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Nazi Germany-controlled POW camps in the environs of Šilutė 1939–1944

The status of prisoners of war and concentration camps in Nazi Germany

The last century in Europe was marked by the fact that all generations know about war. And there are no wars without prisoners of war (POWs). Civilian refugees and prisoners of war are among those who have come to know and pay the true cost of the war. There were as many as 35 million POWs in WWII¹. Both scientists and amateur researchers often try to circumvent topics that are painful and that have left deep scars in all the countries that were at war.

The international legal treatment of prisoners of war and regulation of their protection dates back to the Crimean War (1853–1856), when international law codified the rules of warfare, including the treatment of POWs. The main aim was to protect POWs from reprisals and unjustifiable violence by the state in whose hands they found themselves. In the early 20th century during WWI, also known as the Great War, a great many people were taken into captivity resulting in unforeseen heavy losses and casualties. Therefore, international organisations were forced to adopt the Geneva Convention, which regulated the treatment of POWs captured by the forces of another country. During WWII the basic provisions regulating the treatment of POWs and their protection were based on the Third Geneva Convention (adopted on 27 July 1929). Germany was a signatory to the

¹ S. Geck, *Das deutsche Kriegsgefangenenwesen 1939–1945* (PDF), Masterarbeit, Universität Münster, 1998, S. 1.

Convention. The Geneva Convention was ratified by 41 countries. Of the large countries, the Soviet Union did not ratify the Convention and this had disastrous consequences for the fate of Soviet POWs during the 1941–1945 war between Germany and the Soviet Union. The Third Geneva Convention had 97 articles².

The main provisions of the Convention were aimed at significant improvement of the conditions, protection and supervision measures of POWs compared to those in WWI. This Convention gave POWs a status equivalent to the rank of soldiers of the state which captured them. For example, Article 2 stated that: ‘Prisoners of war are in the power of the hostile Government, but not of the individuals or formation which captured them. They shall at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, from insults and from public curiosity. Measures of reprisal against them are forbidden’³.

The Convention further emphasised that ‘The detaining Power is required to provide for the maintenance of prisoners of war in its charge. Differences of treatment between prisoners are permissible only if such differences are based on the military rank, the state of physical or mental health, the professional abilities, or the sex of those who benefit from them’ (Article 4)⁴. Article 10 required that ‘Prisoners of war shall be lodged in buildings [...]. The premises must be entirely free from damp, and adequately heated and lighted’.⁵ Articles 27–32 laid down the work and employment conditions of prisoners of war in detail: the types of industry and economy where prisoners of war could be used as the work force, what level of danger the work could involve and the duration of daily work; the work done by prisoners was to have no direct connection with the operations of the war and improvement of the capacity of the country at war. Prisoners of war other than officers could be employed, unless officers asked for suitable work. Prisoners of war mostly worked in agriculture, coal or salt mines, quarries, factories, sawmills, breweries, railway construction and forestry operations. Prisoners of war working for private individuals or legal entities had to be paid wages. Workmen were to be allowed a rest period of twenty-four consecutive hours per week. Article 76 required that prisoners of war who died in captivity be honourably buried and that the graves bear the necessary indications⁶.

2 Ibid., S. 3, 4.

3 Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July 1929 [available from www.icrc.org, accessed 2015-01-07].

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

Close economic ties were established between the camp and the town of Šilutė. The camp provided labour force to a number of people and organisations, while such enterprises as Juodžuveitas' bakery, Leitner's slaughterhouse in Verdainė, Rozė butcher's¹⁰⁰ and other retailers and wholesalers profited from supplying products to the camp. In addition, local residents worked at the camp. In wartime conditions this guaranteed survival. It should be noted that the local elite in Šilutė felt as if they were home again after 16 years spent under the rule of the Lithuanian government¹⁰¹. In 1942 Petras Šileikis (b. 6 January 1907), a carpenter who worked in the camp, was charged with possessing clothes of Russian POWs with the intention to sell them¹⁰². Šileikis was arrested and jailed in Šilutė. On 6 August 1942, Šilutė District Court sentenced Šileikis to four months in prison including the time he had already been jailed for and to pay the court costs¹⁰³.

1943–August 1944 – LUFT period

In 1943, reorganisation of the Šilutė camp to a Luft-type camp started. In early spring, Šilutė Railway Station was packed with wagons containing building materials. Several RAD teams also arrived. In July 1943, on the road to the former Macikai estate a new sign for the Luftwaffe POW camp No 6 (*Kriegsgefangenenlager Nr. 6 der Luftwaffe*) was put up. Construction of the barracks started. They were built in two rows separated by two rows of barbed wire fence with a gap between. The first POWs of the Allied Forces – (British) Royal Air Force (RAF) – were brought in May 1943. The prisoners were thoroughly searched, photographed, their fingerprints were taken, and each prisoner was issued with a metal tag with an ID number. Air Force prisoners were accommodated in the barracks and segregated by country. Each such country compound was marked with a letter. The requirements of the Geneva Convention were observed in the Luft-type camps. According to internet sources, the first British and Canadian non-commissioned officers were sent to Stalag Luft VI in Šilutė from the POW camp Stalag Luft I in Barth in June 1943. The first American POWs appeared in Macikai camp in February 1944¹⁰⁴. In spring

100 A. Margis remembers: 'When Leitner did not have meat we were sent to Tilsit to get horse meat, but when even that was short we would bring silver foxes from the fur animal farm in the suburbs' – „Pėdsakai neišblėso“, *Komunistinis darbas*, 1963-11-19, Nr. 136.

