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## Nazi Germany-controlled POW camps in the environs of Silutė 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 WWII<sup>1</sup>. 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 articles<sup>2</sup>.

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’<sup>3</sup>.

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)<sup>4</sup>. 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’<sup>5</sup>. 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 indications<sup>6</sup>.

2 Ibid., S. 3, 4.

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

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

### The treatment of Red Army POWs

It was expected *a priori* that Germany, as a signatory to the Geneva Convention, would adhere to the principles of the Convention. However, it was obvious to all that the principles of the Geneva Convention were more or less applied with respect to the US and British troops, whereas Poles, Frenchmen and Russians were subject to other kinds of treatment. A very specific ‘law’ was applied with respect to the Red Army soldiers. The issue as to how the Soviet Army POWs would be treated was discussed before the beginning of military battles. There was a problem with the treatment of political commissars of the Red Army (Rus. *politruk*). It was argued that they were not soldiers, but only political, ideological officials. This resulted in the so-called ‘Commissar Order’ or ‘Guidelines regarding Commissars’ (*Kommissarbefehl*). Based on Hitler’s directives of 3 March 1941, on 6 June 1941 the Wehrmacht (German Armed Forces) command issued a directive on the treatment of political commissars. The directive gave instructions on how to recognise political commissars and how to treat them. They were to be segregated at once from other POWs and liquidated summarily. The directive meant direct physical liquidation – shooting without a trial. A little later, the same segregation applied with respect to soldiers who were Communist and Soviet officials and of course Jewish soldiers. Based on the Commissar Order, a total of 140,000 Soviet POWs were killed. POWs who attempted to escape were transferred to the German Security Police and shot<sup>7</sup>. In addition, Soviet POWs were deliberately subject to starvation by the Nazis by allocating reduced food rations to them. As a result, they gradually became weaker and died of starvation and diseases. Even working captives were given food rations that were too little (2,200 calories a day according to the instruction adopted by the German Army High Command [*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH] in August 1941), let alone the quality of meagre rations provided to the captives<sup>8</sup>. Due to the criminal policies of Nazi Germany in respect of the Soviet POWs, by late 1941 around two million POWs had been killed and by the end of the war this figure amounted to more than 3.3 million POWs<sup>9</sup>.

7 Ch. Dieckmann, „Karo belaisvių žudymas“, *Totalitarinių režimų nusikaltimai Lietuvoje. Nacių okupacija*, t. 2, Vilnius, 2005, p. 14.

8 Ibid., p. 15.

9 Ibid., p. 18.

### Military District I POW camps

During WWII the German territory and later the occupied territories were divided into military districts (*Wehrkreis*). There were 17 such military districts. We will focus only on the former POW camps of Military District I in Königsberg (*Wehrkreis I, Königsberg*). Military District I covered East Prussia and later part of occupied Poland and the Royal District of Tilsit-Gumbinnen. The district command headquarters (*Wehrkreiskommando I Ostpreussen*) was based in Königsberg.

The POWs were under the supervision of the Wehrmacht. Institutional responsibility was divided between the Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) and OKH. Hermann Reinecke, General of Infantry and the head of the General Office of the Armed Forces at OKW (*Allgemeines Wehrmachtamt, AWA*), who was in charge of prisoner of war affairs, was from 1 January 1942 responsible for the German Reich, the General Governorate (occupied Poland) and the German civil administration areas in the occupied countries (except for Ukraine and Norway). The heads of the POW units in 17 military districts were also under his command<sup>10</sup>. Starting from 25 September 1944, responsibility for prisoner of war affairs passed to Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German Police. Himmler appointed SS-Obergruppenführer Gottlob Berger to be in charge of prisoner of war affairs.

Initially (in 1942), Lieutenant General Hubert Gercke was in charge of prisoner of war affairs in Military District I, then he was succeeded by Lieutenant General Oskar von Beneckendorff und von Hindenburg whose deputies were Major Ulrich Erdtmann and Rittmeister Perdant and Major Krugenberg was the quartermaster (intendant). Medical-sanitary affairs were handled by Captain Savage who was a medical doctor. Starting from December 1944, managerial functions were taken over by Colonel General Wilhelm von Stockenhausen. SS-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm Rediess was in charge of general order and security within the area of Military District I and represented the special service – SD and Sipo<sup>11</sup>.

Wehrmacht POW camps varied in their functions and subordination. It is important to understand this, because these differences reflect in the name and numbering of POW camps. The geographical location of the camp is usually not reflected in numbering.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*, SD) and Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*, Sipo) (1936–1945).

## Types of camps

**Dulag** (*Durchgangslager*) were transit camps and served as a collection point for POWs prior to their reassignment to a stationary camp. There were no set requirements for these camps, they could have been open outdoor areas of a field or other zones fenced with barbed fence with the obligatory watchtower. There were no special requirements regarding food, sanitation conditions or medical assistance to POWs in these camps<sup>12</sup>. Only the most basic information about the captives, such as the full name, military rank and military unit was collected at this point.

**Oflag** (*Offizierslager*) were POW camps exclusively for officers (higher than the non-commissioned officer's rank).

**Stalag** (*Stammlager*) were base stationary POW camps for captives who have been reassigned. Various auxiliary and utility units were naturally established around the camps. These units were comparatively self-contained and therefore had numbers assigned to them. The letter 'Z' was also added to their name and stood for *Zweiglager*, a branch/auxiliary camp. The main POW camp which had any branch units also had the letter 'H' added to its name, which stood for *Hauptlager*, the main camp.

**Working Groups** (*Arbeitskommando*) were assigned numbers in Arabic numerals. Temporary groups of POWs which naturally formed during different events of the war were also assigned numbers in Arabic numerals; later POWs established in the occupied territories were also assigned numbers in Arabic numerals<sup>13</sup>. In total there were 222 Stalags in Germany and the occupied countries in WWII. Usually there were between 7,000 and 70,000 POWs in a Stalag. According to the data of 1 January 1944, a total of 2.2 million captives were imprisoned by the Germans<sup>14</sup>.

Transit camps of the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) should be discussed separately as they were not subordinate to the OKH.

**Dulag Luft** (*Durchgangslager der Luftwaffe*) were transit camps for air force POWs. The main Dulag Luft camp was in Frankfurt<sup>15</sup>, and this was the main collection point for all air force personnel, not just pilots, of the Allied Forces across Western Europe.

12 According to the capabilities of the military unit in whose charge the POW camp was.

13 For example, Kaunas Stalag 336, Alytus Stalag 343, Vilnius Stalag 344, Šiauliai Stalag 361 and Širvinta Oflag 60.

14 S. Geck, *Das deutsche Kriegsgefangenenwesen 1939–1945* (PDF), Masterarbeit, Universität Münster, 1998, S. 41.

15 Dulag Luft Oberursel, Frankfurt.

**Stalag Luft** (*Luftwaffe-Stammlager*) were base POW camps for aircrews of the Allied Forces administered by the German Air Force. There were eleven such camps numbered with Roman numerals, for example, Stalag Luft VI Heydekrug. It should be noted that there were also independent POW camps for Navy personnel of the Allied Forces (*Marlag* and *Málaga*). In 1941–1944, 211 Oflags and Stalags were established in Germany for POWs of 33 nationalities<sup>16</sup>.

### Camp structure

POW camps subordinate to German Armed Forces were managed according to a single standard. Each camp had its own administration. It had to include the following units:

- 1 A – administration; responsible for the organisation, security and accounting (including economic) of prisoners.
- 2 A – the unit for the use of POWs for work; this unit accepted applications, concluded contracts, and assigned prisoners for forced labour; it also prepared reports regarding the use of POWs.
- 2 B – records unit of POWs; this unit was responsible for registering, administering a card index of names and assigning numbers to prisoners.
- 3 A – Abwehr (German military intelligence and counter-intelligence) unit; this unit recruited agents from among prisoners and worked on the prevention of escapes.
- 3 B – censorship unit; the unit checked all correspondence of prisoners.
- 4 A – utility unit.
- 4 B – sanitary/medical unit<sup>17</sup>.

