

Iziek Lifsches



This is a picture of my brother Iziek Lifsches, taken in Bielsko in 1936.

I had four brothers and a sister. Michal was born in 1905, Heniek in 1906, my sister Hanka, or Hanna, in 1911, I in 1915, Iziek, or Izajasz, in 1917, and between them there was one more brother who died.

Before the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, I was enlisted in the Red Army, and Iziek was called up for the so called reserve drill. And there war met us and we didn't return home, becoming, as you call it, front-liners instead. I served on the Ukrainian front and there we were demobilized and sent away – we were to join the Anders' army. All those who came from Western Ukraine were demobilized with us, as 'unreliable element.' That was early 1942.

We were enlisted in the work battalions, the so called 'stroybats' [Russian stroityelnyy battalion – construction battalion]. They told us we would join the Anders' army and instead we found ourselves in Novosibirsk as stroybat members, building a metallurgical plant at minus 40 degrees Celsius. And there, a group of 200 soldiers, we mutinied and organized a strike.

Among us was Lucjan Szenwald, I remember, he was a famous writer. We refused to go to work. A district military prosecutor came and, surprisingly, asked us what we wanted, so we said we were professionals and had nothing against working in the stroybats – but in our professions. To our surprise, 24 hours later the military prosecutor personally arrived with some buses and those buses took us to boarding houses where we were given jobs consistent with our professions. And that was an episode that could have well ended tragically.

Iziek was still on the front, somewhere near Moscow. And from there, he was also sent to the trudarmia, to Tashkent. We met many of our friends in Novosibirsk. One was a guy named Sternlicht, from Bielsko, his wife worked in the canteen, gave us some extra food, and it was there I learned that my three brothers, Michal, Henryk, and Iziek, were in Tashkent.

It was 1942. And so, illegally, me and a whole group of people, we hopped on a train carrying Polish soldiers released from camps, and we rode towards the Anders' army, towards Tashkent. Eventually I found myself in a place near Bukhara where they told us to pull our pants down and said, 'about turn!' End of story, they checked whether we were circumcised. By that time, Jews were no longer admitted into the Anders' army.