**Camp 104** **- Beela (Bela) River Camp, Milnthorpe, Westmoreland**

Included in the 1945 ICRC camp list – Labour Camp. 104. Beela River Camp, Milnthorpe, Westmorland.

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| **1947 Camp list** | | | | | | | |
| 104(G.W.C.) | Beela River Camp, Milnthorpe, Westmorland | W. | Priswar, Milnthorpe | Milnthorpe 112 | Milnthorpe | Major E.Selby. | v/1452/2 |

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| **Prisoner of War Camps (1939 – 1948) - Project report by Roger J.C. Thomas - English Heritage 2003** | | | | | | | |
| OS NGR | Sheet | No. | Name & Location | County | Cond’n | Type 1945 | Comments |
| SD 49 81 | 97 | 104 | Beela River (Bela River) Camp, Milnthorpe | Westmorland | 5 | German Working Camp |  |

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Location:** NGR above is for Milnthorpe. NGR for the camp SD 513 803. About 2 km SE of Milnthorpe  **Before the camp:** Farmland  **Pow Camp:** Listed as Italian working camp / labour battalion, then a German Working Camp. The map indicates that the camp was laid out as a standard type with a main pow compound, with guards’ huts and offices at the front alongside the road. Buildings included a water tower, offices, officer's mess, a canteen, guard rooms, barrack huts, ablution blocks, cell blocks, a camp reception station (medical facility/hospital), a cookhouse, dining rooms, recreation rooms and living huts or tents.  **3 June 1943** - There was an International Red Cross inspection - Italian prisoners, capacity 750.  **May and November 1944** - The camp was listed as an Italian Labour Battalion under the Western Command area (WO 32/10737). The Italians were recorded as co-operators.  **1 August 1945** - an urgent memorandum was sent to this camp, and others, about maintaining records of Italians who were classed as ‘co-operators’. At this point many, sometimes all, of the Italian pows were in hostels / billets.   |  | | --- | | Oversight and development of re-education activities and English teaching for German pows was carried out by PID (Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office) / COGA (Control Office for Germany and Austria – UK). Visits and reports were made. The standard of the reports varied greatly. The visitors took little interest, if any, in activities other than re-education. They rarely mentioned welfare, sports, games, pastimes, crafts, etc of the pows. If there were still Italian pows in hostels, they were usually ignored by PID. | |  |
| Ordnance Survey 1956 |

**1946** – Additional intake of many pows from camps in the USA. Most had very low morale as they had been misinformed in the US that they were being repatriated. Instead, they found themselves in working camps in the UK.

**24-29 August 1946** – PID visit for screening and report on re-education. Strength; 3 officers, 1242 Other Ranks in HQ, 3 hostels and billets. This was listed as the 3rd visit – the previous 2 reports are not in the National Archive file.

Commandant: Major Selby Camp Leader: Feldw Jaenicke (B+)

Interpreter: S/Sgt Wantoch Deputy C/L: Feldw Podschun (A)

German M.O.: St.Arzt Dr Baumstark (A); A.Arzt Dr Tobias (B+)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political screening: | A | B+ | B | B- | C | C+ | Unscreened |
|  | 56 | 66 | 247 | 25 | 24 | 1 | 826 |

The camp was regarded overall as anti-Nazi with no active Nazis. Some of the pows had been transferred to an officers’ camp before this date.

Very long hours for the harvest meant that few re-education activities were taking place

Visiting Lectures – regular.