### Base POW camps of Military District I

The first POW camps (although ‘concentration camps’ would be a more accurate definition) appeared at the start of WWII. The first captives were imprisoned in POW camps established in East Prussia in September 1939. Later, POW camps were established or liquidated depending on the course of military action.

The type of the camp and its sequence number reflect in the name of the camp. The Roman numeral (e. g. I) denotes the district; the capital letter of the Latin alphabet denotes the series (or number), which is followed by the name of the geographical area. The fol-

<sup>16</sup> Z. Lietz, *Obozy jenieckie w Prusach Wschodnich 1939–1945*, Warszawa, 1982, s. 21, 22.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, s. 75, 76.

lowing were the main base camps in the territory of East Prussia under the authority of the Military District I with Headquarters in Königsberg and Tilsit Gestapo:

**Stalag I A Stablack** (in Stablack, now Stabławki, Poland). This is the name of two camps in Kamińsk and Stablack. The camp was about 8 km northwest of Prussian Eylau (now Bagrationovsk, Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia). This was the largest POW camp in East Prussia. Before the war, the settlement of Stablack was built as a garrison town specifically for military personnel. Therefore it was convenient to set up the main central East Prussian POW camp there. There were over 20 working groups (branches, including E 12 Memel) in the camp. The groups were based on the former occupations of the prisoners. The number of the base camp was E 1. The first prisoners of war, Polish military personnel, were delivered to the camp in the first days of September 1939. Later they were joined by Belgians, French, Russians, Italians and prisoners of other nationalities. In 1940–1941, there were over 100,000 prisoners in the camp. In the first half of 1940, 178 Lithuanian citizens, who had been captured as Polish soldiers in 1939, were released from this camp<sup>18</sup>. The camp was evacuated on 25 January 1945; it is believed that at the time of its evacuation there were about 50,000 POWs in the camp.

**Stalag I B Hohenstein** (in Hohenstein, now Olsztynek, Poland) was probably the first camp to receive Polish Army prisoners of war (September 1939). They were admitted to the Reich Labour Service (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*, RAD) camp that operated in Hohenstein<sup>19</sup>. Prisoners from various countries and of various nationalities, including Lithuanians, were imprisoned in the camp. In early February 1941, the number of prisoners in the camp increased to 50,000 people (46,000 French and 4,000 Poles)<sup>20</sup>.

**Stalag I C Heydekrug** (in Heydekrug, now Šilutė, Lithuania)<sup>21</sup> was the northernmost camp in the German Empire (more details about it will be provided below).

**Stalag I D Ebenrode** (in Ebenrode, now Nesterov, Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia). Little information is available about this camp. It seems to have been established at the beginning of the war with the USSR. At the end of September 1941, there were 4,990 Soviet POWs in the camp brought from Smolensk and Viazma districts of Russia. Due to the

18 Z. Lietz, *Obozy jenieckie w Prusach Wschodnich 1939–1945*, s. 78–79.

19 RAD camps were used for conscription-age men and women, who for some good reason (for example, religious beliefs, disability, etc.) could not be called up for military service. They usually carried out construction works and also built infrastructure, lived in dormitories and observed a strict discipline.

20 Z. Lietz, *Obozy jenieckie w Prusach Wschodnich 1939–1945*, s. 90–92.

21 Initially it was called Stalag 331 Heydekrug (1941 August–December).

mass executions of prisoners and diseases the number dropped sharply and by June 1942 only 900 POWs remained. In total about 5,000–7,000 Soviet POWs died in this camp. The camp was liquidated in late June 1942<sup>22</sup>. There is no official cemetery in Nestorov today and nothing is known about its existence. It is assumed that the prisoners of war were transported to Šilutė for burial.

**Stalag I E Prostken** (in Prostken, now Prostki, Poland) was a camp on the German-Russian border and was predominantly for Soviet POWs. It was opened in May 1941 and closed in November 1942. The Nazis decided to liquidate the camp due to a typhus epidemic<sup>23</sup>.

**Stalag I F Sudauen** (in Sudauen, now Suwałki, Poland). The camp was established in March 1941 and was initially called Oflag 53. In 1942 it was renamed Stalag I F. This camp held mostly Soviet and Polish POWs. In total up to 30,000 POWs could have died in the camp. Stalag I F was liquidated on 1 October 1944<sup>24</sup>.

In summer 1940, more and more prisoners of war from western European countries – the French and Belgians – started arriving at the camps in East Prussia. They were used for agriculture, land reclamation and drainage works. In order to organise and control the work more German specialists were also required. Since many German men were called up to the army, in his letter dated 20 July 1940 the Ober-president for East Prussia instructed county governors and burgomasters that some of these specialists would not be conscripted for the time being (reserved occupations). Initially it was planned not to conscript those men born in 1900 and earlier<sup>25</sup>.

### **Stalag I C Heydekrug (Šilutė)**

We will speak about this camp at different stages of its development.

#### **1939–second half of summer 1941**

**Polish POWs.** After Germany conquered Poland in September 1939, the Germans captured around 420,000 Polish soldiers. Some of them were released soon afterwards,

22 Z. Lietz, *Obozy jenieckie w Prusach Wschodnich 1939–1945*, s. 116–117.

23 Ibid, s. 104–106.

24 Ibid., s. 102–104.

25 Letter of 20 July 1940 from the Ober-president for East Prussian Province, LCVA, f. 1577, ap. 7, b. 33, l. 4.

while others were sent to POW camps. Pursuant to Hitler's order of 22 May 1940, many Polish POWs were released from the camps, but were immediately recruited for forced labour. This order was therefore contrary to the Geneva Convention and other international legal acts and aggravated the fate of many former POWs. Polish captives were turned into civilian workmen and transferred to the control of the German civil government, police, companies and farm owners<sup>26</sup>.

As far as it is known, the first Polish prisoners of war were brought to Šilutė County in October 1939. According to the receipt for a cash transfer (Ausgabeanweisung) dated 15 November 1939, 236 Reichsmarks (RM) and 90 pfennig were transferred to Šilutė County Construction Board for the works carried out by Polish POWs on 9–31 October 1939 (wages for Polish prisoners). According to this document, Polish POWs did some roadworks in the Šilutė (Heydekrug)–Užliekniai (Uzslöknen)–Urbiškiai (Bögschen) (now Armalėnai?) section of the road. The enclosed list of prisoners contained the names of 40 Polish POWs<sup>27</sup>. On 2 December 1939, a second transfer of money was made. The transfer in the amount of RM 46 was issued to farmer Augustas Kauschas from the village of Pagryniai for the supply of coffee to Polish POWs who were working on the roads (for the period between 17 October 1939 and 30 November 1939). The enclosed list contained the names of 33 prisoners<sup>28</sup>.

The payrolls for Polish POWs state that in the first half (1–15) of January 1940 Poles worked a total of 88 hours. They were paid RM 0.33 per hour, but various fees were deducted from their wages, so for the two weeks of work each prisoner was paid only RM 4.54<sup>29</sup>. Wages for work in the second half of January 1940 were higher – each was paid RM 11.36<sup>30</sup>. The surviving documents lead to the conclusion that the Polish POWs doing the roadwork in November were guarded by 5 German soldiers from Stablack base POW camp (*Kriegsgefangenenstammlager Stablack*)<sup>31</sup>. It is very likely that the first prisoners of war were sent to Šilutė County namely from Stablack POW camp. On 11 November 1939, the governor of Šilutė County wrote a letter to Stablack POW camp requesting medical care for prisoners of war. The letter states that in the event of illness Polish POWs work-

26 Z. Lietz, *Obozy jenieckie w Prusach Wschodnich 1939–1945*, s. 23.

27 A receipt for money transfer of 15 November 1939, LCVA, f. 1577, ap. 4, b. 79, l. 23; Payroll for Polish POWs of 1 November 1939, *ibid.*, b. 79, l. 24–25.

