

56(4)/17/44

SECRET

AIS CMF/SKP/3961,3962

ESCAPED FROM

E.535, SOSNOWIEC

SILESIA, VIA

SLOVAKIA.

INTERROGATION REPORT ON

7814 Pte GILMOUR, Wilfred Samuel Henry.

27 (M.G. ) Bn., 2 N.Z.E.F.

12264 Pte McKINNEY, Ronald Jack.

26 Bn, 2 N.Z.E.F.

Both Interrogated 8 Oct 44.

(Map References: Owing to the variety of maps of CENTRAL EUROPE in use, and the diversity in the spelling of place names in the area, the approx. Latitude and Longitude of names, where traced, are given in the text.)

1. PERSONAL DETAILS.

	<u>Pte GILMOUR.</u>	<u>Pte McKINNEY.</u>
Born	24 Oct 22.	21 Jul 16.
Enlisted	15 Sep 39 (Volunteer)	15 Oct 39 (Volunteer).
Address	c/o Mrs M.E. Gilmour, 28 Freeling Street, Island Bay, WELLINGTON, New Zealand.	ONEWHERE,[sic;ONERWERO] AUCKLAND, New Zealand.

2. CAMPS.

	<u>Pte GILMOUR.</u>	<u>Pte McKINNEY.</u>
EL DABA	(1-day – Jul 42)	Hospitals in EL DABA
Hosp. MERSA MATRUH.	20 – 28 Jul 42	MERSA MATRUH, BADIA.
BENGHAZI (Main Camp)	30 Jul – 15 Oct 42	TOBRUK, DERNA (in transit
P.G. 75, BARI.	19 Oct – end Nov 42.	1-week). Thence by ship to NAPLES (Sept 42) 205, CASERTA Hosp. 10 Sep – Nov 42 P.G. 66, CAPUA. (10 days) Nov 42.

Both Sources

(except where noted )

P.G. 57, GRAPPICHANO.	Nov 42 – 13 Sep 43.
Stalag 317 (XVIII C), MARKT PONGAU.	14 – 19 Sep 43.
Stalag VIII A, GORLITZ (SILESIA).	23 Sep – 2 Nov 43.
Working Camps:	SCHAKOVA [sic; SCHOWA] 5 Nov 43 – 6 Jun 44 (GILMOUR)
	5 Nov 43 – 15 Jan 44 (McKINNEY)
	GLEIWITZ 6 Jun – 24 Aug 44 (GILMOUR)
	E. 535 SOSNOWIEC 24 Aug – 12 Sep 44 (GILMOUR)
	15 an – 12 Sep44 (McKINNEY)
	16

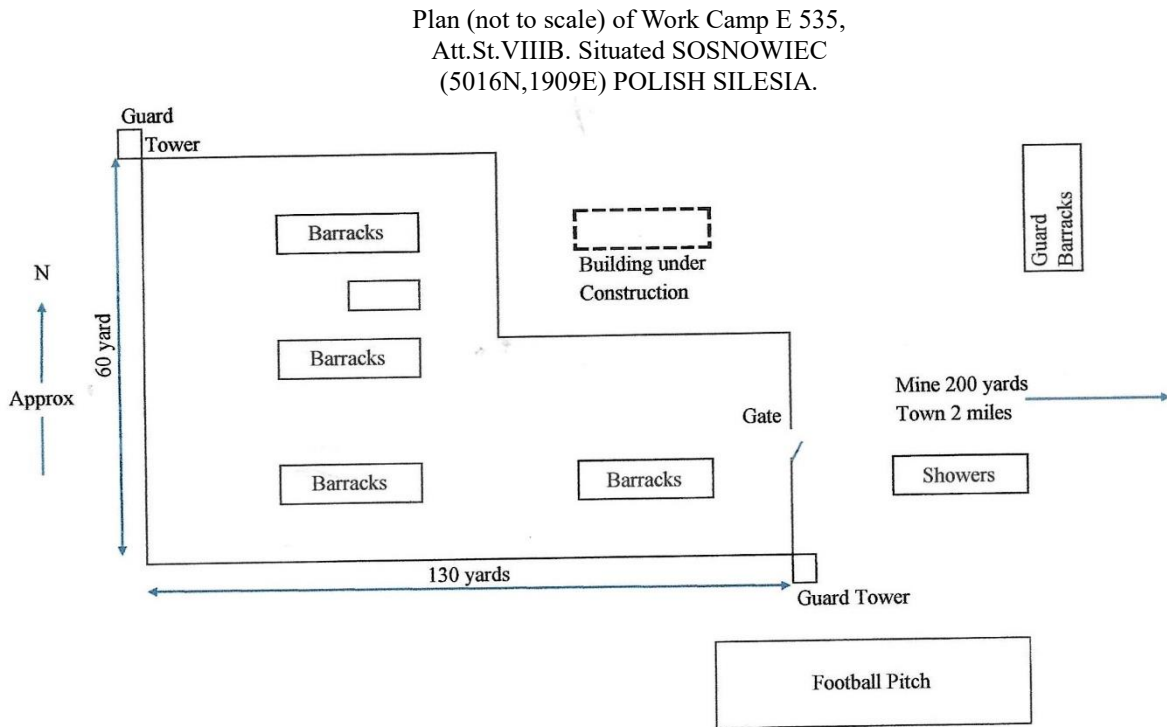
### 3. CAPTURE.