Camp magazine - Magazine Der Neue Zeit (The New Times) – 120 copies made.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | The work of Reverend Alexander Macleod Murray and relationships with the local area – *“…the village of Beetham [about 2 km from the camp] on the edge of the Lake District set out to achieve reconciliation through ‘integration’. The vicar there was the Reverend Alexander Macleod Murray, a rare spirit… tall, scholarly, and high-church with an outgoing loving nature, he had also a shrewd knowledge of a man’s world; he bore the scars of the Kut campaign of 1915 and till recently had been chaplain to the Royal Tank Corps Depot at Warcop.*  *Arriving at Beetham in January 1946 and discovering that Camp 104 at Bela River was within his parish, he simply regarded its inmates as his parishioners. He put it to the existing ones that here were cast-down and ostracised people living in their midst, prisoners of war as many British had been. Let Beetham become for them a ‘little sanctuary,’ he said. As soon as regulations permitted and indeed long before, people responded. With young Mrs Murray playing her full part, the vicarage became a centre where Germans brought their loneliness and private troubles, or even their problems with their Commandant. When some prisoners told the vicar of a school teacher they knew in Germany who, though a good man and no Nazi, had been unjustly dismissed, he asked for a dossier on him which he sent to the local MP, William Fletcher Vane. He, in turn, passed it on to Lard Pakenham, then Minister for German Affairs. With astonishing speed, the case was reviewed, the teacher reinstated and his denouncers exposed.*  *The vicar put a large box in the church to receive gifts, chiefly clothing and food, and Beetham for a time became probably the greatest parcel-sending centre for its size in England. When furniture was required for a quiet room in the camp, a three-ton truck was soon taking in two dozen old easy chairs and a settee. Later a billiard table was sent up.*  *The beautiful church with its unique rose trellis walk to the south door was used for several joint services in two languages and for memorable concerts (among the Germans was a violinist once selected to play in Westminster Abbey at the 1936 Coronation). There was community singing, music-making in private houses, and the occasional discussion group. So swiftly did the spirit of reconciliation get going that for Christmas 1946 members of the Bela River Camp secretly prepared a surprise gift to the parish – a full set of carved and painted crib figures, with a dedication which read:*  “*We German Prisoners of War from Beela River Camp are giving this stable and the figures of the Nativity story, which have been made by Bruno Baumann and his assistant Gabriel Fabian as a gift to the Parish of Beetham.* |
| *By doing so we will express our gratefulness for having been able to realize the real spirit of Christian brotherhood, which has been proved to us by the Hon. Rev. A. Macleod Murray and the congregation of Beetham*  *We are praying with you to the Child of Bethlehem. On behalf of the Camp: Christmas 1946. B.Baumann – Artist / Werner Janicke – Camp Leader / Erich Schmidt – Camp Padre*”  (Extract from ‘Thresholds of Peace’, p278-9, Matthew Barry Sullivan, 1979, Hamish Hamilton). | |

Another visitor to this and other camps was Dr Margaret Rosenberg, a Jewess from Austria, called, ‘*the Angel of the Lake District Camps’* – at least until she had a dispute and is reported to have boxed the commandant’s ears at Camp 104. After that she would appear at places where the pows were working to ask if she could get them anything.

One of the German pows, Wilhelm Hackl stated of the camp: “*Here we were treated as humans, free from threats and humiliation*.” (quoted in the Westmorland Gazette).

**28-31 January 1947** – Report on Re-education. Strength; 2 officers, 976 OR.

The only change to senior personnel was the German M.O., St.Arzt Dr Baumstark had been replaced by Dr Ruhe (B).

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political screening: | A | B+ | B | B- | C |
|  | 12 | 136 | 682 | 121 | 27 |

32 appeals had been heard against political grades, 25 were successful, (the better the grade, the sooner repatriated, in theory) – 25 further appeals were pending.

Morale was recorded as “*low*,” mainly due to slow repatriations and bad news from Germany. Some of the pows were from ‘Rumania.’

1/3 of the pows were ‘youth’ (under-25). They were not seen as a problem.

The standard list of re-education activities was given:

Wochenpost and Ausblick – separate appendix.

Newspapers – A wide range of daily, Sunday and weekly papers were bought. The hostels were well supplied. 8-10 German newspapers were delivered weekly by COGA.

Library – 1250 books, though 400 needed repair. More requested.