28 Receipt for money transfer of 2 December 1939, LCVA, f. 1577, ap. 4, b. 79, l. 35; *ibid.*, l. 37–38.

29 Payroll for Polish POWs of 1–15 January 1940, *ibid.*, l. 60.

30 Payroll for Polish POWs of 16–31 January 1940, *ibid.*, l. 68.

31 Receipt for money transfer of 2 December 1939 by Lt. Gatzke, *ibid.*, l. 39.

ing in Šilutė County were to be sent to Šilutė County Hospital. The governor enquired regarding the food ration amounts for POWs in the letter. According to the previous procedure, RM 4 were allocated per patient for hospital meals per day at Šilutė County Hospital. The governor was asking the authorities of the camp whether they agreed with the existing amounts. Invoices for hospital meals for POWs were to be sent directly to Stablack POW camp<sup>32</sup>. A reply came from Stablack POW camp on 17 November 1939 to the governor of Šilutė County that they agreed with the existing arrangements regarding food and medical care amounts for POWs<sup>33</sup>.

In December 1939, 25 German soldiers were guarding the POWs<sup>34</sup>. The archival documents of April 1940 show information about Kalveliškiai (Kallwelischken) POW camp in Šilutė County. Butcher Heinz Rogall was paid RM 156.75 on 8 April 1940 for the supply of potatoes to the POW camp in Kalveliškiai. The butcher delivered 500 kg of potatoes on 28 March 1940, 750 kg of potatoes on 2 April 1940, etc. to the POW camp in Kalveliškiai (a total of 2,750 kg of potatoes were delivered over four times for the said sum of RM 156.75)<sup>35</sup>. It is clear from other documents that the money continued to be paid for roadworks on the Šilutė–Urbiškiai section of the road. It may therefore be concluded that the Polish POWs who did roadworks were held at the POW camp in Kalveliškiai<sup>36</sup>. In June 1940, 52 Polish POW were working on the roads<sup>37</sup>. On 6 June 1940, a sum of RM 214.65 was paid for food provided to nine soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Company of Landeschützen-Bataillon 216 who were guarding prisoners of war at the POW camp in Kalveliškiai<sup>38</sup>.

The story of Michel Schermoks, a 67-year-old farmer of Lithuanian origin from Gaideliai Village, is worth noting. Although he tried to prove his loyalty to the German state, German officials tried to undermine Schermoks, to take away his farm, and to make him leave Klaipėda Region annexed by Germany for Lithuania. On 17 July 1941, Schermoks

32 Letter of the governor of Šilutė County of 11 November 1939 to Stablack POW camp, *ibid.*, b. 196, l. 3–3 a. p.

33 Letter of Stablack POW camp of 17 November 1939 to the governor of Šilutė County, *ibid.*, l. 4.

34 Receipt for money transfer of 16 December 1939 by Lt. Gatzke, *ibid.*, b. 79, l. 48.

35 Cheque dated 8 April 1940 issued to butcher Heinz Rogalla, LCVA, f. 1577, ap. 4, b. 79, l. 81, 82.

36 Cheque dated 10 April 1940 issued to trader F. Ulrich for providing coal and wood blocks to the POW camp in Kalveliškiai, *ibid.*, l. 83.

37 Payroll for Polish POWs for June 1940, *ibid.*, l. 172–173.

38 Invoice dated 4 June 1940 issued to soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Company of Landeschützen-Bataillon 216, *ibid.*, l. 152.

wrote a letter to the leadership of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP) of Šilutė County in which he listed grievances against the local authorities. In his letter, among other things, he complained that in autumn 1939 he had fitted out a small camp for Polish POWs (10 people) at his own expense, but was not paid any compensation by local authorities despite repeated requests<sup>39</sup>. Another farmer, Gustav Friederici, from Barzdūnai Village of Šilutė County, kept two Polish POWs on his 40 ha farm. They were sent to him from Šilutė Labour Exchange. He paid RM 25 per month to the prisoners and provided food to them. In 1942, the Labour Exchange took away the prisoners from Friederici and instead sent Polish civilian workmen. In addition, in 1941 and 1942 harvesting work was carried out on his farm for two weeks by Russian POWs from the camp in Macikai. Every morning the prisoners were brought by German guards and in the evening escorted back to the camp. Russian captives were paid using special banknotes<sup>40</sup>.



Farmer Gustav Friederici, LYA

From mid-summer 1940 there is hardly any information about Polish POWs in Šilutė County. On 11 April 1940, the head of Rusnė NSDAP group wrote a letter to the authori-

39 Letter dated 6 July 1941 from Michel Schermoks to the NSDAP authorities of Šilutė County, LCVA, f. 1684, ap. 1, b. 355, l. 21–21 a. p.

40 Interrogation protocol of 10 February 1945 of Gustav Friederici, LYA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. P-13417, l. 19–21.

ties of NSDAP of Šilutė County concerning inappropriate treatment of Polish POW by the blacksmith Uckermarck, a resident of Rusnė. An outraged Nazi officer complained about Uckermarck, because he allowed the Pole to walk freely about in the streets and paid no attention to the complaints about it. The blacksmith ate with the prisoner at the same table, and did not lock the door at night. There were also suspicions that Uckermarck posted letters for the Pole. The blacksmith was allegedly a lazy drunkard and that was why he kept the Polish prisoner. The Nazi officer asked his superiors to take away the Polish prisoner from Uckermarck and insist that the blacksmith obey the instructions of a party member<sup>41</sup>. The authorities of NSDAP of Šilutė County took the initiative to discipline Uckermarck. They wrote a letter to the gendarmerie commander of Šilutė County regarding the punishment of Uckermarck<sup>42</sup>. It is however not known what the follow-up action was. There is limited information available as to the Polish POWs who worked in Šilutė County and their life.

Polish soldier Joseph Kilichowski, born 3 August 1915 in Gdańsk (Danzig) was captured by the Germans on 29 September 1939 (POW ID number 27445). He was transferred to work for farmer Barsties in Žemaitkiemis Village (Šilutė County). Kilichowski was charged in 1942 of having sexual relations with a young German woman Gertrud Luise Stöllger (b. 12 April 1926), a farm hand. During the interrogation, the Polish prisoner denied having had sexual relations with Stöllger, although she admitted to it<sup>43</sup>. Because the documents have not survived it is not known what kind of punishment Stöllger and Kilichowski received for this crime. According to the OKW order of 10 January 1940, prisoners of war (first Poles and later Yugoslavs and Russians) were not allowed to have intimate relations with German women. A breach of this order could even be punished by the death sentence. Under an instruction of 6 August 1940 issued by the German Security Police and SD Commander, the prohibition to have intimate relations with German women was expanded to apply to French and Belgian POWs. However, in this case, the Nazis treated POWs differently. Prisoners of Slavic origin were usually punished by death for these violations, while the French and Belgians were imprisoned for 2–3 years<sup>44</sup>.

41 Letter dated 11 April 1940 from the head of Rusnė NSDAP group to the authorities of NSDAP of Šilutė County, LCVA, f. 1684, ap. 1, b. 357, l. 1–1 a. p.

