

Sabat Pilosof And Aron Alkalai In A Forced Labor Camp



This is a photo taken during my work in the forced labor camp in Transka Klisura near the town of Breznik in 1942. I am first from left and next to me is my friend from Dupnitsa, Aron Alkalai.

In 1940 I appeared before the recruiting committee. I was approved as an artillerist. However, the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed and they didn't take me in the army. The Jewish labor groups were created. I was allocated in the Seventh forced labor group in Samokov. In 1941 I was sent to such a forced labor group in the village of Rebrovo, Sofia district. In 1942, I was already allocated to the village of Transka Klisura, Breznik district, and in 1943 I was sent to Dupnitsa. In 1944, I went to the village of Isvor, Lovech district. In Dupnitsa I dug tunnels which were meant to be used as shelters during air raids. I worked at road construction sites in the other places. It was very hard work. We dug with our hands using picks and spades, removing the earth and stones in wheelbarrows. All the forced labor camps started at the beginning of summer and ended in early November. The rest of the time I spent in Dupnitsa. I used to work at home as a shoemaker. In 1944 I was in the Jewish [forced] labor groups until the beginning of September, when I ran away and returned to Dupnitsa.

I can say that in Rebrovo we were much better off than in the forced labor camp in Transka Klisura in 1942. This camp was close to the Bulgarian-Serbian border. We built a road between the Serbian towns Surdolica and Tran. The food there was awful. We lived in tents even during November when it was snowing. There was no chance for us to receive packages. Only once a parcel from Dupnitsa reached us successfully. We were about to be happy, when we opened it and found out that everything inside was moldy. Because of the insufficient and bad food, we often went to the neighboring villages to buy cheese and potatoes. We were sold even boiled potatoes. The money we had was just all that we could take from home. We didn't have any visitors. Because of the close border, we were guarded by the police.