then he was not so well.

"CHARLIE":

I speak some Lithuanian I've forgotten most of it, reading yes a little too, I speak better German and Russian.

ESTHER:

I am sorry but I must go now. I thank you so very much. I hope to get this information in an email from you. I will send you the telephone directory page. If there is anything else that I can help you with, I will try to do so. I hope you understand that this chat is so very exciting for me . Thank you very much! ESTHER

"CHARLIE":

Aciu labai Esther, malonu jus matyte.

"CHARLIE":

Your so very welcome and I will try to find what I can. It has been an absolute please talking with you.

"CHARLIE":

pleasure sorry hehe

ESTHER:

What language did you speak with your Grandfather? What does what you have written aciulabai- malonu jus matyte mean please?

"CHARLIE":

I spoke Lithuanian when I was younger and Russian.

"CHARLIE":

Malonu jus matyte means pleased to meet you.

"CHARLIE":

Kalbu niekad nemokesi per daug - one language is never enough you know.

ESTHER:

In Hebrew we say SHALOM for good-bye. It means PEACE

"CHARLIE":

Viso gero good bye in Lithuanian

"CHARLIE":

Take care and will speak soon...