101 The Lithuanian period (1923–1939) was treated by German supporters of Klaipėda Region as 'occupation'.

102 Interrogation protocol of 13 June 1942 of C. Grube, LCVA, f. 1573, ap. 7, b. 917, l. 2.

103 Judgement of 6 August 1942 of Šilutė District Court, *ibid.*, l. 19–21.

104 Stalag Luft VI Heydekrug on the map [available from www.gps-practice-and-fun.com, accessed 2014-11-15].

1944, American POWs were separated from British POWs and transferred to compound E. There was a double barbed wire fence between sectors. The entire camp area was also surrounded by two rows of barbed wire fences up to 3.4 m in height and at night guards patrolled in the gap between the fences. There were watchtowers in the corners and in the middle of the camp with powerful searchlights and armed guards. About 60 centimetres above the ground inside the fence was a strand of wire called ‘the warning wire’, this marked the boundary beyond which a prisoner would be shot immediately without warning¹⁰⁵.

In OKW Organisational Order No 51 of 18 November 1943, the Šilutė camp is already called camp VI under the authority of the Luftwaffe¹⁰⁶. In the first half of 1944, the camp consisted of three compounds A, C and E – for American, British and joint American and British POWs. All British POWs were pilots. The camp consisted of 10 brick barracks, each with a capacity of 552 people, and 12 wooden barracks with 54 prisoners in each. So the camp could accommodate a total of 6,168 prisoners. The barracks had triple bunks made from wooden boards, desks, lockers and stools. The heating of the barracks was satisfactory, but ventilation was poor. There was also a laundry room, a barrack, which served as chapel and a theatre with eight small rooms¹⁰⁷. Western POWs were not required to work, unless they wanted to. The POWs had the right to correspond with their family members and relatives. Food was poor, but westerners received both food and clothing from the Red Cross¹⁰⁸. Compound A was completed and began to function in early June 1943 with the arrival of British POWs from Stalag Luft III. By September 1943 the compound was fairly full. New British POWs were then housed in Compound K together with British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand airmen and airmen from other former British colonies. Polish troops under the command of General Władysław Anders were also held in Macikai¹⁰⁹. Compound K consisted of four rows of barracks (E, F, G and H) with 13 barracks in each row. Each barracks would select their leader, for example, Fred Salemme was elected the leader of barracks F-2. Leaders elected the camp council¹¹⁰. American pilot Don Kremper was brought to Macikai camp in the third week of February 1944. He remembered that he was finger printed, issued a tag with number

105 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 43, 44.

106 OKW Organisational Order No 51 of 18 November 1943, BAL, B 162/1903, l. 717.

107 Stalag Luft VI [available from www.b24.net, accessed 2014-12-15].

108 Ibid.

109 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 26, 33.

110 The Fred Salemme Story [available from www.angel45-2b.com, accessed 2014-11-26].

1394 and assigned to compound E, brick barracks F, room 6. Each room had triple bunks and held a total of 60 men¹¹¹. In February 1944, US Air Force POWs were delivered to Macikai. They were held for about a month together with the British airmen. This was very helpful to them, because the British already had considerable experience of life in captivity, knew the nuances of life in the camp, and were able to give useful tips to their brothers in arms. For as long as the Americans did not receive help from the International Red Cross, the Canadians shared their food with them. The Germans provided food to prisoners twice daily; however, the portions were not sufficient for survival. Had it not been for the Red Cross, prisoners would have been starving¹¹².

Daily life prisoners. Western POWs had the right to contact their family members and relatives. They were allowed to send one letter and two postcards a month. The letters were checked by German censors and any prohibited information was crossed out. Air-mail letters took a month to arrive and regular mail – over 9 weeks¹¹³. American POWs had a secret radio in the camp. At midnight they listened to radio broadcasts from London. Radio broadcasts transmitted coded information to anti-Nazi underground organisations and POWs in western and central European countries¹¹⁴. Even western prisoners admitted that the camp administration treated them correctly. In winter prisoners suffered from the cold because of poor heating; prisoners were also freezing during long morning and evening inspections. There was a punishment room (prisoners called it the ‘cooler’). Prisoners were placed in the punishment room for violation of internal rules of the camp. Those in the punishment room received only bread and water¹¹⁵. Prisoners of each barracks had to elect an elder. Barracks elders formed a compound council, which elected a leader. The 40-year pilot Sergeant James Dixie Deans was the leader of the British compound. He was captured in 1940 and before arriving in Macikai was held in two other camps. Deans spoke German well and this helped in communicating with the camp administration. The Americans elected Sergeant Frank Paules, who was both a good organiser and diplomatic, as their leader. Prisoner Bill Krebs from Pennsylvania of German origin was very useful. He spoke fluent German and was able to speak convincingly to his interlocutors and the camp administration officials. Canadian prisoners were led by Sergeant Clark. Leaders of compounds communicated with the International

111 Stalag Luft 6 [available from www.b24.net, accessed 2014-12-15].

112 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 34.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

114 The Frank Paules Story [available from www.angel45-2b.com, accessed 2014-11-26].

115 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 45, 46.