Lectures – approximately monthly. More requested.

Discussion groups – Little interest – to be organised.

Films – YMCA and Gaumont British films. GB films were considered too expensive as they charged 6d. GB films were not shown in the hostels.

Wireless – satisfactory in HQ and hostels.

Camp magazine – paper supplies needed. 200 copies fortnightly. [See note under Further Information below.]

Press review – Ceased at HQ. Reviews given in hostels by interpreters.

English instruction – separate appendix.

Information room – no information, usually held exhibitions based on a topic.

Other camp activities –

Religion – Weekly protestant service. RC pows were able to visit a local church. Decreasing interest.

Education – Classes for Spanish, French, history, literature, mathematics and physics. There was a theatre education group.

Entertainments – Theatre group. Orchestra.

**February 1947** – recorded that 20 pows detached to Beela River Camp 104 from Merry Thought Camp 76; no reason given.

**15-18 April 1947** – Report on re-education. Strength; 2 officers, 931 OR.

No changes to senior personnel.

Like most commandants, Major Selby co-operated with PID visits, but did not have any involvement with re-education – he attached “*more importance to strict military discipline*.”

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Political screening: | A | B+ | B | B- |
|  | 23 | 132 | 612 | 166 |

43 appeals heard – all were successful. 15 appeals pending. 350 pows repatriated to date.

Morale continued to be low. There were complaints about the strict military discipline (saluting, standing to attention when talking to officers, etc), with pows stating this did nothing to erase militarism. Cigarettes had not been available from the canteen for 6 weeks – no reason was given for this. Pows transferred from other camps stated that conditions were worse here, this caused unrest.

Positive factors included faster repatriation, football matches with Merry thought Camp 76, and theatre visits from Featherstone Camp 18.

The standard list of re-education activities was given with little difference from the previous report. The frequency of visiting lecturers had decreased. The camp magazine had a new editor, the previous one had proved to be a failure and the Interpreter Officer had censored articles.

Entertainment – a theatre group of 16 men was very active with 3 new shows in 2 months.

**1/4 July 1947** – Report on re-education. Strength 2 officers, 1051 OR.

Commandant: Major Selby Camp Leader: Ofw Kuhrke (B-) [From 15 May].

Interpreter: S/Sgt Wantoch Deputy C/L: Gefr Hesselberth (B)

German M.O.: A.Arzt Dr Tobias (B+); Dr Ruhe (B)

Simplified screening figures given: B+ 143 / B 714 / B- 196. 53 appeals pending. 550 pows repatriated to date.

Morale was still low, for the reasons previously stated. A positive factor was the increased freedoms the pows were given to leave camp and for fraternisation.

A mock general election and Gallop poll was held in the camp in an attempt to stimulate political interest.

40% of the pows were ‘youth.’

The pows were working very long hours for the harvest, many camp activities were affected. Changes to re-education activities; lectures were more frequent; 250 copies of the magazine produced; a press review in HQ had started and a daily news-sheet was distributed to the hostels.

Many pows established informal contacts with local civilians. There were very few formal outside contacts, but more were planned:

- Small groups of pows attended lectures given by Mr Dawson, the headmaster of Heversham Grammar School.

- Kendal library sent 50 books each month.

- Rev McLeod-Murray organised social evenings at Beetham School.

A new protestant padre, Kratz (B-), from Fort Crosby Camp 678 – “*his party record is no recommendation; Allg SS 1933, Party 1937*.”

Education – classes for French and mathematics.

Entertainments – The theatre group had given concerts to civilians.

**9-12 September 1947** – Report on re-education. Strength; 3 officers, 904 OR.

Commandant: Major Selby Camp Leader: Ogefr Kroeger (B+) [New]

Interpreter: S/Sgt Morgenstern [New – from Camp 168] Deputy C/L: Gefr Hesselberth (B)

German M.O.: A.Arzt Dr Tobias (B+); Dr Ruhe (B)

It was stated that the previous Camp Leader had “*proved a failure.”* The new leader started in August, aged 28, “excellent” – popular with the pows and British staff.

