

# David Kohen At The 60th Anniversary Of The Liquidation Of Jewish Forced Labor Groups



This is a photo of a gathering in Plovdiv in front of a monument on 18th September 2004. We were celebrating the 60th anniversary of the liquidation of Jewish forced labor groups. In the photo I'm the fourth from left on the right side of the monument. On 8th September 1944 we heard that the Russian army was nearing. Meanwhile I was sent to work at the office of the water management construction department in Smyadovo. I got an order to prepare a poster for the welcoming of the Russian troops. I had no political training and I wrote the first thing I thought of. So it read: 'Welcome, dear guests!' A man argued that they weren't guests, but liberators. However, what I wrote was hung as a slogan above the street. First came a reconnaissance automobile with machine-guns fixed to it to see if there were any troops nearby. A crowd of villagers flocked to the car. One of them mounted to one of its footboards and made a speech. There was also a group of women in black head-cloths, who were standing near a well crying. A Soviet officer asked why they cried and he was answered that in the well the bodies of dead anti-fascists had been thrown. We were quite excited on this day. Motorized infantries came with trucks after that, I managed to mount onto a truck and I went thus to my fourth forced labor group. The guys from these groups were hitch-hiking the trucks; they were jumping into them and singing with joy. It was this way that the forced labor groups were disbanded. I got onto a truck and reached the ninth forced labor group where the guys from Sofia were. The Jews there were playing instruments and dancing ring dances around the Soviet soldiers, who begged to make space for them to move ahead. All of us were enchanted with joy. When I got back to my forced labor group I saw one of the workmen with a knife, who was ready to tear the canvas off our tent. I took his hand and stopped him. He wanted to have his revenge, but I told him it was our property now and didn't belong to the previous government any more. The people were ready to work off their bad temper on the belongings.