42 Letter dated 24 June 1940 from NSDAP of Šilutė County to the gendarmerie commander of Šilutė County, *ibid.*, l. 10.

43 Interrogation protocol of Joseph Kilichowski (no date is specified, according to the proceedings it could have been February 1943), *ibid.*, f. 1573, ap. 7, b. 916 a, l. 6.

44 Z. Lietz, *Obozy jenieckie w Prusach Wschodnich 1939–1945*, s. 47.

On 3 March 1942, a notification from the head of Vyžiai (Wiesenheide) NSDAP group states that in February 1942 the police broke up a secret meeting of 8 Poles. One Polish civilian worker who worked on the farm of Erdmann Junker fled<sup>45</sup>. The last mention of Polish POWs can be found in the documents of the Polish underground movement. On 19 May 1944, the notification of the representative of the Polish Government for the province states that there is a POW camp in Šilutė (Heydekrug) in East Prussia with 300 Polish prisoners of war<sup>46</sup>.

**Belgian POWs.** In 1940 when Germany occupied Belgium, 150,000 Belgian troops of Flemish origin and 75,000 of Walloon origin (French-speaking) were captured. By March 1941, all troops of Flemish origin had been released while the Walloons were sent to POW camps<sup>47</sup>. In July 1940, information on the Belgian POWs appears in the financial documents of Šilutė County. They were most likely brought here from Stalag I A (Stalack) camp. Starting from 6 July 1940 Belgians worked on building roads in Pagryniai Village of Šilutė County. The payroll dated 6–23 July 1940 lists 50 Belgian prisoners of war<sup>48</sup>. Belgian prisoners may have replaced Polish prisoners of war, because these are no longer mentioned in the financial documents of the county. Belgian POWs (a total of 68 people) worked in Pagryniai Village in August 1940<sup>49</sup>. According to the data of 11 November 1941, Belgian workmen ate in three locations: Kalveliškiai, Piktaičiai (Piktaten) and Šilviai (Schillwen). The POWs continued to do construction and repair work in the areas of Šilutė–Urbiškiai (Heydekrug–Bögschen), Verdainė–Pašyšiai (Werden–Paszieszen) and Meišlaukiai (Meischlauken)<sup>50</sup>. In November 1940, 70 Belgian POWs did roadwork on the Šilutė–Urbiškiai section of the road and were paid (before deductions) RM 829.63<sup>51</sup>. According to the surviving documents of Šilutė County Construction Board, RM 7,002.31 was spent on the POW camp in Kalveliškiai between 10 October 1939 and 31 March 1940. The money was spent on establishing the camp, provisions for prisoners of war and wages. During this time prisoners of war worked on building roads and repairing sec-

45 Letter dated 2 March 1942 from the head of Vyžiai NSDAP group to the authorities of NSDAP of Šilutė County, LCVA, f. 1684, ap. 1, b. 517, l. 2.

46 Notification dated 4 May 1944 from the representative of the Polish Government for the province, Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN) in Warsaw, Sygn. 202/III, t. 144, k. 34.

47 Z. Lietz, *Obozy jenieckie w Prusach Wschodnich 1939–1945*, s. 27.

48 Payroll for Belgium POWs for July 1940, LCVA, f. 1577, ap. 4, b. 79, l. 195–197.

49 Payroll for Belgium POWs for August 1940, *ibid.*, l. 255–256.

50 Information dated 11 November 1940 about the provision of food to POWs, *ibid.*, l. 308.

51 Payroll for Belgium POWs for November 1940, *ibid.*, l. 337–337 a. p.



Family of Else Griga with Belgium prisoners of war in Traksėdžiai (Neusassen) Village, 26 May 1942, LYA

tions of the road specified above<sup>52</sup>. In subsequent years, some of the Belgian prisoners of war were dispersed among farmers and did various jobs on the farms. It is known that five or six Belgian prisoners of war worked on the farms of Traksėdžiai (?) (Neusassen) Village<sup>53</sup>. Belgian prisoner of war Robert Seine (POW ID number 2125) worked between September 1942 and 15 January 1943 on the farm of Meta Herzam in Skirvytė Village (Skirwieth, now Borovoe, Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia) and was later transferred to work for farmer Krassat in Užliekniai (Usslöcknen) Village. Seine and Herzam were accused of having intimate relations, as a result of which Herzam became pregnant. During the interrogation, both accused denied having any sexual relations<sup>54</sup>. However, on 18 November 1943 the District Court of Šilutė (*Amtsgericht*) ordered Herzam to pay a penalty of RM 120 and the court costs<sup>55</sup>.

52 Notes dated 28 February 1941 regarding the costs for Kalveliškiai POW camp, *ibid.*, l. 399.

53 Interrogation protocol of 9 March 1943 of Joseph Kilichowski, *ibid.*, f. 1573, ap. 7, b. 908, l. 4.

54 Interrogation protocol of 18 February 1943 of Meta Herzam; Interrogation protocol of 23 February 23 of vasario Robert Seine, *ibid.*, b. 910, l. 12–13, 21.

55 Ruling of 19 November 1943 of Šilutė District Court, *ibid.*, l. 37.

In 1941–1943, Belgian prisoner of war Marsel Benoit worked for farmer Else Griga who had a farm of 64 *morgen* in Traksėdžiai Village. He became friends with members of the Griga family and had his photograph taken with the family several times. As a result, Else and her daughter Anna were reported to the police and interrogated<sup>56</sup>. On 8 July 1943, the District Court of Šilutė ordered Else to pay a penalty of RM 200 and Anna to pay a penalty of RM 100 for prohibited behaviour with prisoners of war. They also had to cover the court costs<sup>57</sup>.

The fact that there were Belgian POWs in Šilutė County is confirmed by the correspondence regarding maintenance of the graves. A letter dated 16 September 1942 from Šilutė County Board mentions the graves of Belgians Gerard Deckers and Maurvy in Šilutė Catholic Cemetery and the grave of Van der Heyden in Rusnė Cemetery<sup>58</sup>. According to the surviving testimonies, the deceased French and Belgian prisoners of war (could be about 50 of them) were buried in two rows at the back of Šilutė Catholic Cemetery. Tombstones were put up with inscriptions in French or the graves were marked with a cross and a number. The POW graves, however, were neglected during the Soviet era, and as a result they deteriorated and new graves were made in their place. A delegation of the Belgium prisoner of war organisation visited Šilutė and Macikai in 1991. They indicated that there were four Belgium POWS buried in Šilutė Catholic Cemetery and one on Rusnė Island<sup>59</sup>.

Polish historian Zygmunt Lietz wrote that 450 Belgian POWs did various jobs in Šilutė County<sup>60</sup>. Owners of the companies and farms where the prisoners worked had to pay the POW camp administration 10 pfennig per each employee per working day or RM 3 per month<sup>61</sup>.

**French POWs.** In summer 1940 when Germany conquered and occupied France, about 1.5 million French troops were taken prisoner by the Germans. Soon after France signed an act of military surrender, about 500,000 wounded and sick prisoners of war and

56 Interrogation protocol of 3 May 1943 of Anna Griga, *ibid.*, b. 908, l. 9–10.

57 Ruling of 8 July 1943 of Šilutė District Court, *ibid.*, l. 32.

58 Letter dated 16 September 1942 from Šilutė County Board regarding maintenance of the graves, LCVA, f. 1577, ap. 4, b. 231, l. 98.

59 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, Šilutė, 2014, p. 13, 14.

60 Z. Lietz, *Obozy jeniecke w Prusach Wschodnich 1939–1945*, s. 179.

61 Ch. Dieckmann, „Karo belaisvių žudymas“, *Totalitarinių režimų nusikaltimai Lietuvoje. Nacių okupacija*, t. 2, p. 36.

those unable to work were released. Tens of thousands of French prisoners were sent to POW camps in Germany or sent to work in German industry and agriculture<sup>62</sup>.