Screening figures – A 3; B+ 114; B 635; B- 155. 770 pows repatriated to date.

There had been a slight improvement to morale due to increased speed of repatriations and some greater freedoms. The pows had little interest in taking part in organised political activities, and “*the majority of the PsW is definitely not pro-British*.”

Religion – There was a new RC priest, Josef-Maria Janzen (A) (or Jansen), from Warth Mills Camp 177. The protestant padre was described as; “*a troublemaker, intolerant and unpopular… he should be removed*.”

Education – all classes had ceased.

Entertainment – Both the theatre group and orchestra were down to 6 members, but were still giving performances to the camp and to civilians. There were classical music ‘performances’ played on records. Sports were an important part of camp life.

**28 October – 1 November 1947** – Re-educational Survey. Strength; 3 officers, 861 OR.

No changes to senior personnel.

There were a growing number of issues arising within the camp, most of which would appear to be due the Commandant. He expected to be posted overseas. It was stated that he was, “*becoming more unpopular with the PSW.*” The visitor commented on the Commandant’s “*erratic attitude*” and “*changing moods*.” The pows were “*puzzled by his lack of consistency and who can never feel ‘safe’ with him*.”

The Adjutant showed interest in re-education, but, “*lost much influence in the camp*” – no direct reason was given for this, but it would seem to be linked to the Commandant.

The Interpreter was, “*popular with the men, but unpopular with the British Officers. By order of the Commandant he works in his office and has very little contact with PsW.*”

The Camp Leader was ‘suitable,’ but depressed after the recent death of his wife, “*and upset by the Commandant’s temperament*.” He was soon to be repatriated on compassionate grounds.

It was also stated that “*Malcontents from all camps of North-West District are now sent to this camp*.”

Morale was low in HQ, but better in the hostels. The political attitude of the pows were described as “*getting more bitter and nihilistic;”* one particular cause was the news that factories were being dismantled in Germany. There was little interest in re-education activities.

Religion – despite the recommendation that the protestant padre, Kratz, be removed, he was still in place.

Entertainments – A large theatre had been built. The theatre group of 9 men were rehearsing a comedy. A puppet show had been given by pows from Camp 18. Dancing lessons that had been held at Sedbergh were also being put on at HQ. The orchestra was down to 5 men, but continued to given concerts.

Outside contacts –

At Kendal - 7 pows attended courses at the WEA; sports matches were arranged through the Social Centre, the library sent books on loan.

Young Farmers’ Clubs and Youth Clubs had been visited organised by Westmorland County Educational Committee.

**14 November 1947** - Camp number included in an ‘Urgent Memorandum’ (FO 939/270) regarding inspection of food parcels.

**6-9 January 1948** – Re-educational survey. Strength; 2 officers, 828 OR.

Commandant: Major Selby Camp Leader: Uffz Tischer [New – from December]

Interpreter: None Deputy C/L: Feldw Haensch [New]

German M.O.: A.Arzt Dr Tobias (B+)

It was expected that the camp would close at the end of January.

Major Selby was recorded as Commandant, but he had been posted overseas and had, “*handed over to the 2i/c Captain Midgeley*…. *The Adjutant, Lt Osborne, is the decisive figure in the camp*.”

Political screening: A 3 / B 827. 1000 pows repatriated to date. Morale remained low for reasons previously stated.

The library had grown to 2888 books. Only YMCA films were being shown as the other suppliers were irregular and more expensive.

Religion – Further comments on Protestant Padre Kratz – “*a most unpleasant personality… ordained a short time ago at the YMCA Camp… his grading of B- might be considered too high… [his] recent appointment to the ‘War Criminal Holding Centre’ at Fischbeck, nr Hamburg, can only cause amazement*.” The YMCA Camp was likely to have been Norton Park Camp 174.