GILMOUR was wounded on 15 Jul 42 at EL ALAMEIN, and was picked up by Germans on 18 Jul 42. McKINNEY was captured on 4 Sep 44 [sic; 42] at EL ALAMEIN after his Coy had been. surrounded and had expended its ammunition.

#### 4. ATTEMPTED ESCAPES.

In Aug 44 GILMOUR and another PW (name not given) made an unsuccessful attempt to escape from GLEIWITZ. This was detected, shortly after 5-days solitary confinement on a diet of bread and water, they were sent to work in the coal mines in working camp E. 535, SOSNOWIEC (5016N, 1909E) administered from Stalag VIIIB, TESCHEN.

5. CAMP CONDITIONS IN WORKING CAMP E.535. SOSNOWIEC, as at mid-Sep 44.



(a) General.

The Camp is situated in MIŁOWITZ, a suburb of SOSNOWIEC, 2-miles West of SOSNOWIEC railway station, built on the North side of a hill.

The Camp consists of 2 lagers, one holding 600 PW, the other 200. Neither Source was in the latter, so all the information to follow deals with the larger of the two lagers.

The compound was approximately 130-yds x 80-yds, and had a single barbed wire fence. Within this wire were 4 brick huts for the accommodation of the PW, each of which was divided into 2 sections. Each section contained 8 rooms. Two guard towers overlooked the compound, but the guards accommodation was outside the wire, as were the showers and the football pitch. There were lights at 15 yd intervals round the wire.

There was only one gate into the Compound, at the East end. This was not guarded, but in full view of one of the guard towers. A new building was under construction at the N.E. corner of the Compound, outside the wire, but no doubt this will be enclosed as soon as it is completed.

There was about 600 PW in this lager, most of whom are New Zealanders.

...There were also 15 Spanish from French Foreign Legion

15 Cypriots.

6 British (Administration)

6 British (Working in coal mine)

2 Australians (Administration)

Of the New Zealand PW approximately 256 were working in the coal mine.

(b) Accommodation.

This consisted of 4 Brick huts with concrete floors, roofed with slates, and 2 with felt. Each hut was divided up into 16 small rooms, each about 14-ft square, and housing 10 PW. In each room there was a fireplace and a table. Each hut was partitioned into 2 sections with no intercommunication. A passage down the centre of each section gave access to the rooms.

There was plenty of water available at the camp, and hot water could be obtained from the cookhouse at certain hours of the day. There was, however, only one wash basin to each section of a hut, in a small cubicle with a urinal. 2-oz of "ersatz" soap were issued each week and the PW had a hot shower every time they came off a shift in the coal mine.

There were 32 lavatories, all of which were situated at the end of one building. These were of the pit type and were pumped out at fairly reasonable intervals. The PW were locked in their huts at 2100 hrs each evening so that they could not use the latrines after this hour, a bucket was put in each section for use at night.

There was a fireplace in each room and unlimited coal, so that during the cold weather the PW kept their fires going for 24 hours every day. There were two windows, opening inwards, to each room. These windows were not barred or wired in any way, but the guards had orders to shoot any PW who ventured outside of his hut after the doors had been locked. One electric lamp per room gave adequate light for reading, etc. The PW slept on two-tier beds and were issued with a straw bolster, a palliasse and 2 blankets.

