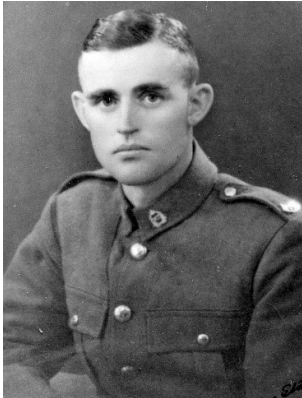


Thomas Keith Townsend
NZDF 22 Rifle Battalion Number 6870
Stalag VIIIIB E75 Knurow
POW Number 5479

Crete, KIA and Stalag VIIIIB (E75)



This summary of Keith Townsend's involvement in WW2 has been assembled from recent acquisitions on the death of my mother, NZ military records and my imperfect memory of conversations about his war years.

Keith Townsend was my stepfather.

Like most returned soldiers he spoke little of the war, and like many children of returned service men I was to learn more after his death than before. There are no verifiable anecdotes in this history from the man, no dairies, only photos (most with no names, locations or dates), dates from military records, and a wonderful selection of mementos from his period in E75 that will to be lodged with the Military Museum in Waiouru New Zealand.

Keith never spoke of the war until Hogan's Heroes appeared on TV in the early 1965. This caused some controversy with returned POW's but Keith enjoyed it and the war comments I remember are from this time. Soon after I was to leave my parent's home for University and the wide world. Keith was to die within 10 years of this date and I unfortunately spent little time with him in this latter period.



He enlisted in December 1939 only three months after New Zealand's formal Declaration of War was declared, leaving a wife but no children behind.

He said little about enlistment and the Trentham training camp other than that the lorry drivers (he was one) were given the biggest brooms to sweep the parade ground. He did say that part of the reason he enlisted at 34 years of age was to get away from the relentless early morning milking run.

His photo album is full of postcards from the 22 Battalions trip from New Zealand to Scotland via Cape Horn and Sierra Leone, as would be expected from a country lad with little travel experience. Keith was in the first shipment of 22 Battalion to the war front: the 'Originals'.

He never mentioned Egypt or Greece or Crete, other than to say that he (and others) gave themselves up within a month or so of the 20 May 1941 invasion¹ of Crete as it was obvious the locals lacked food to support them, and there were heavy repercussions if caught hiding them.

By the 18 July 1941 he was in a transit camp in Crete and wrote a letter to his wife saying that he was the batman for some officers which allowed him better food than most. The letter never got to her.

¹ <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/the-battle-for-crete/overview>

Keith was reported as killed in action (KIA) by the Court of Enquiry (Egypt) in July 1941 based on the testimonial of another soldier that he had been blown up by a grenade. His family held a memorial service for him in Carterton New Zealand on the 10 August of that year.

In 9 December 1941 his name was registered on POW list from Stalag VIII B. The NZ Military contacted the Red Cross in Geneva who confirmed that their Athens branch had seen Keith in a transit camp on route for Germany, probably in July 1941. One wonders at the thoughts of family and local community on the news that he was alive that was initially received in December of 1941 and finally confirmed in February of 1942, some 8 months after the Crete invasion.

A small photo dated 28 Dec 1941 shows Keith in the passenger seat of truck driven and guarded by German military. However the truck is right hand drive which means it was a captured vehicle! Who took the photo and how Keith got it is unknown.

From Stalag VIII B he was transferred to the coal mine at E75 Knurów in Poland and this is where most of his stories began. He was athletic, he boxed and played rugby for E75, both of which he did well as the accompanying photographs testify.

He told the story of how at one boxing match the referee introduced him as "Bee Keeper Townsend". He watched the realization hit the time keeper, who was the head MO in their compound, as to why he often had swollen knees that kept him out of the mines. Keith had been using left over jam in the Red Cross cans to attract bees which he used to sting his knees. The MO never said a word and the German medical team never discovered the reason for the swollen knees either. He talked of a Welsh miner in the camp who left his protected job in a mine in Wales to serve only to end up in a German coal mine 9 months later working for free and bad food. He asked Keith to smash his foot to get out of the mine. Keith obliged.

He also mentioned the kindness of one or two of the German guards. There is a photo of one in his albums. He could never understand how the Germans and British had fought against each other in two world wars. As he saw it they were so similar just separated by language and custom.

He mentioned the weather often, how the mine gave them warmth, and the coldness of the forced evacuation from E535 at Milowitz (transferred there in mid-1944) in the winter of early 1945.

