

THE WAR BEGINS



After the invasion of Poland, Canada declared war on Germany on September 10, 1939.

Within a short time, the Jews of Poland were being forced into ghettos and labour camps. There, they worked long hours without pay and proper food to build roads, canals, bridges and railroads, and to staff factories. These slave labourers were expected to die after six months from starvation or disease.

Anti-semitism in Canada was a significant force.

Within Canada, fascist groups in Ontario and Quebec tried to keep Canada from fighting against Germany. Canadian anti-Semitic groups tried to label Jewish citizens as “enemy aliens”.



WILLIE JACOBS (Poland)

The Nazis took us by force, about five hundred guys, they send us to Posen, west of Poland, about four days by cattle train. We built the autobahn [highway]. At night we come back to the barracks. All Jews. We had barbed wire and guards around. I was there with two brothers. One got killed on the autobahn. He got sick, a guard hit him over the head and killed him with a crow bar. I saw. What can I do? He was thirty years old. They buried him right in the road. That autobahn is a Jewish cemetery.

When I worked on the autobahn, the president of the project, a man named Hoess, took five of us to work on his house, garden. We wore civilian clothes. He gave us the full food ration we were supposed to get; bread, sugar, salami, marmalade. He never called us Jews. He called us “my boys”. His wife cooked for us and washed our clothes. We slept in bunks we made in his garage. For thirteen months we stayed with him, from '42 to '43. All of the five ‘boys’, we survived. One was my uncle. We had to leave because Himmler decreed no more using Jews for private people. I tried to find Hoess after the war. He said we should have patience, the war had to come to an end.