Additional outside contacts:

Kendal Labour Party, Pacifist Peace Union and County Council meetings. Chess Club matches.

Confirmation Club at Beetham.

YMCA at Lancaster and Kendal.

**January 1948** – camp closed, many pows transferred to Merry Thought Camp 76.

Known Camp Commandants:

1946/7 - Major E Selby.

**After the camp:** Site used as an agricultural hostel for displaced persons, then an open prison. 2019 ‘Wings Residential School’.

**Further Information:**

National Archives - FO 1120/224 – ‘Re-educational survey visit reports for camps 100 to 106’. Used above. (FO 939/93 has duplicate documents).

Camp Magazine – Number 1, 4 January 1947 - [Die Neue Zeit : Beela River Camp : Zeitung des Lagers 104 - The Wiener Holocaust Library](https://www.whlcollections.org/image/99724/)

- “Notebook 2”, January 1947 - [Das Inselschiff : Zeitung des Camp 104 - The Wiener Holocaust Library](https://www.whlcollections.org/image/99564/1/#topDocAnchor)

Strange. In both copies the editor is noted as Sehm who was recorded as the editor for the magazine at 104. Was ‘Notebook 2’ the news review issued by Silecroft?

**POW NUMBERS**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Open |  |  | With other camps |  |  | Unknown |  |  | Not open |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 8/1946 | 1/1947 | 4/1947 | 7/1947 | 9/1947 | 11/1947 | 1/1948 |
| Main | 750 cap. | 651 | 613 | 590 | 596 | 493 | 508 | 629 |
| Borwick |  | 142 | 104 | 89 | 116 | 99 | 93 | 65 |
| Sedbergh |  | 68 | 50 | 55 | 49 | 62 | 54 |  |
| Silecroft |  | 164 | 90 | 85 | 102 | 88 | 66 | 52 |
| Billets |  | 220 | 121 | 114 | 190 | 165 | 143 | 84 |
| TOTALS |  | 1245 | 978 | 933 | 1053 | 907 | 861 | 830 |

**Hostels**

**Borwick**

**8/1946** – Hostel leader; St O.Steuerm. Vierling (B-) – regarded as an unsuitable leader and due to be replaced.

**1/1947** – Hostel leader; St.O/Fw Renken (A). Classes for maths, French and history. Had a small orchestra. A pow choir performed at the local church.

**4/1947** – Hostel leader; Plate (B-); had been a member of the Nazi Party, but was considered to be “*good and trustworthy*.” Had a ‘fine’ information room.

**7/1947** – Hostel leader; Uffz Ganninger (B) **11/1947** – same leader. The hostel had its own cabaret group.

**1/1948** – Hostel leader; Feldw Wulf

**January 1948** – Administration transferred to Merrythought Camp 76.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 8/1946 | 1/1947 | 4/1947 | 7/1947 | 9/1947 | 11/1947 | 1/1948 |
| Borwick |  | 142 | 104 | 89 | 116 | 99 | 93 | 65 |

**Sedbergh**

**8/1946** – Hostel leader; O.Verw.Faehnr. Reinecke (A) – an “*outstanding personality.”*

**1/1947** – Hostel leader; Fw Storm (B). The hostel held its own discussion group. **4/1947** – same leader. About 50% of the pows were ‘youth.’ **7/1947** – same leader. The hostel was entertained by the Methodist Community. **11/1947** – same leader.