I understand from the history books² that many of these prisoners walked some 900 miles from Poland to Landshut in Bavaria via Czechoslovakia where they were eventually released by the Americans. I am not sure whether Keith made it to this town but he did say it was the Americans who flew him out of Germany. He talked of stripping dead horses for their flesh, the fights for blankets and warm gear even from the dead, and the lack of food. For the rest of his life he could not abide wasted food in our house.

Keith also has several war era postcards of Berlin. Again how he got these or whether he was ever in Berlin is unknown; I can find no records of the route he took from Greece to Stalag VIII B.

Sports Awards E75

His prowess at boxing is clearly shown by two pieces of memorabilia. The first (See Appendix 2) is an undated hand drawn poster of an Easter boxing event (Admission Free!). Keith's name is among the heavyweight contenders. I have included a list of all those mentioned on the poster as some names are hard to read from the photos.

The second major item is a handmade trophy, from wood and aluminum with the inscription: "*Presented to Keith Townsend from the Boys of E75 – Good luck*". Keith had won the heavy weight title.

² (http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2Pris-_N102413.html)

The back has the inscription: "*Made by HH Holder POW 13000*" (H Holder is the Referee in the above boxing match)

Other items include a small copper disk inscribed "*Sports Club E75 Knurow 1943*" and "*Green House Rugby Champions*", and a small handmade aluminum box dated 1944.

Invoices

Two interesting Invoices are enclosed. One is for RM 50.00 dated 23 July 1942 from the town of Beslau and the other for RM5.00 from the town of Sosnowitz on 19 July 1944, both for dental services. These towns served Stalag VIII B. A war era post card of Sosnowitz was also in Keith's possessions.

Who paid for the dental work is unknown. I am not aware POWs earned money for their services but the invoices are made out to Keith's POW number 5479.

Photos

As well as photos of the trophies and Invoices above and other items of this period the appendices include formal photos of groups of men at Stalag V111 B each stamped on the back "*Fotoaufnahme genehmigt Dieser Profvermak gilt nicht schriftliche Mitteilungen Stalag VIII B*". Keith appears in two these which he was sent back to his wife in Carterton New Zealand (probably through the Red Cross), again dates unknown.

I have also included a series of photos of prisoners of war, all unnamed as to location or person, but the surrounds would suggest a POW camp, certainly not a military camp. Perhaps someone else can shed light on this and who these men are.

After the War

Keith's marriage did not survive too long after the war, perhaps the separation, the fact that he was reported KIA and subsequent return contributed. He divorced (7 years required then) and met and married my mother. They moved to Auckland in 1954, and had a good life until his death in 1975 following a long illness caused by an industrial accident.

Rod McMahon

8 Maunganui Rd

Birkenhead

Auckland

30 Jan 2019

Email: rodandmcmahon@gmail.com

Postscript

I was eventually to have a second stepfather also named Keith! His brother Ian was also in Crete, but spent considerable more time with the locals than the first Keith. After the war he wrote to a young women in the village who had looked after him. I understand it took nearly a year but the young women arrived on a boat to Christchurch New Zealand where they married...

<http://media.api.aucklandmuseum.com/id/media/public/db52316d-41ac-40d5-bf85-22c2ddb4563d/original.pdf>

Other References

22nd Battalion 2NZEF Web Site

An informative site with history timelines and personal stories

<http://www.22battalion.org.nz/index.php>

22nd Battalion 2NZEF Roll of Originals

Keith is mentioned in List 15 of John Bowke's 'Roll of the Originals' on the 22nd Battalion 2NZEF website. This site provides a good summary of the boat trip from New Zealand to Scotland and the alterations in course due to the changing face of the war.

<http://www.22battalion.org.nz/originals/index.php>

Stalag VIII B 344 LAMSDORF

<https://www.lamsdorf.com/>

WW2Talk

<http://ww2talk.com/index.php>

Medical Services in New Zealand and the Pacific

Comment on the conditions of Stalag VIII B

<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2PMed-pt2-c5-1.html>

Thanks

Thanks to NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals Waiouru New Zealand and Google

Appendix 1 Timeline of Keith's service

This timeline has been sourced principally from Keith's military records held by the New Zealand Defense Force.