On 24 Aug 44, 60 new PW arrived, and these had not been issued with any bedding by 12 Sep 44, when Sources escape.

(c) Food.

Considering the heavy work which the PW were called to do in the coal mine the food was "not very good,".

The usual ration was as follows: -

500-gms of black bread daily.

50-gms of margarine (poor quality)

A small quantity of jam.

3-oz of sugar weekly.

Meat was issued occasionally, but was usually "quite rotten".

Cheese occasionally.

Plenty of "ersatz" coffee.

The PW were given a cup of coffee for breakfast, but really had only one meal per day, which consisted of potatoes, and occasionally stew. The cooking was done by PW, who saved the little extras issued, so that on Sundays they usually managed to serve a better meal than on the rest of the week.

Red Cross parcels were received regularly and one per week was issued to each PW. Just before Sources left, an order was issued that only ½ a parcel per man was to be issued w.c.f. 15 Sep 44. All the parcels were opened, and all the tins punctured, and latterly the authorities had been breaking up the chocolate bars during their searching.

(d) Clothing.

Working kit was supplied to the PW working as miners, viz., a miner's hat, sleeveless vest, overalls, boots and a lamp. Towards the end of Sources stay this kit was in very poor shape and there was no sign of replacement. Uniform were received from the Red Cross and issued where available.

(e) Medical.

Sick parade was held each day, and 10% of the PW were allowed to report sick. The Camp M.O. was most unco-operative and inefficient. On more than one occasion when men caused self inflicted wounds in an attempt to slow up production, this M.O. sent them to work and threatened them with a court martial if they repeated their offence.

On one occasion he sent a man to work after he had reported sick with a broken finger. This man worked five shifts before the German foreman in the mine sent him back to the M.O. with a note pointing out the injury. Another man suffering from pleurisy was sent to work but collapsed after a short time and was sent back.

Sources state that they got much better treatment from the German doctor in the area than from their own M.O.

Nearly all the dressings and drugs were supplied by the Red Cross, and were better than those available to the Germans. Hospital treatment was fairly good. All PW were thoroughly X-Rayed before being sent to the mine, and anyone with any suspicion of lung trouble was rejected.

(f) Spiritual.

No Church services were ever held in the Camp.

(g) Amenities.

PW were allowed on free Sunday out of 3, when they played football if guards were available to go out with them. There was a small library. Most of the books had been left by previous PW, and some others were supplied by the Red Cross.

Concerts were occasionally given and there was a PW orchestra. All performances had to be given in the open air, because no recreation hut was available.

There was no Canteen in the Camp. Beer was occasionally on sale in the Camp, and about 75 French cigarettes a month could be bought.

(h) Working Conditions.

The PW worked in the coal mine 3 shifts each 7 hours, which meant that a man was away from the Camp for 11 - 11½ hours each day. A quota was put on the work so that if a man finished his quota early, he could stop working. Many took advantage of this, but the majority took the view that they would stop at the end of the shift however little they produced. All the PW deprecated their employment as being war work.

The PW were split up as much as possible, and mixed with the forced civilian labour. The working parties were of sizes varying from 5 to 10 workers, with an armed German supervisor to watch each.

Working conditions in the mine were not good. The mine had been flooded on the invasion of Poland, and the plans burnt, so that there was an ever-present danger of a new working breaking into an old flooded shaft. Safety precautions were very lax, as the Germans were only interested in getting as much coal out of the mine as possible before they had to give up control. One section of the mine has bad air to the height of 2-ft off the ground. PW were made to work here, and were frequently overcome; when this happened they were sent to the bottom of the shaft to wait for the shift to be relieved, and another man sent to the section as a replacement.

The Germans supervisors frequently threatened the PW with shooting or hanging as a punishment for slacking, but their threats were never carried out. 3 PW were however, sent to a "punishment mine" for consistent slacking.

PW were paid for their work in the mine, but as they had to pay for their food, light, accommodation, fuel, guards, "in fact for everything", they received very little at the end of the month. Pay for a full months work usually amounted to 25-30 marks. If a PW missed a days work, his pay was stopped and "1 day off usually took 2-days work to pay for it".

Normally only Ptes and L/Cpls had to work, but quite a number of more Senior N.C.Os. volunteered to go down the mine.

The guards were for the most part down-graded men who had been wounded and were no longer fit for combatant service. Some were very hostile to the PW, but many were quite friendly and smuggled extra food, bought on the Black Market, into the Camp. The Camp was run by a German W.O. who had complete power over everything.