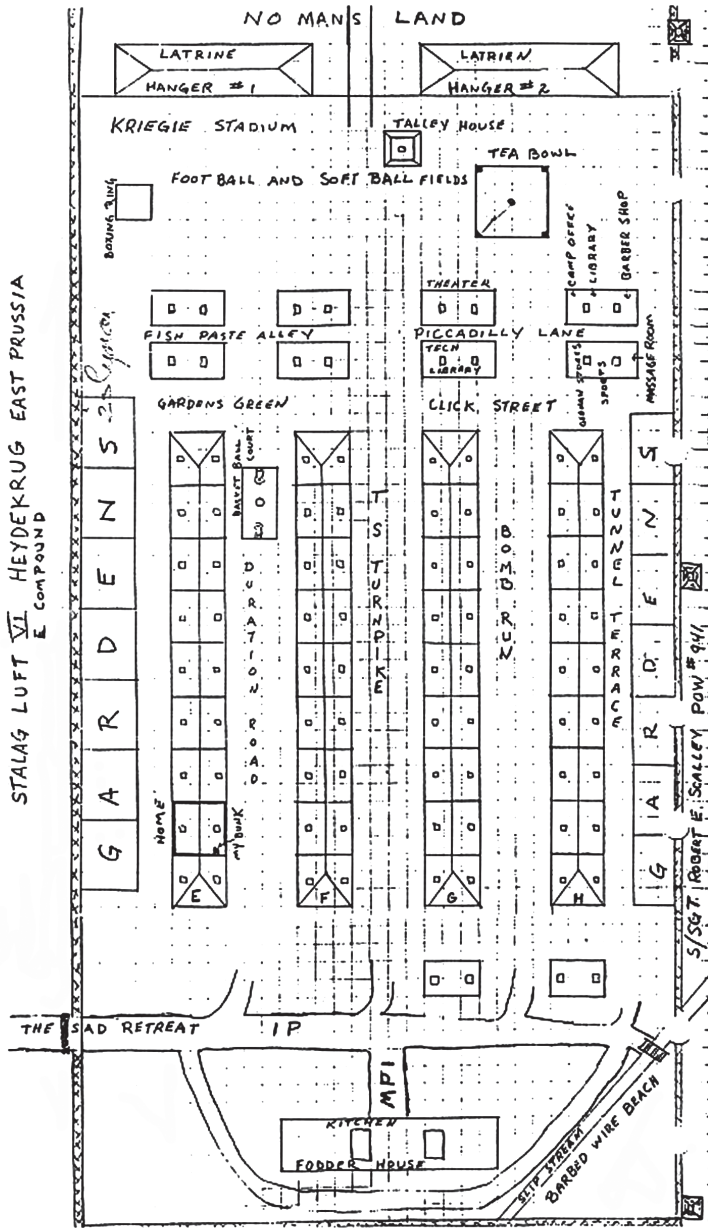
Red Cross representatives who came to the camp and passed their requests and wishes to them¹¹⁶. Prisoners were engaged in self-education and cultural affairs. From the books sent to them by their relatives, a library was organised. The library of the American compound had about 6,000 books. Prisoners established various courses (for example, a course on the German language). The British established a school called Royal Air Force School of Prisoners of War Stalag Luft VI Germany. The school had three forms, and lessons and examinations were held. The British school had two libraries – technical and general. The Americans put together a theatre group playing mostly comedies. The so-called theatre rooms accommodated about 200 people. American Sergeant Tom McHale issued a newspaper for prisoners *Barbed Wire News*. There was only one copy of the newspaper. The first issue was published on 18 April 1944 and the last – on 24 June 1944. A total of 30 issues were published. British prisoners also published their own newspaper *Yorkshire Post*. Camp prisoners arranged various sporting events: football, cricket, boxing and other events¹¹⁷.

Escapes of POWs from the camp. The POW camp security was quite strong. In addition to the regular guards, Abwehr and Gestapo officials served in the camp. Their duty was to guard the POWs and prevent potential escapes and other prohibited activities. In 1944, Major Gruber, who was blind in one eye (the injured eye had a patch over it), served as the senior Abwehr officer in Macikai camp¹¹⁸. Very much like in other POW camps, prisoners in Macikai dreamt of freedom and attempted to escape from the camp. British POWs who had longer imprisonment experience were best prepared to escape from the camp. Some of them had tried it in several other POW camps also. The British even had a special escape committee, which had to plan and implement escapes from the camp. The committee was led by Jock Alexander. One of the ways to escape was through a tunnel. Digging a tunnel was long, tedious, dangerous work. It was further exacerbated by the fact that the ground water was 1.8–2.10 metres below. In July 1943, the British started digging a tunnel from the laundry room. They cut out the concrete floor under the fireplace, which served as the entrance to the tunnel. The tunnel was dug by several dozen prisoners. It took them six weeks to dig a 48-metre long tunnel which would take them outside the barbed wire fence. One evening in August 50 fugitives got into the tunnel. The first eight fugitives managed to get outside of the camp successfully, but when the ninth prisoner was trying to escape, the guard noticed him and started shooting. The

116 Ibid., p. 48.

117 Ibid., p. 53, 54.

118 The Frank Paules Story [available from www.angel45-2b.com, accessed 2014-11-26].



*Barvėsių į stovyklą atėjusių laikų
 ir administracijos pastatų. Pirmą kartą komandiratas*

Plan of the 'American zone' of the POW camp as drawn from memory by American pilots, former prisoners of the camp in Macikai, S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*

alarm went off in the camp and the long preparations for the escape operation failed. Within two weeks the Germans caught the prisoners of war and brought them back to the camp. By that time some prisoners had already managed to get to the Baltic Sea and were about to travel to Sweden by sea¹¹⁹.

