

Ladislav Porjes In The 6th Labor Battalion Of Jews In Svaty Jur



In this photograph I'm standing eighth from the left. The photo was taken in the Svaty Jur labor camp, into which I was drafted on 3rd October 1941. The 'Slovak State' had decided to resolve the problem of young Jews in two phases: firstly to use up their manpower to the last drop in labor camps, secondly to load them onto cattle wagons and entrust their final liquidation to a foreign territory, 'Generalgouvernement Polen,' its German protectors. On 3rd October 1941 I entered Svaty Jur, which was a small town between Bratislava and Pezinok. The plan was that after some time we'd be included on a transport to concentration camps in German-occupied territory. In Svaty Jur we were housed in wooden barracks infested with ants and fleas, and were armed with picks and shovels. We were given a mess tin and a tin spoon instead of cutlery. There was one washroom, two latrines, and no source of potable running water. From the perspective of some sort of military discipline, it was basically a farce, because no one took it seriously. The guards were Aryan non-commissioned officers, partly former convicts, partly people of weaker intellect, who weren't deemed by the authorities to be worthy of service in the regular Slovak army. One of the 'sergeants,' who had in civilian life been a soda factory owner, was a lunatic - he even had a permanently manned machine gun installed into the window of his camp quarters, aimed day and night at the wooden barracks of the 'sixth-battalioners,' because he was under the delusion that the Jews want to kill him. We of course weren't allowed to leave the camp, associate with the Aryan populace, we weren't allowed to reach any military rank, we were all designated with the title of 'laborer - Jew'. We weren't allowed any leave, the only exception being the death of an immediate family member or a court summons. However, even in these cases, we had to be accompanied on our leave by an Aryan guard, whom we had to pay in advance all expenses connected to the journey; and so if we didn't have the necessary means, we weren't granted a leave of absence. The daily regime consisted of ten hours of toil for the Moravod Company, draining marshes. We were helping build the Sursky Canal by Svaty Jur. Our daily pay was one and a half crowns, which was

just enough for a roll, soda pop and five cigarettes. In the evening we cleaned our muddied uniforms with steel brushes, which was forbidden as damaging of government-issue property, but it was much more effective and faster than washing it in icy water and government-issue soap for two crowns. The nights were half-filled with unrequited erotic dreams, with the other half being filled with furious scratching and futile catching of thousands of insatiable fleas that infested our cots. Occasionally our fitful sleep was augmented by nighttime alerts and assemblies or equipment checks.