(i) Mail.

PW were allowed to write 1 letter card and 1 postcard per week. Mail into the Camp was irregular, but "most of it arrived eventually".

(j) Miscellaneous.

PW who still had watches and jewelry were allowed to keep them. Personal photographs were censored and returned to the owners. On transfer from ITALY all correspondence was censored, much of it confiscated.

Just after FRANCE was invaded by the Allies, all PW's Pay Books were confiscated. No reason was given for this. On capture these books had been examined, but returned to the PW shortly afterwards.

Protected personnel were not expected to work in the mines, though medical personnel who could not get their status verified did have to work. A few exempted personnel volunteered for work, doubtless as an alternative to the monotony of the life in the Camp. 3 medical orderlies were employed in the Camp M.I.Room.

A Swedish representative visited the Camp once and a Red Cross representative visited it about once in 3-months. PW were not allowed to talk to these visitors, but the Senior N.C.O. only. No improvements were effected in consequence of these visits, though many complaints were preferred.

Preferential treatment was given to the Cypriot PW, who made a point of mollifying the German Camp staff, by giving them gifts of chocolate and other food from their Red Cross parcels.

## 6. ESCAPE.

Shortly after his arrival in E.535, SOSNOWIEC (at end of Aug 44), GILMOUR learned of the existence of some old escape tunnels in the old mine workings. With another PW he began exploring the latter, and discovered a shaft which came out about ½ a mile from the PW Camp. this shaft had been known to the Germans at some time or other as there was a wooden cover upon the exit.

Plans were made for GILMOUR, McKINNEY and 2 other PW (names not given) to escape, but before they could leave 4 other PW (names not given) made an attempt, 2 of them being re-captured. GILMOUR and his companions decided to postpone their attempt until the hue and cry had died down. In the meantime they obtained all the information they could from the re-captured PW, as these had followed the same route which GILMOUR proposed to use.

They also arranged for the other PW to perform their shifts in the mine so that their absence would not be noticed for about 24-hours.

About 2300 hrs on 12 Sep 44, GILMOUR, McKINNEY and their two companions (names not given) reached the end of the shaft. They were then held up for about 2-hours, as they had to cut off the heads of all

the nails on the wooden cover at the exit. The cover was eventually removed, and the party set off in a Southerly direction, with the intention of crossing the Carpathian Mts, and entering SLOVAKIA.

As they had emerged to the N.W. of the Camp they had to make their way around it, and skirt the town of MYSTOWICE (5014N,1909E) before they could set off on their chosen route.

They walked all night and by morning (13 Sep 44) had reached a point N.W. of OSWIECIM (5003N,1913E), having watched a heavy R.A.F. raid on that town during the night. They rested a while then set off towards ZYWIEC (4941N,1911E), keeping to the forest country and avoiding all inhabited localities. They obtained good information about this part of the route from the 2 PW who had made the unsuccessful escape attempt already referred to in this report.

On the third day of their journey the party became split near the village of KOSY WLK [sic; KOZY] (4951N,1909E). GILMOUR and McKINNEY proceeded on the preselected route for a short distance, and then waited for a time. Their 2 former companions did not reappear, so both Sources continued their journey by themselves.

They walked all night and all the following day (15 Sep) until they reached the valley surrounding ZYWIEC (4941N,1911E). They walked all night around the East edge of the bowl, until on the morning of 16 Sep they arrived back on their route at a point S.E. of the town. From here they walked South through the forest, rested a short time that night, and on the evening of the 17 Sep crossed the SLOVAKIAN border at a point approx. 4933N, 1922E.

They followed a road S.E. until they met a Slovak peasant, who indicated to them that there were Germans in the next village. They therefore skirted this village and continued on down the road until they reached a point where it joined a main road at TVRDOSIN (4921N,1935E).

They decided it was too dangerous to follow the main road as German vehicles were passing along it all the time, so they crossed the road and set off due South again. After walking for 2-days they arrived at a small village named HUTE [sic; HUTY] (approx. 4514N,1935E) on 19 Sep, where they met members of a "Partisan" band, which they decided to join.

From this point their subsequent journey was arranged for them.

They arrived safely in British hands in ITALY on 5 Oct 44.

Note Additional information of a 'TOP SECRET' nature has been passed to departments concerned in the form of Appendices B & C.