The fact that French POWs appeared in Šilutė County can be traced from the notice published in the Šilutė newsletter *Amtliches Nachrichtenblatt* on 4 July 1941 regarding French language translators. The notice said people with a knowledge of the French language were required to communicate with the French and Belgian prisoners of war. Those who spoke French were to contact Šilutė County Board, the farmers unit (Room 8)<sup>63</sup>. On 10 October 1942, French prisoner of war Morris Defer started working on the 39-morgen farm of Anna Maria Waitschies (b. 1910) in Virkytai (Wirkieten) Village. Anna was later accused of having a prohibited relationship with the prisoner of war who worked for her (he ate at the same table, etc.). On 20 May 1943 the District Court of Šilutė heard Waitschies' case. The court sentenced her to four months in prison and she also had to pay the court costs<sup>64</sup>. She appealed against the judgment before Klaipėda Land Court (*Landgericht* in Memel), which at a hearing on 23 June 1943 acquitted Waitschies and overturned her sentence<sup>65</sup>.

Information is available that in 1943 the French POWs did the wiring work of Šilutė dairy built in the same year, worked in various workshops and at Šilutė sawmill. Some of the French POWs were dispersed among farmers in Šilutė County and did agricultural work. French prisoners of war worked for farmer Dovas Cyrulis in Kintai. Incidentally, Cyrulis' son, who was sent to the Western Front at the end of the war, fell into the hands of the French. The French POWs had set working hours, and farmers provided them with food, but the Nazis forbade the farmers from eating at the same table as the captives<sup>66</sup>.

According to the information of 1 April 1942, 1,508 prisoners of war were imprisoned in Stalag I C camp in Šilutė, of which 405 did various jobs<sup>67</sup>. With the approaching Eastern Front, the Germans collected the French and Belgian prisoners of war who worked for farmers and transferred them probably to POW camps located in East Prussia.

62 Z. Lietz, *Obozy jeniecke w Prusach Wschodnich 1939–1945*, s. 26.

63 Notification dated 2 July 1941, *Amtliches Nachrichtenblatt*, Nr. 24, LCVA, f. 1577, ap. 6, b. 5, l. 201 a. p.

64 Judgment of Šilutė District Court of 20 May 1943, LCVA, f. 1573, ap. 7, b. 918, l. 26–28 a. p.

65 Judgment of Klaipėda Land Court of 23 June 1943, *ibid.*, l. 57–59.

66 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, Šilutė, 2014, p. 10, 11.

67 The number of prisoners of war at POW camps of the Reich according to the data of 1 April 1942, Copy of Doc. No 82362636 in conformity with the ITS Archives.



French prisoner of war Yvon Andre, LCVA

Due to the lengthy war and the massive mobilisation of German men into the army, there was an increasing shortage of workmen in various German industries and agriculture. As a result, the Nazi government increased their efforts to bring workers from occupied European countries and used them to do various jobs.

On 5 August 1942, a special announcement from the governor of Šilutė County ‘On the Treatment of Prisoners of War’ (*Verhalten gegenüber Kriegsgefangene*) was published. It stated that prisoners of war were to be treated so that they could be used effectively in industry and agriculture. First, they were to be provided with sufficient food. The prisoners were to be treated strictly, but correctly. If prisoners were unwilling to work they were to be punished by the competent bodies of the Wehrmacht. On the other hand, the announcement emphasised that prisoners of war were *not* to be treated either like family members or like permanent farm staff. They were soldiers of countries that were fighting against Germany and could not be treated better than German workers. Anyone who acted to the contrary would be deemed to be traitors of the German nation. German women who had sexual relations with prisoners of war would be excommunicating themselves from the German national community and would be punished for it. Prisoners of war were not allowed to participate in German festivals or church services with Germans, or visit restaurants or bars. Prisoners of war who worked exceptionally well were issued with camp certificates, which allowed them to move about freely without guards. German institutions were to provide prisoners with working tools and food.

Wages for work were essentially *not* to be paid to them. These rules also applied with respect to the French and Belgian prisoners of war with certain exemptions. The rules had been aligned with the instructions of the German central authorities on the issue of prisoners of war<sup>68</sup>.

The relationships between some local farmers and prisoners of war working for them used to become complicated either due to the fault of the hosts or the prisoners. There was, for example, Else Pieck who managed a farm of 100 *morgen* in Gaideliai (Gaidellen) Village. She was constantly dissatisfied with the work of prisoners of war and complained to the local authorities. At various times prisoners of seven different nationalities worked on her farm. The first was a Polish prisoner of war who worked on the farm for eight months. He was replaced by two Belgian prisoners of war. One of them (Flemish) was sent back to his homeland after four weeks, the other was transferred to another location. The Belgians were replaced by two French prisoners of war. One of them was a bank employee by profession, another – an artisan. The first one knew nothing about agricultural work, the other was also sent back home. Subsequently, another French prisoner of war was sent to the farm, but he was also not to the satisfaction of Pieck and therefore was sent to another place. Later one Polish civilian worker and five Russians were employed on Pieck's farm<sup>69</sup>.

### **Establishment of the Šilutė (Macikai) POW camp and its first year of operation**

According to the statement of Max Baumgardt, a machinist born and living in Tilsit, on 25 August 1941 a construction company in Tilsit owned by Stein sent quite a few of its employees to work at Macikai (Matzicken) POW camp. They were accommodated in the barracks of the Wehrmacht military personnel and did various jobs on site<sup>70</sup>. One of the first references to Macikai POW camp in the documents available in the Lithuanian Archives is a letter dated 29 January 1942 from Gumbinnen Land Management Division to the governor of Šilutė County. It states that there is no objection to installing a

68 Announcement of 5 August 1942 of the governor of Šilutė County 'On the Treatment of Prisoners of War', *Amtliches Nachrichtenblatt des Kreises Heydekrug*, LCVA, f. 1577, ap. 6, b. 5, l. 364–364 a. p.

69 Letter dated 2 April 1942 from the head of Vyžiai NSDAP group to the authorities of NSDAP of Šilutė County, *ibid.*, f. 1684, ap. 1, b. 517, l. 6.

70 Interrogation protocol of 27 June 1942 of Max Baumgardt, *ibid.*, f. 1573, ap. 7, b. 917, l. 4.

15-watt power line to the POW camp in Macikai<sup>71</sup>. Perhaps the first reference to Šilutė (Heydekrug) camp in German documents was in Annex 3 to Order No 8 of 17 July 1941 of the German Security Police and SD Commander. The annex lists POW camps established in Military District I and the Šilutė Camp is mentioned among others<sup>72</sup>. The OKW Organisational Order No 40 of 14 August 1941 mentions Šilutė POW camp Stammlager 331 (I C)<sup>73</sup>. These documents essentially confirm the subsequent testimonies given by German soldiers and officers who served in Šilutė (Macikai) to prosecutors of the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1960s. According to some authors, Macikai POW camp in Šilutė was initially called Stalag 331, but on 12 December 1941 it was renamed Stalag I C. According to other sources Stalag 331 was established on 9 April 1941 and was renamed Stalag I C on 10 October 1941<sup>74</sup>.