**5/1/1948** – Hostel closed.

*“MEMORIES OF A FORMER PRISONER OF WAR IN SEDBERGH - Alfred HARTMAN…* [abridged]

*…they were sent to a big camp at Milnthorpe [*Beela River Camp] *from where about fifty came on to Sedbergh where they were billeted in the old workhouse on Loftus Hill. Food was sent from Milnthorpe and if medical treatment was needed this was administered at or from Milnthorpe also. Dental treatment was from a trailer or caravan in Sedbergh. They had no guards and were allowed to fraternise with the local people in Sedbergh but not with those in Milnthorpe and were permitted to walk up to five miles out of Sedbergh; also, they were allowed into the Golden Lion (now the Dalesman).*

*They were issued with a type of overall but with a triangular piece cut out front and back and a different type of material inserted in the gap. They slept in bunks and were issued with ‘camp money’ which was enough to buy six Woodbines or toothpaste and other necessities.*

*They worked at Kirkby Stephen where they were usually taken by truck but, during a blizzard in the very hard winter of 1946-1947 they taken to Rawthey Bridge and told to walk but got stuck and had to be picked up again after sheltering in snow holes they had made. They helped the local farmers to bury the sheep which had died in the severe weather, in pits. During this winter food was very scarce as supplies could not get through from Milnthorpe so, when the prisoners managed to find a dying sheep this helped a bit. It was so cold that the pipes froze and they had no fuel to light a fire in so they used to visit the rubbish heap where Mounsey’s Garage was and take things back to Loftus Hill to burn in the fireplace to keep warm.*

*In the summer, Alfred hay-timed for the Raws at Killington Hall and also worked for Mr Fishwick, Marjory’s father. Jack Moxham was the labour officer for the camp and they jokingly called him, ‘the slave driver;’ he worked for the West Riding Agricultural Committee. Tom Mason was the foreman in charge of Alfred’s working group...*

*Provision was made for the welfare of the prisoners: Mrs Alice Robinson of the Oaks, whom they called ‘Mum’ and Mr Max Goodwin of Holmecroft visited twice a week to look after prisoners needs and see if they required anything. Mrs Robinson helped to look after a sick prisoner, Fritz Neuhaus, and said she wished to ‘treat him as I would wish my son would be treated if he were a prisoner.’*

*Alfred had contact with home and letters were exchanged; there were no food parcels as the family had nothing to send but they knew where he was and were happy for him to be here as there was no food or employment at home. The prisoners were not bothered to try to escape.*

*The prisoners were invited to one of the ‘Sedbergh Evangelistic Meetings’ at the Masonic Hall in July 1947, where they were served tea by local ladies… Later in 1947 the prisoners were finally discharged or ‘freed’ and could have been repatriated, but Alfred chose to stay and he was not alone in this.”*

<https://sedberghlookaround.org.uk/issues/215%20September%202004.pdf> (Sedbergh & District ‘Lookaround’ – September 2004).

It seems another site in Sedbergh was also used, from an entry in Hansard;

*Mr. Drayson - asked the Secretary of State for War why the 150 Polish troops who recently arrived in the Sedbergh area have been billeted in Baliol school and not Ingmire Hall military camp, which has accommodation for 300 men and is at present only occupied by 40.*

*Mr. Lawson - The spare accommodation at Ingmire Hall Camp is about to be used for German prisoners of war required locally for harvesting.*

Hansard; Vol 425: Monday 22 July 1946. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1946-07-22/debates/3f5ffe90-1e81-4d60-bf7c-6c87613b4b50/BaliolSchoolSedbergh(Use)>

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1943 | 8/1946 | 1/1947 | 4/1947 | 7/1947 | 9/1947 | 11/1947 | 1/1948 |
| Sedbergh |  | 68 | 50 | 55 | 49 | 62 | 54 |  |

**Silecroft**

**8/1946** – Hostel leader; O.Feldw Steuernthal (B). **1/1947** – Same leader. A weekly news review of 20 pages published weekly. Had a small orchestra. Had its own theatre.

**4/1947** – Hostel leader; Feld Zschippang (B) **7/1947** – same leader. “*The population, influenced by the local policeman, is unfriendly.”* **9/1947** – same leader. 50% were ‘youth.’ The orchestra continued to perform. Held very popular dancing classes. **1/1948** – same leader.