At the end of 1943, British POWs had a well-functioning system for organising escapes from Macikai. The prisoners managed to recruit two persons who worked in the camp – a guard called Sommers, who considered himself a Pole and belonged to a secret Polish organisation, and German officer Adolf Munkert, who hated the Nazis. Both of these provided prisoners with important information and with items and documents required for an escape. The British were getting ready to flee from Macikai to the ports of the Baltic Sea where they would board Swedish commercial ships and escape to freedom. Sergeant George Grimson was the first to escape. Dressed in a German military uniform and with forged documents he left the camp on 21 January 1944 and went looking for Swedish sailors. He succeeded in reaching the environs of Gdańsk and settled in the village where the Sommers' family lived. Later he moved to a nearby forest warden's house. Grimson maintained contact with the rest of his friends in Macikai through Munkert. Grimson found out that Swedish ships did not call into Klaipėda, so it was impossible to escape from there. However, Paddy Flockart, who escaped later, was able to get to Gdańsk, reach Stockholm on a ship, and then get to England. On 5 March 1944, prisoner Jock Callender escaped from Macikai. However, his subsequent fate is unknown. He most probably fell into the hands of Gestapo and was shot¹²⁰. On 16 March 1944, British Master Sergeant E. P. Lewis escaped from the camp. He arrived at the port of Gdańsk, a German guard tried to detain him. Lewis tried to flee, but was seriously injured and died a few hours later in the hospital. On 3 April 1944, two British pilots of Jewish faith Jack Gilbert and Townsend-Coles left the camp with forged documents. They got to Gdańsk and met up with Grimson. In the port Gilbert succeeded in getting onto a Swedish ship and escape, but his friend was arrested by a German guard. Townsend-Coles was transported to a jail in Insterburg (now Chernyakhovsk, Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia). Grimson took the same train in which Townsend-Coles was transported hoping that he would somehow be able to help his arrested friend, but this was impossible to achieve. Townsend-Coles was imprisoned in various prisons, then sentenced to death and executed. All traces of Grimson also disappeared in Insterburg¹²¹. The camp administra-

119 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 59–63.

120 J. Dominy, *The Sergeant Escapers*, London, 1974, p. 92, 94; S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 67, 68.

121 J. Dominy, *The Sergeant Escapers*, p. 102; S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 68–70.

tion and the Gestapo gradually managed to track the British escape system and people who supported the fugitives. Sommers was the first to be identified and arrested. Fearing that he would break under torture and reveal secrets, Sommers committed suicide. Subsequently, Munkert was also arrested. After brutal interrogations he was executed. The Gestapo arrested 15 Germans suspected of assisting prisoners. Some of them were later shot dead. As a result, civilian Poles and Germans who worked in the camp were removed. Six British prisoners considered as extremely dangerous were transferred to other camps¹²². On the night of 29 April 1944, American prisoners George B. Walker and Ed Jurist tried to escape from the camp. The guards shot Walker at the camp fence and Jurist was arrested¹²³.

Medical care. German officer Walter Müller (b. 2 January 1897) served as a medic at the POW camp in Macikai intermittently between September 1942 and February 1943. He was in charge of the camp pharmacy. Russian prisoners who fell ill were not treated on the site, but were taken to the barracks in Šilutė. One barrack was for the medics, another – for the pharmacy, third – for German soldiers, and the fourth contained about 80–100 Russian POWs. The POW barracks were fenced with barbed wire and guarded. Dr Hungerecker from Königsberg was the camp sanitation/medical chief with a team of about 13–15 medics. In 1942, there were around 5,000–6,000 Soviet POWs, although according to the official statistics on 1 February 1942 there were only 1,812 and on 1 December 1942 only 825 POWs. Dr Baumann, born in Odessa, was among the prisoners. His task was to determine whether a prisoner was healthy or sick. Another Russian doctor Kolokov also worked at Macikai camp and he ordered the required medicines at Müller's pharmacy¹²⁴.

On 9 April 1943, a delegation of German medical officers and hygiene specialists from Königsberg, Insterburg and other areas visited Stalag Luft VI in Šilutė. At that time there were no western POWs in the camp. The plan was to house 2,000–2,500 captured British and American soldiers and officers. They were to be accommodated in a 150-metre long barracks divided into separate areas for 40–50 people each, but during the visit the barracks had not yet been fitted out at all. The barracks were to have large windows and electricity, and the members of the German delegation considered them to be sufficient from the hygienic point of view. The camp was equipped with washrooms and water

122 J. Dominy, *The Sergeant Escapers*, p. 102–109; S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, 71–72.

123 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 73.

124 Interrogation protocol of 27 October 1970 and 16 January 1975 of Walter Müller, BAL, B 162/6574, l. 1352–1355, 1356–1359.

filtration systems. Water quality was tested and was recognised as compliant with the rules of hygiene. Louse treatment premises were built near the main barracks. Soviet POWs who worked on the extension and fitting out of the camp had to visit these premises regularly. At the time of the visit of the delegation, the camp hospital was just being fitted out in one of the wooden barracks. A large kitchen was also under construction in a brick building. Members of the delegation concluded that the sanitary conditions were good and the camp was prepared properly for the prevention of the spread of infectious diseases¹²⁵.