According to the testimony of the former camp employee Paul Demuth (b. 16 February 1895), at the beginning of the German-Soviet war he arrived with several German soldiers in Šilutė and together with about 300 French and a small number of Russian POWs worked on the establishment of a proper POW camp. Major Curt Petters (b. 30 June 1883, d. 13 December 1958) was the commander of POW camps in Šilutė and Pagėgiai; his aide-de-camp was Captain Günther Oskar (b. 3 April 1881), Captain Döring was an officer of I C unit, and Dr Smend was the camp doctor. There was also a Captain Lorenz who worked in the camp administration. According to Döring's testimony a separate commandant's office was set up in Šilutė POW camp only in the late summer or early autumn 1941<sup>75</sup>. According to the testimony of the former Wehrmacht officer Peter Ruth (b. 25 March 1909), in July 1941 a group of officers (about 30 people) from Hohenstein POW camp were sent to Šilutė POW camp Stalag 331 (later Stalag I C). By that time the camp administration had grown to about 100 people. Major Brinkord was then the camp commandant and he was later replaced by Major Engel. The camp was located in Maci-

71 Letter dated 29 January 1942 from Gumbinnen Land Management Division to the governor of Šilutė County, *ibid.*, f. 1577, ap. 10, b. 30, l. 1.

72 А. Шнеер, *Плен*, т. 1, Иерусалим, 2003, с. 167.

73 Letter dated 27 March 1974 from Dortmund Prosecution Service to the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes (*Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung von NS-Gewaltverbrechen in Ludwigsburg*, hereinafter ZStL), BA in Ludwigsburg (hereinafter BAL), B162/6573, l. 1234.

74 G. Mattiello, W. Vogt, *Deutsche Kriegsgefangenen- und Internierteneinrichtungen 1939–1945. Band 1: Stammlager (Stalag)*, Koblenz–Milano, 1986, S. 9, 42, 43; letter dated 1 April 1974 from Dortmund Prosecution Service to ZStL, BAL, B162/6573, l. 1235.

75 Interrogation protocol of 11 November 1966 of Paul Demuth, BAL, B 162/6571, l. 395.

kai, the commandant's office was about 500 metres away from the camp in the building where the well-known writer Hermann Sudermann (b. 30 September 1857) was born. Some of the officers from the commandant's office lived in private apartments in Šilutė. There were a few barracks next to the commandant's office where prisoners' clothes were kept. Other barracks were used as offices for other camp personnel and guards. In July 1941, about 2,000–3,000 Soviet POWs were imprisoned in the Macikai camp, their numbers grew as time went on and allegedly reached 15,000. Some prisoners were transferred to other camps. About 40 people of the administrative staff regularly worked in the camp led by Chief Master Sergeant Engbarth. In spring 1942, Ruth was moved to serve at Stablack POW camp<sup>76</sup>.

Bruno Wendik (b. 28 January 1896) was transferred to Macikai POW camp in July 1941. He served in commandant's office I B as an officer handling prisoner records. When he arrived there were about 4,000 POWs in Macikai, but as stated above their number increased. According to Wendik, in 1942 POWs were recruited into General Andrey Vlasov's (1901–1946) army (Russian Liberation Army [ROA]). The prisoners joined the army voluntarily, but they were selected by a special commission. In July 1942, Wendik was transferred to Stablack POW camp<sup>77</sup>.

According to the testimony of the former German soldier Johannes Schleyer (b. 24 April 1902), he served at Macikai POW camp in Šilutė from around mid-June to mid-September 1941. The commander of the camp was Major Petters, while Dr Engelke was an Abwehr officer. Schleyer served at the telephone exchange which was, like the commandant's office, outside the camp in Šilutė. When Schleyer arrived in Šilutė there was as yet no camp, only a meadow fenced with barbed wire. In the first few days of the war between Germany and the USSR, 300 prisoners were brought to the camp. By mid-September 1941, the number of prisoners had increased to 700–800. As stated by Schleyer, during his service in Macikai he never saw any Gestapo officials nor did he see or hear about the selection of Soviet POWs at the camp or of their being shot outside the camp boundaries. In mid-September 1941, the commandant's office was relocated to Pagėgiai POW camp and a new administration was to be appointed for Macikai POW camp in Šilutė<sup>78</sup>.

According to the testimony of Paul Karl Erfurt, in April–May 1941 in the city of Lübben a special Wehrmacht unit was formed for work at the future POW camps. Erfurt was a member of the administration and worked as an accountant (*Oberzahlmeister*). In mid-

76 Interrogation protocol of 19 March 1975 of Peter Ruth, *ibid.*, B 162/6574, l. 1361–1363.

77 Interrogation protocol of 20 March 1975 of Bruno Wendik, *ibid.*, l. 1367–1369.

78 Interrogation protocol of 29 June 1967 of Johannes Schleyer, *ibid.*, B 162/6571, l. 408–409.

June the unit arrived at an estate in Macikai Village about 3 km east of Šilutė. Erfurt worked in an office in Šilutė. Soon afterwards, the first Soviet POWs were delivered to the camp. There could have been about 2,000 POWs at that time. The camps in Macikai and Pagėgiai were initially marked with the same number 53. Around early August 1941, most of the staff from the commandant's office and other personnel were transferred to the camp in Pagėgiai. During the interrogation Erfurt maintained that it was not known to him if Gestapo officials visited the camp in Macikai in order to select groups of POWs for annihilation. In early August, Erfurt was transferred to the camp in Pagėgiai<sup>79</sup>.

German soldier Adam Falkowski was transferred to Šilutė in early September 1941. The POW camp was then called Stalag 331. The camp's commandant's office was located on an estate approximately 2 km south of Šilutė. According to Falkowski's testimony, the camp was another 2 km south of the commandant's office. Falkowski maintained that he had never been to the camp, because he worked as a driver at the commandant's office and mainly maintained and repaired vehicles. From the stories of his friends Falkowski learned that in winter 1941–1942 there was a typhus epidemic in the camp and because of the frozen ground it was very difficult to bury the dead. In early 1943, together with a group of other employees Falkowski was transferred to Stablack camp and from there sent to serve in Norway<sup>80</sup>.

Wilhelm Frerick (b. 23 October 1904) was transferred from Königsberg to Stalag 331 in Šilutė in spring 1942. He had to manage a shoe repair shop where Russian POWs worked. Frerick worked in the camp until August 1942, but lived outside the camp in private accommodation. The working hours were from 8.00 to 16.00. According to Frerick, he never saw any Gestapo officers in the camp; and he had never seen or heard about the selection of commissars from among the POWs. In summer 1942 there were about 5,000 Soviet POWs in the camp. In early September 1942, Frerick was transferred to Stablack POW camp (Stalag I A)<sup>81</sup>.

According to the testimony of Walter Müller (b. 2 January 1897), the real POW camp was located in Macikai, about 3–4 km from Šilutė. There were barracks and a large kitchen on the site of the camp. Halfway between Šilutė and Macikai there was a commandant's

79 Interrogation protocol of 11 December 1967 of Paul Karl Erfurt, *ibid.*, l. 441–442.

80 Interrogation protocol of 15 January 1975 of Adam Falkowski, *ibid.*, B 162/6574, l. 1343–1346.

81 Interrogation protocol of 14 January 1975 of Wilhelm Frerick, *ibid.*, l. 1350–1351.

office and the guards' quarters (barracks). It was not possible to see the camp from the commandant's office because of the dense forest<sup>82</sup>.

Former Wehrmacht lance Rudolf Grimm (b. 9 May 1898) served as a translator at Macikai POW camp for nearly one and a half years intermittently starting from March 1942. According to him the camp was guarded by two battalions of German soldiers. At that time there could have been about 2,000 prisoners in the camp. On two occasions officers were selected from among the prisoners. One group of officers was sent to Estonia, the other – to Nuremberg. The selected officers were sent to serve in Vlasov's army units. Soviet officers sent to Estonia were armed. According to Grimm, during the time of his service no POWs were executed in Macikai camp. The prisoners allegedly passed away in the camp from natural causes. In September 1943, Grimm was transferred to serve in Vlasov's army as a translator<sup>83</sup>.

So, on the basis of the testimony of the German military personnel, it can be concluded that the POW camp started its operations in Macikai only at the beginning of the war between Germany and USSR, no earlier than late June or early July 1941.

