

SOUTH PEEL'S PEOPLE

By **RON DENNIS**
Staff Reporter

MISSISSAUGA (Lakeview) — If Mike Horodenka had not been a professional dancer and folk singer, he might never have been subjected to the atrocities of World War Two. But incongruity is a part of life.

Born in Hungary in 1920, Horodenka shone in his early life in the art of dancing, acting and folk singing. He so impressed a famous Hungarian theatrical director at one point, that he was financed through the National Theatrical Academy.

All went well until he reached the age of 19 — the year he joined a singing and dancing troupe and was on tour in Germany — the year the war broke out.

The perfect age to be conscripted into Hitler's army, Horodenka says "it was not a question of politics that I was drafted."

"I had none. Being on stage, my job was to bring laughter to people's faces."

But he was to see very little laughter in the years to come. By 1941, he was at the Russian Front in a German Panzer division.

By the end of the war, cold and hunger were intimate acquaintances of the young

Horodenka. "I can remember times when the temperature went down to 40 or 50 below zero," he recalled.

Once, his division entered into a Russian village in pursuit of Russian soldiers. "We had some free time so my friend decided that he would like to wash.

The two soldiers, filthy from the hardships of battle, found the village well and his friend proceeded to haul up the bucket when he noticed a cave hollowed out just below ground level.

"My friend was curious, so I lowered him in the bucket to have a look and then followed him down," Horodenka recalled. What they found in the small cavern was a soldier's dream. There, in the cool semi-darkness, stood barrels of Russian Vodka.

Tired and thirsty, the soldiers needed no prompting.

Soon it was evident that the Russians had returned to the village and that fighting was in progress. "I was worried we might be classed as deserters but when we found out that the Russians had pushed our divisions back out of the village, we knew it would have been suicide to poke our heads above ground," said Horodenka.

Four years at the Russian

Front was rewarded with a five-year prison term when he returned to Hungary in 1945.

Three months later, he had escaped from the prison and from Hungary, went to Germany. But during his stay at the displaced persons camp there, the call of the French Foreign Legion reached him and within a year, he found himself in Indo China. It was there in a hand-to-hand bayonet-thrusting fight, that a vicious machete blow nearly severed his head.

Very little hope was held for his life. But two friends carried him back to camp and after recovering sufficiently, he was shipped back to France.

By 1953, Horodenka was in Canada—but not before he had been in and out of Hungary illegally, played professional soccer in Germany, and became married.

He arrived in Canada, the master of eight languages—none of which was English. He made his way to Toronto and then to Toronto Township where he now works in the maintenance department at the Huron Park Recreation Centre.

The only remnants of his former life show in his hobbies, which include landscape painting, tenor banjo and wood carving.

PEEL COUNTY — BIOGRAPHY — HORODENKA



MIKE HORODENKA

Making a comfortable life for his wife and three children has not been easy in a country where English is the predominant language but

Mike Horodenko is happy. His philosophy: "As long as I enjoy good health and am able to support my family, I am happy."

Photo by Mike