[Appendix B is missing in the file.]

## APPENDIX C.

### INTERROGATION REPORT OF

7814 Pte GILMOUR, W.S.H.

27 (MG) Bn, 2 N.Z.E.F.

12264 Pte McKINNEY R.J.

26 Bn. 2 N.Z.E.F.

#### 1. PERSONALITIES AT Working Camp E. 535, SOSNOWIEC.

##### (a) Imperial & Dominion Camp Staff.

R.S.M. BROOKES A, 20 Bn, 2 NZEF. "A sincere and honest man but rather weak, who disliked to cause trouble and would not stand up against the Germans."

M.O., Capt HOOPER, R.A.M.C. Captured in ITALY. Cordially disliked by all PW because he refused to co-operate with them in their attempts to slow up production. Not very efficient in his diagnoses, and inclined to be negligent, so that many PW suffered unnecessarily. Even the German mine foreman sent men back after they had been passed as fit for work by HOOPER. "He appeared frightened not to co-operate fully with the German authorities."

##### (b) German Camp Staff.

Feldwebel Herman ARNIKER. A bully type although "his bark was worse than his bite". Unco-operative and would do nothing to help the PW improve their living conditions. On one or two occasions in a fit of temper this man struck PW.

#### 2. NOTE ON ATTEMPTED SUBORNING OF IMPERIAL AND DOMINIAN PW.

The "St.George Legion or British Free Corps".

Dress: Khaki, German type uniform. German emblem on right breast, Cross of St George on the Left.

PW suborned to join this German-sponsored movement ostensibly aimed against "Bolshevism", were alleged to number "30,000". (Comment: A previous report has stated 200.) They were said to be allowed to move about freely. Some are said to have been sent to the Russian front. Rumours circulating among the PW camps were that the majority of the members are South Africans.

PW from Stalag 344, LAMSDORF, or Stalag VIII B, TESCHEN, can give more information on this movement, as it is having most effect in the Main PW Camps, not in the Working Camps.

IRISH PW are being subjected to intensive propaganda. In May 44 all were recalled to Stalag 344, LAMSDORF, from the working camps. This has happened once or twice before.

All Canadian PW were removed from Working Camps in May 44. (Comment: There is no evidence here of any sinister interpretation.

The practice now seems to be to make each camp for one nationality only, whether this is coincidence or not neither Source could say.

There are "Rest Camps" in BERLIN for men who have been PW for 4-years. Those going here were taken for sight-seeing tours (but not since the big Allied air raids). Only selected PW were taken to these rest camps, and the majority of the PW consider they are purely an enemy "propaganda stunt".

#### 3.ESCAPE INFORMATION.

There was no organised escape committee in E.535, SOSNOWIEC.

#### 4.ESCAPE NARRATIVE.

On arrival with the Partisan band at HUTE [sic; HUTY] (? APPROX 4914N,1935E), on 19 Sep 44, Sources were given rifles and Slovak Partisan uniforms. Shortly afterwards a Partisan Colonel arrived, and told them of the presence of British and American Missions in SLOVAKIA. They were told to put on their own clothes, a guide was provided, and they were taken to KORYTNICA (4854N,1918E), to an Allied Mission.

They arrived here on 24 Sep, and stayed for 2-days. They were taken by truck to an Allied airfield. They waited here for 10-days, and were then evacuated by air to BARI, ITALY.

Sources can give no names and addresses of helpers, but state that such civilians as they met during their walk through SLOVAKIA all proved willing to help escapers.

The area Sources passed through was chiefly young plantations and game preserves. "Watch towers" were seen on all high points, but these were not manned, and have been pre-War "look-out points" for the use of game and forest wardens.

No patrols were encountered on the German side of the border, though Sources noticed imprints of hobnailed boots and poor of dogs on the forest tracks.

Lights were noticed flashing on and off upon main roads at night, which Sources consider might indicate that these are patrolled.

Transcribed by Deb Johnson August 2024. Additional notes by Brian Cooper.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON E535

The UK National Archives, Kew Catalogue Reference WO 244/27

Protecting Power Visit Report 579 covering 15-18 Sep 1944

For information on the camp newspaper see <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/the-tiki-times-vol-1?fbclid=IwAR2CwitR9O1yEUfISz6TuZUpJi5Nh5rHTnFrJy5Ejer1YmhQ5ButVhifPI4> ; accessed August 2024.