It is known that in July 1941 Lieutenant Colonel Gerhard was the commandant of the camp; between from 22 June 1942 to 14 April 1943 the commandant was Major Schonert; and in 1944 – Colonel Hörmann von Hörbach<sup>84</sup>.

### **Macikai in 1941–1943 – Soviet POW camp**

At the start of the German-Soviet war the number of prisoners climbed swiftly. According to the orders and instructions of the German Security Police and SD, hostile elements were to be selected from among the Soviet POWs and subsequently destroyed. The following groups of prisoners were to be liquidated: professional revolutionaries, Comintern officials, all Communist Party officials and officials of its branch organisations, people's commissars and their deputies, Soviet intellectuals, political leaders and commissioners of the Red Army, leading employees of economic sectors and Jews. Local Gestapo officials were to select the POWs and execute them. Specifically the camps in Macikai and

82 Interrogation protocol of 27 January 1970 and 16 January 1975 of Walter Müller, *ibid.*, l. 1352–1355, 1356–1359.

83 Interrogation protocol of 27 September 1967 of Rudolf Grimm, *ibid.*, B 162/6576, l. 2149–2150.

84 Interrogation protocol of 23 September 1975 of W. Meyer, *ibid.*, l. 1580–1581; *ibid.*, B 162/6575, l. 1622; notification of 15 September 1967 by Stade City Criminal Police about Erich Gehrke, *ibid.*, B 162/6576, l. 2147.

Pagėgiai had to be ‘cleared’ by Tilsit Gestapo office staff (a special group of 4–6 Gestapo men led by a senior Gestapo officer). This criminal activity was managed by Tilsit Gestapo Criminal Commissioner Wilhelm Gerke (b. 25 November 1906)<sup>85</sup>. The Gestapo sought to identify the groups of prisoners to be liquidated through interrogations and their agents recruited from among the POWs. Since Soviet POWs suffered from the lack of food, attempts were made to recruit them by offering additional food and tobacco rations. Each week Gestapo officers had to report to the Reich Security Head Office (RSHA) in Berlin about the prisoners identified for liquidation. The commandant of the camp had to report any victim identified from among the prisoners to the Gestapo<sup>86</sup>. According to German historian Alfred Streim, POWs selected by Tilsit Gestapo at POW camps in Pagėgiai, Šilutė (Macikai) and Ebenrode camps were shot near Pagėgiai in July–August 1941. About 700–800 Soviet POWs were executed. Executions were carried out by the Tilsit Gestapo squad led by Hans Joachim Böhme. It is not known how many POWs from the Macikai camp were killed. In 1958 the court in the city of Ulm sentenced Böhme to 15 years imprisonment<sup>87</sup>. According to Gerke’s testimony, executions of Soviet POWs from Širvinta camp were also carried out near Virbalis in the territory of Lithuania. Gerke stated that on one occasion the commissars and political commissars from the camp in Šilutė were shot in the forest near Šilutė<sup>88</sup>. According to the testimony of Walter Müller, selection of POWs was also carried out at the Macikai camp hospital. This was performed by Gestapo official Wilhelm Schmidt. He was tasked with the selection of Jews and political commissars from among the POWs. Some surnames were most likely passed to him by agents recruited from among the POWs. Next morning the selected POWs were taken away in trucks. Müller found out from a truck driver that Soviet POWs condemned to death were taken to the woods near Pagėgiai and shot there. There were 3–4 selections in January 1942 from among the hospitalised POWs. At least 20–25 prisoners could have been taken away for execution. On one occasion the Gestapo men wanted to select Tatars, because like the Jews, they were circumcised. Following Müller’s efforts, prisoners of Tatar origin were not taken by the Gestapo for execution<sup>89</sup>.

85 Letter dated 20 December 1967 from Dortmund Prosecution Service to ZStL, BAL, B 162/6571, l. 389–390.

86 Ibid., l. 391.

87 A. Streim, *Die Behandlung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener im „Fall Barbarossa“*. Eine Dokumentation, Heidelberg–Karlsruhe, 1981, S. 98–99.

88 Extract from the interrogation protocol of 20 June 1958 of Wilhelm Gerke, BAL, B 162/21448, l. 7.

89 Interrogation protocols of 27 October 1970 and 16 January 1975 of Walter Müller, ibid., l. 1352–1355, 1356–1359.

Little is known about the life of the Red Army POWs in the camp in Šilutė. Witnesses recall that captives did the hardest work: loaded coal, cleaned sewerage and dug trenches for future storage of potatoes and root vegetables<sup>90</sup>. Russian POWs helped farmers of Klaipėda Region to do various jobs, particularly during the harvest season. Martin Redweik, who had a 70 ha farm in Sakučiai (Sakuten) Village, testified that in May–July 1943 a Russian POW worked on his farm during the harvest season<sup>91</sup>. According to another testimony, around 20 Russian POWs worked in Sakučiai Village on two large farms in May–July 1944. They were guarded by German soldiers. When the frontline approached, the POWs were taken to the depths of Germany<sup>92</sup>.

Hunger and hard work was only a fraction of what the Red Army POWs had to endure. The worst torture was penalties. On the edge of the camp by the gate there were several cages covered with barbed wire where prisoners were put for the slightest offense. The ‘culprit’ would suffer in a half upright position in the cage for a day or often several days<sup>93</sup>.

Witness Dovydas Stučka testified that around 40 Soviet POWs died every day. At first they were buried near the camp, on the other side of the road. Later the bodies were transported further away to the fields of farmer Koblencas. A particularly high number of Soviet POW deaths were recorded in the winter of 1942–1943. Many prisoners died during the typhus epidemic. The prisoners were often transported to be buried without outerwear. They were buried in pits, about 20 corpses in each pit. Detention conditions of Russian POWs slightly improved only in 1944. They started receiving wages for their work and were able to buy tobacco and food products for coupons. The Russian language newspaper *Zaria* began to be distributed among Soviet POWs. This was probably related to the recruitment of prisoners to Vlasov’s army, which had to fight alongside the Germans against the Red Army<sup>94</sup>. As the Soviet POWs died in huge numbers they were replaced by new prisoners from the liquidated POW camp in Priekulė (Stalag 63). In July 1942, around 1,200 Russian POWs were brought to Macikai<sup>95</sup>. It is impossible to estimate (even approximately) the number of Soviet POWs who perished at the POW camp in

90 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 15.

91 Interrogation protocol of 16 February 1945 of Martin Redweik, LYA, f. K-1, ap. 58, b. P-13418, l. 30 a. p.

92 Interrogation protocol of 21 November 1944 of Georg Klimkait, *ibid.*, b. P-13426, l. 15.

93 „Pėdsakai neišblėso“, *Komunistinis darbas*, 1963-11-19, Nr. 136.

94 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 15, 16.

95 Z. Lietz, *Obozy jenieckie w Prusach Wschodnich 1939–1945*, s. 114.

Macikai. German historian Christoph Dieckmann claims that around 3,000–5,000 Soviet POWs could have died. After the Soviets occupied Lithuania, the NKVD officials informed their leadership that 60 pits had been discovered with 20–25 corpses in each; furthermore, around 200–300 single graves had been identified. However, the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission for the investigation of Nazi crimes neither investigated the site of the Macikai POW camp nor exhumed any bodies. Not even a monument was built in Soviet times to commemorate the POWs in Macikai<sup>96</sup>. British POW Walter Henry Layne who was brought to Macikai camp on 10 October 1943 wrote that at that time there were around 1,000 Russian POWs in the camp and that they died in huge numbers of starvation without getting any aid from the International Red Cross<sup>97</sup>.

