

A RUSSIAN DRAMA

SEVEN YEARS OF TORTURE.

A woman's story of seven year's of tortured life in Russia was told in a neat little cottage at Brighton-le-Sands yesterday, says the Sydney "Daily Telegraph," of the 28th of November.

Through horror after horror, often starving, and not knowing whether she would ever again see her husband in Australia, Mrs. Sarah Saffar, with her two little girls, faced death and destitution. The family's reunion aboard the Demosthenes yesterday was the climax of a drama of real life.

While her husband was preparing a home for her in Australia, Mrs. Saffar supported herself and her children in the town of Goldingen, in the Baltic province where she was born. Came the invading German hordes, and the population were herded like sheep in trucks and carriages, and despatched they knew not whither, toward the centre of Russia. Mrs. Saffar carried a baby in her arms, and her two other children clung to her skirts.

At Riga they were led and housed for a while, and then they were sent off to Brodijansk, a village in the Crimea. There they struggled along as best they could.

When the revolution came, the village was the sport of the contending forces. One day it would be pillaged by the Bolsheviks and another by the anti-Bolsheviks. Soon the barren shelter in which the family lodged had no glass windows; they had been shattered by shot and shell, and replaced by bullet-holed boards.

Relatives, neighbours, and friends succumbed under the onslaughts of marauding bands. One day Mrs. Saffar's mother was killed. At last her baby boy died of starvation. For the sake of the other two children the grief-stricken mother struggled on.

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Sometimes the marauders would cast villagers into the sea; often the villagers would cast themselves in. And when morning came relatives would go to the edge of the water to seek the bodies of those whom the mourned.

Horses' flesh was eagerly sought by human beings. Once Mrs. Saffar begged two beans and boiled them in water, so that her children might live. Some days not even beans could be got, and the little ones lay down, crying of hunger. Death was taking toll in hundreds.

All the while not a word had come to Mrs. Saffar of her husband. One day she received a document from the British Embassy which showed that he was alive and seeking her, but this knowledge was turned into an instrument of torture when she found she was unable to get away. Two years later she set out for Smolensk, which she reached after travelling for four months, sometimes afoot, sometimes in a cattle truck, often on the verge of starvation and despair.

At Smolensk she found shelter in a disused railway carriage, and made up cigarettes, which the little girls sold to passers by. At last, aided by a kindly traveller, and then by the British Consul, she and her children got away to London, where her passage was booked for Australia.

Russia was an unhappy land when she left, said Mrs. Saffar. The Bolsheviks had gained the upper hand, and there was comparative peace, but the people were being fed on empty promises, and he who got a sack with which to make himself a suit was a happy man. Barter had taken the place of the worthless money, and many were naked and starving.

Mr. Saffar, the husband, considered that Australia, in which he was building his fortunes, was worth fighting for, and he bears in his body the wounds he received during three years' fighting in the A.I.F. He appeared a happy man with his family round him yesterday. Of course, they have to start at the bottom rung again; but husband and wife will start together, and in a free country.