

THE 20 MILITARY CLASSES



This photo was taken during our military service as a souvenir. When they recruited the 20 military classes (everyone, mostly non-Muslims between the ages of 35-46) in 1941, my friends and I were sent to Gönen.

I have my friends with me here in this photo: from left to right, the first is Izak Behar, I am the second and Moiz Atiyas, always with me since childhood is the third. The one sitting in front is a friend we had called Masa.

Actually, this military service was not military at all. They made us work in road building. We were part of the "Nafia" (Road Building Division) and we built roads, but I remember that we never did a good job.

We had this photo taken by a street photographer who had his camera on a three-legged stand. He would take the photo and deliver it in 10 minutes.

What can I tell you about the 20 military classes? Well, the Turkish government did not trust its minorities, the Jews, Greeks and Armenians. They were scared that in the event of war, these minorities would turn traitors. So they gathered all of them in the guise of serving in the military. They gave us brown uniforms, which were not soldier uniforms. These were special uniforms for us. I did not present myself until the last day we were supposed to give ourselves in.

They sent all of us to different places. I was sent to a place near Balikesir. There were even fathers and sons going together as it was 20 classes. It lasted about 2 years.