Sometimes, Soviet POWs, like prisoners of western countries, tried to escape. There is a record in the documents of the German Security Police that on 22 August 1943 four Russian POWs tried to cross a bridge in the town of Skaudvilė. A prisoner from the Šilutė camp was among the fugitives and he was shot dead, while others managed to flee. Marytė Musvydaitė, who was a farm hand in Macikai, helped her Polish friend and a group of Russian POWs to escape in summer 1943 (she supplied them with wire cutters). The young woman successfully took the fugitives across the former border between Klaipėda Region and Lithuania. Some Russian POWs who escaped from Macikai camp managed to reach Soviet partisans. One of these fugitives was pilot Anatolij Simokhin from Arkhangelsk. His plane had been shot down in June 1942. He met another pilot Vyacheslav Kozoborodov in the Macikai camp. They managed to escape from the camp and join The Avenger group of Soviet partisans operating in Raseiniai environs. In June 1944, both Russian prisoners together with another three POWs who fled from Macikai camp perished in a skirmish with the Germans<sup>98</sup>.

It is believed that between 1941 and 1942, a standard mandatory structure of the camp formed. On the road to the Macikai estate the sign 'Heydekrug POW camp' (*Kriegsgefangenenlager Heydekrug*) was put up. At the time, the administration of the camp (*Vorlager*) and quarantine (reception) unit were also formed. On the basis of the surviving documents it can be stated that in summer 1942 the Macikai camp (called Stalag 331 [I C]) was guarded by the 6<sup>th</sup> Company of Rifle Battalion 337 (*Landeschützenbataillon 337*)<sup>99</sup>.

96 Ch. Dieckmann, „Karo belaisvių žudymas“, *Totalitarinių režimų nusikaltimai Lietuvoje. Nacių okupacija*, t. 2, p. 42; S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 24, 25.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 22, 23.

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

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's<sup>100</sup> 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 government<sup>101</sup>. 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 them<sup>102</sup>. 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 costs<sup>103</sup>.

#### 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 1944<sup>104</sup>. 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](http://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 warning<sup>105</sup>.

In OKW Organisational Order No 51 of 18 November 1943, the Šilutė camp is already called camp VI under the authority of the Luftwaffe<sup>106</sup>. 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 rooms<sup>107</sup>. 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 Cross<sup>108</sup>. 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 Macikai<sup>109</sup>. 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 Salemmé was elected the leader of barracks F-2. Leaders elected the camp council<sup>110</sup>. 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](http://www.b24.net), accessed 2014-12-15].

108 Ibid.

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

110 The Fred Salemmé Story [available from [www.angel45-2b.com](http://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 men<sup>111</sup>. 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 starving<sup>112</sup>.

**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 weeks<sup>113</sup>. 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 countries<sup>114</sup>. 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 water<sup>115</sup>. 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](http://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](http://www.angel45-2b.com), accessed 2014-11-26].

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

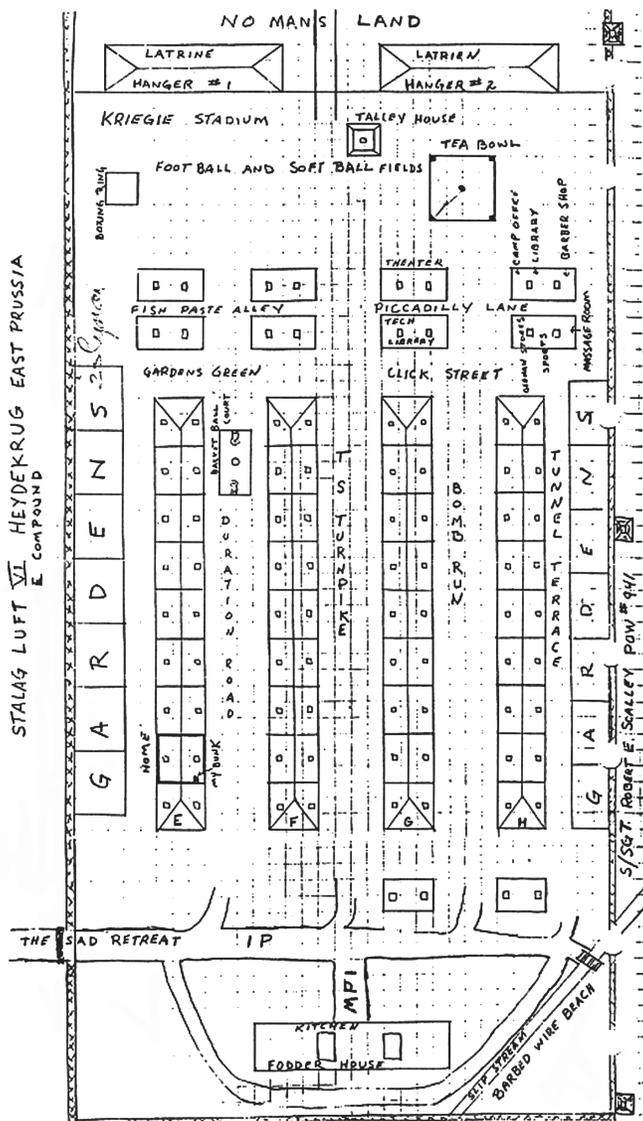
Red Cross representatives who came to the camp and passed their requests and wishes to them<sup>116</sup>. Prisoners were engaged in self-education and cultural affairs. From the books sent to them by their relatives, a library was organised. The library of the American compound had about 6,000 books. 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 events<sup>117</sup>.

**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 camp<sup>118</sup>. 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](http://www.angel45-2b.com), accessed 2014-11-26].



*Barvėnė yra atskirai esanti kėčių kabinas  
 ir administracijos pastatas. Amerikiečių komanda*

Plan of the 'American zone' of the POW camp as drawn from memory by American pilots, former prisoners of the camp in Macikai, S. Melinauskas, *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 sea<sup>119</sup>.

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 shot<sup>120</sup>. 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 Insterburg<sup>121</sup>. 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 camps<sup>122</sup>. 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 arrested<sup>123</sup>.

**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 pharmacy<sup>124</sup>.

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 diseases<sup>125</sup>.

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 food<sup>126</sup>. 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 medics<sup>127</sup>. 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 homeland<sup>128</sup>. 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 proposal<sup>129</sup>.

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 typhoid<sup>130</sup>.

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 it<sup>131</sup>. 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 Šilutė<sup>132</sup>. 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 camp<sup>133</sup>.

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: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 46, 48.

133 S. Mėlinauskas, *Macikai: Sugrįžimas 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 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. [...] <sup>134</sup>

### **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 Salemmé Story [available from [www.angel45-2b.com](http://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 Village<sup>135</sup>.

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 RM<sup>136</sup>.

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 probation<sup>137</sup>. 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 room<sup>138</sup>. 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 Schaar<sup>139</sup>. 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 jokes<sup>140</sup>. 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 costs<sup>141</sup>.

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 costs<sup>142</sup>.

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 POWs<sup>143</sup>. Petereit was sent to prison in Marienburg<sup>144</sup>.

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 (Gurgsdén) 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 stations<sup>145</sup>. 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 convictions<sup>146</sup>.

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 People<sup>147</sup>. 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 case<sup>148</sup>. 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 girls<sup>149</sup>. The other French POW, Laurent Beaumartin (b. 1913, Bel. No 15243), who worked for the same farmer as Prost, also denied having any intimate relations<sup>150</sup>.

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 POW<sup>151</sup>.

### 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 VI<sup>152</sup>.

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 Poland<sup>153</sup>.

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 1945<sup>154</sup>.

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](http://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](http://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 labour<sup>155</sup>. 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 direction<sup>156</sup>. 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: Sugrįžimas atminties takais*, p. 86.