On 23 June 1943, chief medical doctor Schatz of Königsberg District Staff paid a visit to the camp and prepared a report on his visit. Dr Schatz wrote that the camp was about 3 km from Šilutė and was not reachable by public transport. The camp consisted of three main parts: 1) British POW camp, which during Dr Schatz's visit contained 1,200 British prisoners, former air force pilots, and the number of prisoners was approaching 2,000; 2) Russian POW camp – Russians did a variety of fitting out works of the camp; 3) the commandant's office, guard accommodation, and utility buildings. German guards lived in wooden barracks, which were kept clean and ventilated. Barracks were heated with stoves. The kitchen for the guards was in a former barn, hygiene conditions were rather poor and there was a lack of cold storage. German guards complained to Dr Schatz about the poor supply of food¹²⁶. The camp hospital was in a barracks which was not well insulated. There were 8 beds and 4 patients in hospital during Dr Schatz's visit. The cabinet for medicines was not yet installed in the hospital. Between 20 and 25 patients visited the medical officer/dentist daily, including POWs. Dr Schatz gave quite a positive evaluation of the work of the camp medical doctor Legler, who spoke Russian and English. There was another medical doctor Pflaum in the camp. In addition to these two doctors, there was a team of 11 medics¹²⁷. The hospital for British POWs was in temporary premises, which consisted of an examination room and two patient rooms (10 and 8 beds). During Dr Schatz's visit, construction of three much-needed large barracks for a hospital was in progress. Two barracks were to be equipped with all the necessary facilities for treatment – doctors' offices and wards and the third barracks was to be used for isolation and treatment of patients ill with infectious diseases and

125 Report of the delegation of German medical doctors dated 9 April 1943 regarding their visit to Stalag Luft VI in Šilutė, Federal Archive – Military Archive (hereinafter – BA-MA) in Freiburg, RL 19/5.

126 Report dated 28 June 1943 of chief medical doctor Schatz regarding his visit to Stalag Luft VI, BA-MA, RL 19/5, l. 2.

127 *Ibid.*, l. 3.

were to contain four wards with 25 beds. The British POWs had a dentist, medic, and two assistants to the medic. There was a shortage of necessary medications and devices for dental treatment. It was expected that these were to be obtained with the assistance of the Red Cross. Dr Schatz noted that food provision to the British POWs was good, because they received extra food from their homeland¹²⁸. The hospital for Soviet POWs was in a barracks, which had a waiting room, an examination room, an office for two medics, a room for patients with 14 beds, and a ward for patients with infectious diseases with 8 beds. One Soviet POW was a medic by profession. Hospital facilities were pretty clean, and as far as parasites were concerned only fleas were found. Dr Schatz noted that the general health condition of Soviet POWs was satisfactory. There were louse treatment premises near the camp and these could be used daily by up to 2,000 people. Dr Schatz noted that there was certain disagreement between the commandant and the medical officer of the camp. The commandant had forbidden doctors and medics to refer patients to the hospital in Šilutė. Summing up his impressions of the visit, Dr Schatz recommended that patients requiring surgery be referred to the hospital in Šilutė. Furthermore, in his opinion, assistance of the specialists from Tilsit lazareto should also be sought. To this end, a special agreement between the competent military sanitation facilities must be drawn up. The Abwehr officer of the camp allegedly did not object to this proposal¹²⁹.

The report on the sanitary situation between 16 January 1943 and 15 July 1943 states that there were eight large POW camps in Luftgau I, i.e. Air District I. Strong wooden barracks were built in all camps. New construction was in progress in only two camps, one of them being in Šilutė. The general health condition of POWs was good; there was no increase in communicable diseases. Hospitals had sufficient capacity except for that in the Šilutė camp, which needed to be expanded. Because of good hygiene arrangements for POWs, typhus was only reported in Łódź (Litzmannstadt) POW camp (7 cases, no deaths reported). Due to the lack of X-ray machines, X-rays could be taken only in a small number of POW camps and working groups. All POWs were vaccinated against typhoid¹³⁰.

On 31 August 1943, the German medical officer of Stalag Luft VI made a report regarding medical care in the camp in August 1943. The report says that the hospital (dispensary) of British POWs was fenced with barbed wire. The camp had only one portable dental

128 Ibid., l. 4.

129 Ibid., l. 4–5.

130 Report regarding sanitary situation in Luftgau I POW camps between 16 January 1943 and 15 July 1943, BA-MA, RL 19/5, l. 11–12.

treatment apparatus and this was used for German guards and civil servants, and also for Soviet POWs. Because it was impossible to provide services for all patients, German soldiers and civilians were referred to a civilian dentist. A guard post was set up at the entrance to the hospital to monitor incoming and outgoing patients. In his report the medical officer noted that the British POWs tried to get the required medical equipment through the Red Cross, but so far they had failed to get it¹³¹. According to the memoirs of the former POWs from western countries, due to the relatively low level of sanitation and the lack of clean water, many prisoners suffered from dysentery. There were around 70 beds in the camp hospital. Some of the patients stayed in their barracks. Among the prisoners of Macikai there were two qualified British physicians Forest-Hay and Paddy Pollack. In exceptional cases, the patients were transported to the hospital in Šilutė¹³². The mortality rate among western POWs was low. It is known that on 10 June 1944 Sergeant William F. Teaff died from diphtheria. In total three Americans and one Canadian prisoner, Keith Oliver Perry, died or were killed in Macikai camp¹³³.