Date	Event
30 April 1940	Completed Service training Trentham Military Camp
1 May 1940	Embarked for UK part of 22 Battalion NZ Expeditionary Force
19 June 1940	UK Disembarked – Grenock Scotland
16 December 1940	UK Embarked
18 February 1941	Entered Egypt
14 March 1941	Transferred to Crete via Greece as part of Lustre Force
20 May 1941	German Invasion of Crete
10 June 1941	Not yet reported as alive
16 July 1941	Court of Enquiry Egypt – presumed killed in action
18 July 1941	Letter from Keith to wife from Crete transit camp (not received)
30 July 1941	Wife and parents advised by NZ Military of probable KIA status
10 August 1941	Memorial Service Carterton New Zealand
9 December 1941	NZ Military advise wife name found on POW list from Stalag VIII B
28 December 1941	Photo in captured (?) Military Vehicle
6 February 1942	Telegram to wife advising Athens Red Cross had seen Keith in Transit Camp
7 March 1942	StalagV111B
24 March 1942	E75 Reichswerke “ Hermann Goring” Kurnow KRS RYBNIK ³
22 July 1942	E75 Reichswerke “ Hermann Goring” Kurnow KRS RYBNIK ⁴
3 March 1942	Stalag 344 (NZ History Sheet)
4 July 1944	E535 Milowitz ⁵
19 January 1945	Forced march from E535 ⁶
10 May 1945	Safe in UK
30 May 1945	Embarked to New Zealand
3 July 1945	Disembarked New Zealand
6 October 1945	Discharged
4 April 1975	Died

³ German POW document in NZ Military archives

⁴ German POW document in NZ Military archives

⁵ German POW document in NZ Military archives

⁶ http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2Pris-_N102413.html

Appendix 2 – Boxing Program E75 Easter (Date Unknown)

Officials	
Name	Position
Vic White	Promoter
Ted Gardner	Promoter
Bob Maw	Ring Manager
Vic White	Referee
H Holder	Time Keeper
Capt. D Lacey	Medical Officer
T Sheehan	Announcer
Moses	Second Green Corner
Buchanan	Second Green Corner
Evans	Second Red Corner
Powell	Second Red Corner
FeatherWeight	
S Parmenter (England)	H Worgan (England)
M Mossop (England)	J Auchterlonie (England)
J Holloway (England)	H Morgan (Wales)
LightWeight	
E Gardner (England)	J Scott (Scotland)
WelterWeight	
S Smith (England)	A Sullivan (England)
G Tyler (England)	J Brooks (England)
D Buckley (England)	R Maw (England)
T Mahoney (England)	J Shaw (England)
L Hawkes (Wales)	L Berry(Australia)
J Cracker (England)	R Stewart (Scotland)
J Saunders (England)	J Jennings (England)
MiddleWeight	
W Lloyd (England)	F Brace (Wales)
L Lehmann (Australia)	W Ryder (England)
LightHeavyWeight	
J Hart (England)	L Passmore (Australia)
R McBride (Ireland)	N Malcolm (New Zealand)
HeavyWeights	
M Gregg (Australia)	T Mansfield (England)
K Townsend (New Zealand)	N Domgool (New Zealand)
W Bent (Wales)	J Rodgers (England)
Poster	
D Carlin	Programme
Poster Artist	H G Jones

Appendix 3 – Photos of other Memorabilia E75

Boxing Trophy (Wood and Aluminum)

- *“Presented to Keith Townsend from the Boys of E75 – Good luck”*



110W * 60D x 170H mm

Rugby Medallion (Bronze)

