

Mayer Rafael Alhalel With His Friends



This photo was taken in the Jewish quarter in Vidin, Kaletu. Some of my friends are Bulgarians such as the third man from above to below, his name was Tsanko Urmanov. From above to below are Haim Paparo, Jacques Koen, Tsanko Urmanov, me, Marko Primo and Isak Benaroy. I remember an anti-Semitic case from my school. I had a friend, a Bulgarian, his name was Tsanko Urmanov and his family was rich. He had a Jewish girlfriend. One evening, I went out with him and my best friend Haim Paparo for a walk. Haim's grandfather was a rabbi in our synagogue. Haim and I were neighbors and we often went for a walk together. That evening a Legionnaire approached Haim and I, and ordered us to make the sign of the cross. Tsanko defended us and they started a fight. In the end the Legionnaire ran away, because Tsanko was a big boy. The next evening the three of us went for a walk again and Tsanko opened his coat and said, 'Look at what I bought today!' And he

showed us a dagger. He said, 'If someone tries to threaten you again, I'll kill him, I won't think twice!' Around 29th August, all of us, around 300 laborers, already felt that our freedom was approaching. In other words we anticipated the coming of 9th September 1944. And that feeling strengthened when we saw the German troops withdrawing from Bulgaria along the road near our camp. They were going to Yugoslavia to take part in the fighting there. When we saw them, we stopped working right away. What's more, a group of 30-40 people, mostly from Vidin, decided to escape from the labor camp. We were Jews, members of UYW, from various cities: Sofia, Plovdiv, Vidin, Ruse, Pleven, etc. From them I remember my friend Marko Primov, Simcho Kohenov, also from Vidin, but I don't remember any other names. At that time I wasn't a UYW member yet, but I was a follower of their ideas, unlike Marko Primov, who was a member. Those of us who escaped went first to the village of Sokolovo, which was near the camp. We weren't afraid of getting caught, so we weren't hiding, and we didn't move only at night. We hired five to six men with carts to drive us through the mountain roads to Lovech. We paid them with the money we had collected, which had been sent to us by our relatives. The food in the camp was never enough and we had to buy more food from the people in the nearby villages. We usually bought hominy, potatoes and cheese. Thanks to some of those villagers, who sold us food, we received news on the political changes in the country. We moved fast across the forest and reached Lovech. From there we couldn't get on a train so we hired a truck to get us to places close to our hometowns. I personally, wanted to go back to Vidin.