As has been mentioned above, the Red Cross parcels contributed greatly to the survival of western POWs. The American Red Cross parcel contained the following: one box of corned beef, spices, salmon, liver pate, powdered milk, instant coffee, a piece of margarine, chocolate, cheese, and a soap set; also 0.5 kg of raisins, a few pieces of sugar, a roll of toilet paper, 1–2 packets of cigarettes. According to an agreed schedule such parcels were supposed to reach each American prisoner every 1–2 weeks, but the reality was different. Clothing and footwear parcels came less frequently and often only upon an additional request.

A few memories from The Jim Champ Story:

[...] Stalag Luft VI was my first Prisoner of War camp

[...] The barracks must have been of a standard German design as these and later others were all the same, about 130 feet long, by 40 feet wide. Each barrack contained about 10 smaller rooms all entered into from a center hallway. There were 2 washrooms, without running water, just basins, (always cold), and a 2-seat pit outhouse type latrine. Each room was about 15 feet by 20 feet and it was suppose to accommodate 16 Prisoners of War with 8 wooden 3 wooden slat double bunk beds and we slept on paper mattresses filled with straw, not very comfortable. [...]

131 Report dated 31 August 1943 by the medical officer of Stalag Luft VI, BA-MA, RL 19/5.

132 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrižimas atminties takais*, p. 46, 48.

133 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrižimas atminties takais*, p. 76.

[...] I should also mention that there was a guard tower about every 50/75 feet around the compounds with a large spotlight and a machine gun to shoot first and ask questions last. Inside of the main fence about 8 to 10 feet in was a single wire about 15 or 18 inches high that no one was to step inside of or they would be shot on the spot, and questions asked later. [...]

[...]some International Swedish group came and visited the camp and made sure we would receive cards, books to read, some musical instruments for the musical inclined. We were allowed to write 1 card and 1 victory type letter home a month. We could receive as much mail as was sent to us supposedly, but not much mail was received by anyone. [...]After awhile we received the promised paper back books, cards, musical instruments, etc. [...] Some of the musicians in our POW camp formed a nice band and played concerts of good old American music and the there were some theatrical skits played by some of the guys on a makeshift stage. [...]

[...] [I] learned to play bridge and pinochle card games, though I have since forgotten how to play them now. [...]

[...] Another vivid image is the damn louse infestation in our clothes. We were only allowed a 2 minute cold shower about every 2 weeks or so [...].

[...] The Germans used to lock us up at sundown in our respective barracks and shuttered all of the windows too. After that the Germans would allow a bunch of big police dogs roam the compound all night long. [...]

[...] The Germans made sure that we never got too comfortable as if that was possible under these horrible conditions of life. [...] ¹³⁴

Penalties for violations of the established rules for the treatment of prisoners of war

The Nazis promoted an overall atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. Citizens were encouraged to report to the National Socialist German Workers' Party and other authorities about those persons who violated the laws and orders of the Third Reich. As a result, in examining how Germans treated POWs sent to work for them, the first fact that strikes is the abundance of reports on those who in one way or another way violated the order about the treatment of POWs by the communicating in a friendly and humane way with prisoners. Sometimes this served as a means for neighbours of

134 The Fred Salemme Story [available from www.angel45-2b.com, accessed 2014-11-26].

residents of the same village to get even on certain matters, take revenge, etc. German farmers were forbidden even to eat with POWs at the same table, let alone other ‘transgressions’ of larger proportions. German women who had intimate relations with POWs were shunned and punished. In late September 1940, farmers in Versmininkai (Wersmeningken) Village of Šilutė County were threshing grain and had several Belgian POWs helping the German farmers. During the lunch break farmers shared food and a drink with prisoners. They were reported to the authorities and the prosecution service and courts started investigating the case. Consequently, Davidas Woska received a penalty of RM 70, Helene Mauritz – RM 70 and Michael Margies – RM 35 for behaviour with POWs that was prohibited. All the convicted farmers were from Versmininkai Village¹³⁵.

Between 1 January 1942 and 30 September 1942, Šilutė District Court sentenced three women for unacceptable treatment of war prisoners. One married couple was charged for giving cigarettes and tobacco to French POWs in 1941. Another married couple was charged for eating at the same table with the French POW who worked for them. In both these the penalties were from RM 50 to 70 RM¹³⁶.

On 27 August 1942, Šilutė First Area District Court sentenced farmer’s wife Martha Schaar (b. 1920) from Lašai (Laschen) Village to three months in prison for breaching the rules for treatment of POWs. On 10 October 1942, her appeal regarding the judgment was dismissed by Šilutė Court. Her appeal for pardon submitted by her lawyer stated that Schaar’s husband had been drafted into the Wehrmacht in 1940. Together with one Lithuanian and three German workers she had to manage a farm of 134 morgen. For a short period of time – between November 1941 and the end of April 1942 – a Belgian POW worked on her farm. He was often visited by a French POW who worked on the neighbouring farm. The neighbour then reported Schaar to the authorities saying that allegedly she was having a prohibited relationship with the French POW. Although the investigation showed that there was no intimate relationship between Schaar and the POW and only some minor violations of behaviour with POWs were identified. Schaar’s husband made no claims against his wife and continued to maintain normal relations. Due to the stress caused by the legal proceedings, at the beginning of October 1942 Schaar suffered a miscarriage. The lawyer asked that

135 Letter dated 30 November 1940 from the senior prosecutor of Klaipėda to Šilutė District Court, LCVA, f. 1573, ap. 7, b. 919, l. 27, 39, 44–45.

