

Mayer Rafael Alhalel With Fellow Camp Workers In A Jewish Labor Camp



The photo shows labor camp workers from the camp near Sveti Vrach in 1943. I'm the young man standing wearing a dark vest and with a wide smile in the center of the photo. I am holding a white mug for food, so probably the photo was taken during lunchtime. I remember that we were around 300-400 people in the first and second camp. We were divided into groups: a Vidin one, a Vratsa one and a more general one including workers of Jewish origin born in Northwest Bulgaria. Of course, each group had its platoon commander, something like a supervisor. Our group, the Vidin one, had a very vicious and cruel supervisor. In the first days of spring 1942, he humiliated us a lot: he hit us, shouted at us, swore at us, called us anti-Semitic names like 'chifuti'. He always punished someone who had stolen the bread of a fellow worker. The psychological attack discontinued after a month. We worked there for around ten months. He made us sweat our guts out, we were his slaves. We had to haul 15 wagons of stones from the excavation site we were digging. It was only after we made it so deep that we couldn't be seen from outside when the strange supervisor gathered us all and said, 'Guys, the sweating was up to here. I trust you now. From now on I will protect you and you will protect me.' So now we worked very slowly and leisurely in the big excavation site because no one from the outside could see what we were doing. When one of us noticed that the head of our supervisor was approaching, he would make a signal and we would all start working very hard, while our supervisor started swearing at us and calling us names. When his boss would leave, we would stop working and start playing belote with the supervisor. But that story doesn't have a happy ending. In summer 1942 we were given five to six days of leave to visit out families. During that time the camp was moved from Sveti Vrach to the nearby village called Belitsa. Many of us were absent and there weren't enough Jews to carry the baggage of the others as well as the common tents. So, our 'rude' supervisor also helped them move the camp. Naturally, at that time his action was more than strange and unforgivable. His chiefs started suspecting him and fired him. He had incidentally revealed his sympathies towards us. That was the end of our holiday. It was only after 9th September that we learnt that our strict supervisor was also a UYW member, just like us. But he became a supervisor in a Jewish labor camp, because he was very poor and needed the money