136 Letter dated 28 October 1942 from Šilutė District Court to the president of Klaipėda Land Court, *ibid.*, b. 44, l. 31 a.

her sentence be reduced or that she be allowed out on probation¹³⁷. Jean Stilman (b. 27 March 1917), the Belgian POW who worked for Schaar was also interrogated. He testified that from 1 November 1941 he worked for Schaar at Lašai Village. Sometimes French prisoners of war Andre Leveque and Armand Mangault visited him. The Belgian POW saw that Schaar and Leveque often joked together, but he never noticed that there was anything intimate about their relationship and never saw them alone in one room¹³⁸. Andre Leveque (b. 12 December 1915), a French POW who worked for the neighbour, Marie Richter, was also interrogated. He testified that Schaar flirted with him and invited him many times to visit her, but he only visited his Belgian friend Stilman. Leveque strongly denied having had any sexual relations with Schaar, although he said she had seduced him, but he never even kissed Schaar¹³⁹. During the interrogation, Schaar denied the allegations of the French POW that she had allegedly tried to seduce the Frenchman and explained that Leveque who knew little German did not understand her jokes¹⁴⁰. Having regard to the request of the lawyer and the testimony of witnesses, on 25 November 1942 the senior prosecutor of Klaipėda put Schaar on trial probation until 1 January 1946. She was ordered to pay a penalty in the amount of RM 150 and the court costs¹⁴¹.

Hedwig Franziska Pluschkewitz (b. 17 June 1919) who lived in Barzdėnai (Barden) Village of Šilutė County was sentenced by the Special Tribunal (*Sondergericht*) in Königsberg on 29 April 1943 to two years in prison for having sexual relations with a Belgian POW, as a result of which she became pregnant and in January 1943 gave birth to her daughter Monica Sybilla. Pluschkewitz also had to pay the court costs¹⁴².

On 21 October 1943, the Youth Court (*Jugendgericht*) in Šilutė sentenced Helene Petereit (b. 16 February 1927), an auxiliary worker from Šilutė, to four months in prison for improper behaviour with POWs¹⁴³. Petereit was sent to prison in Marienburg¹⁴⁴.

137 Appeal for pardon dated 20 November 1942 from lawyer Schneidereit to Šilutė Court, *ibid.*, b. 916, l. 113–114.

138 Inquiry protocol of 18 April 1942 of Jean Stilman, LCVA, *ibid.*, l. 16.

139 Inquiry protocol of 18 April 1942 of Andre Leveque, *ibid.*, l. 17.

140 Interrogation protocol of 19 May 1942 of Martha Schaar, *ibid.*, l. 22.

141 Ruling of the senior prosecutor of Klaipėda dated 25 November 1942 in the Case of Martha Schaar, *ibid.*, l. 116–117.

142 Letter dated 6 March 1943 from NSDAP of Šilutė County to NSDAP of Elchniederung County (now Kaliningrad Oblast), *ibid.*, f. 1684, ap. 1, b. 344, l. 2, 5, 6.

143 Letter dated 2 November 1943 of the governor of Šilutė County to the head of Šilutė NSDAP, *ibid.*, b. 342, l. 1.

144 Letter dated 20 November 1943 from the head of Heydekrug-West NSDAP group to the authorities of NSDAP of Šilutė County, *ibid.*, l. 5.

In November 1943, the Gestapo conducted an investigation regarding the Grossmann family from Gurgždžiai (Gurgsden) Village. The family had a Belgian POW, Marcel Bourleau (b. 7 February 1917), on their farm with whom they interacted in a friendly manner, ate together in the kitchen, etc. The Gestapo suspected that the hosts allowed the Belgian POW to listen to banned radio stations¹⁴⁵. On 16 March 1944, Šilutė County Court ordered farmer Fritz Grossmann (b. 25 March 1879) and his wife Martha Grossmann (b. 23 December 1896) to pay a penalty of RM 60 each for prohibited conduct with a POW. Since they had no money to pay the fine, they received a jail sentence equivalent to 3 RM per day. They also had to pay the court costs. The Grossmanns were sentenced according to the regulations of the Protection of Defensive Capacity of the German People (*Verordnung zur Ergänzung der Strafvorschriften zum Schutz der Wehrkraft des Deutschen Volkes*) adopted on 25 November 1939. The court was lenient in its punishment having regard to the age of the defendants, Fritz Grossmann's contribution to Germany in WWI and the fact that they had no previous convictions¹⁴⁶.

On 14 March 1944, Šilutė Youth Court sentenced Lydia Drosdatis (b. 25 December 1927), a maid, to five months in prison for prohibited conduct with POWs. She was accused of hugging and kissing a French POW in May 1943 at the farm of farmer Mauritz in Aukštumalai? (Augstumalmoor) Village. The court judgement was based on the supplements to the regulations of the Protection of Defensive Capacity of the German People¹⁴⁷. Erika Markschat (b. 1918), a farm worker from Lapaliai (Lapallen) Village, who communicated with the French POWs together with Drosdatis, was arrested on 19 July 1943 and on 19 August 1943 sentenced by Šilutė District Court to six months in prison by, including the time spent in custody prior to the court case¹⁴⁸. In this case, two French POWs were questioned. Joseph Prost (b. 1908, Bel. No 59286), who was captured on 23 June 1940 and who, starting from 1 July 1941, worked for farmer Swars Jonaten in Jonaičiai Village, denied having had any intimate relations with German girls¹⁴⁹. The other French POW, Laurent Beaumartin (b. 1913, Bel. No 15243), who worked for the same farmer as Prost, also denied having any intimate relations¹⁵⁰.

145 Letter dated 27 November 1943 from Šilviai (Schillwen) gendarmerie, LCVA, f. 1573, ap. 7, b. 909, l. 12 a. p.

146 Judgment of 16 March 1944 of Šilutė District Court, *ibid.*, l. 23, 23 a. p.

147 Judgment of 14 March 1944 of Šilutė Youth Court, *ibid.*, b. 907, l. 22–23.

148 Judgment of 19 August 1943 of Šilutė District Court, *ibid.*, b. 914, l. 37.

149 Interrogation protocol of 25 July 1943 of Joseph Prost, *ibid.*, l. 21.

150 Interrogation protocol of 23 July 1943 of Laurent Beaumartin, *ibid.*, l. 22.

On 27 April 1944, Šilutė Court of First Instance sentenced Helene Rubok (maiden name Bansemier, b. 5 July 1905) from Rusnė to 10 months in prison for prohibited conduct with a Belgian POW¹⁵¹.

Fateful 1944 – evacuation of the POW camp

In summer 1944, the Wehrmacht began to retreat and it was clear that POWs had to be evacuated. In early July the Soviet Army arrived in Lithuania. There are quite a lot of memoirs on the evacuation of POWs, which was later labelled as the ‘death march’, because no end of war ever saw such flows of people completely confused and going in different directions. Evacuation of POWs, concentration camps, individual camps, plants with their personnel and equipment, etc. ensued. According to the data provided by Polish historian Zygmunt Lietz, before the evacuation, there were 3,623 prisoners in Macikai, including 2,063 Americans. On 1 July 1944, there were 4,051 prisoners, including 2,403 American pilots in Stalag Luft VI¹⁵².

Evacuation from Stalag Luft VI started on 14 July 1944 (Friday) and took place in several stages.

The first batch consisted of 1,100 Americans and 900 Brits. They were taken to Šilutė railway station and transported in several groups to the port of Klaipėda. At the port they were put onto (rather squeezed into) to two ships – Masuren and Insterberg. Within two days they reached Swinemunde. From there, the prisoners were taken to Stalag IV (Gross Tychow) in Poland¹⁵³.

The second batch of prisoners, about 3,000 Brits, was transported from Šilutė by rail to the Polish city of Thorn (Toruń), and from there to Stalag 375. According to other sources, the second batch of evacuees was then also taken to Stalag IV where they remained until February 1945¹⁵⁴.

151 Letter dated 25 May 1944 from lawyer O. Schneidereit to the authorities of NSDAP of Königsberg County, LCVA, f. 1684, ap. 1, b. 349, l. 7.

152 Z. Lietz, *Obozy jenieckie w Prusach Wschodnich 1939–1945*, s. 98.

153 Stalag Luft VI Heydekrug on the map [available from www.gps-practice-and-fun.com, p. 1, accessed 2015-01-07].

154 It should be noted that the numbers provided in the memoirs and other sources differ. The exact data is not available; see Stalag Luft VI Heydekrug on the map [available from www.gps-practice-and-fun.com, p. 1, accessed 2015-01-07].

Travel conditions were appalling. There was a shortage of wagons, so people were packed into trains; nor was there any more space on board the ships. People suffocated in the lower decks on barges. Later prisoners joined the main stream of evacuees (the liberated units of Allied Forces).

For some time the hospital continued to operate in the depopulated Šilutė camp. Later the retreating Wehrmacht brought prisoners of Dulag 379 from Pskov area in the USSR to Šilutė. These were Soviet civilians collected for forced labour¹⁵⁵. In early May 1945, former POWs of Stalag Luft VI, who were in the depths of Germany, were freed by anti-Hitler coalition units. The fate of the Soviet POWs imprisoned in Macikai is not known. According to witness Emma Pietch, 5–6 days before the arrival of the Soviet Army, the Germans deported prisoners in an unknown direction¹⁵⁶. When the Soviets occupied Lithuania and East Prussia, Macikai camp became a German POW camp – Soviet labour camp 184.

155 A. Margis testimony regarding this period: ‘Lots of Nazi property and several warehouses of the International Red Cross parcels remained at the camp. Bajoras’ [Bajoras – the former intendant of the camp who was left to keep an eye on everything. – A. A.], kreisleiter Bingau’s and all Šilutė Nazi ‘creme de la creme’ first set their eyes on the treats, woollen clothing and footwear. Among the officers in tight field grey Wehrmacht uniforms you could also see those dressed in dark brown uniforms, ‘Hitlerjugend’ shorts, their wives, daughters and sisters. Bajoras would often take us to handle the leftover items. – Soon we’ll send it all to the front, the explanation was. Endless partying began in the camp. It makes me sick when I think of what I saw. Half-naked men and women were rolling in the bed which appeared from somewhere. The last thing they were concerned with was sending it all to the front [...]’ – „Pėdsakai neišblėso“, *Komunistinis darbas*, 1963-11-26, Nr. 139.

156 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrižimas atminties takais*, p. 86.