- *“Sports Club E75 Knurów 1943”* and *“Green House Rugby Champions”*
-



30mm D

Carved Box

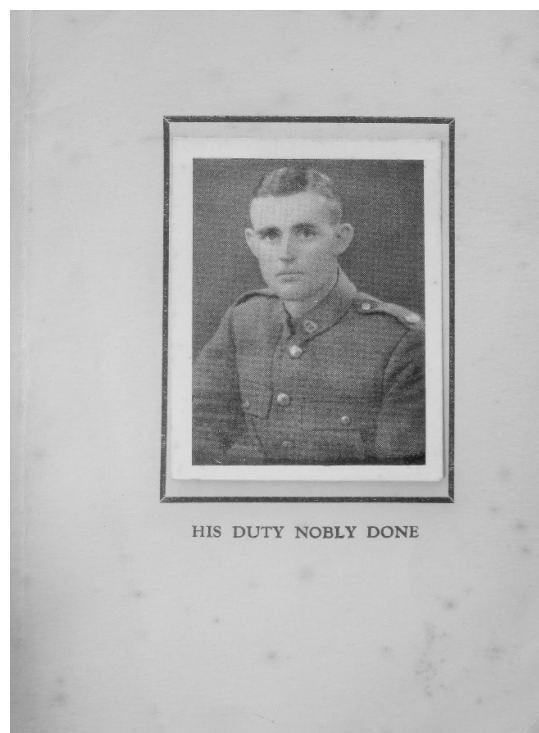
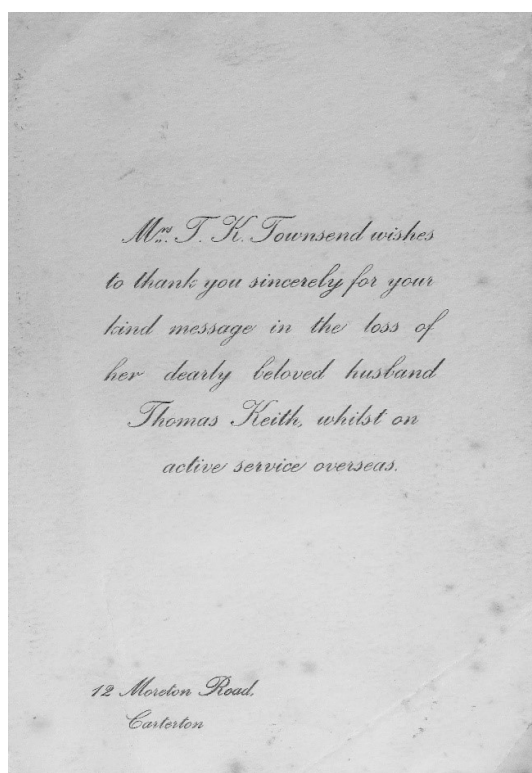
NZ Onwards and Poland 1944 and 1940 to 1945



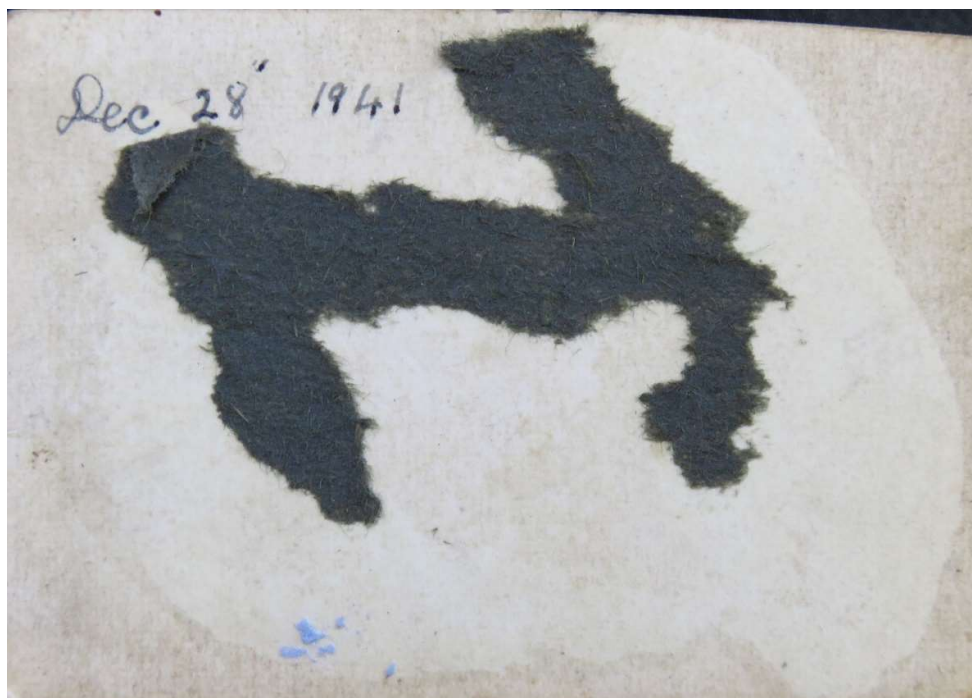
80L x 50Wx 20H mm

Appendix 4 – Memorial Notice Thanks

This was sent to the attendees of Keith's memorial service 10 August 1941 Carterton New Zealand.



Appendix 5 – Keith in Military Truck with German driver and Guard 28 December 1941

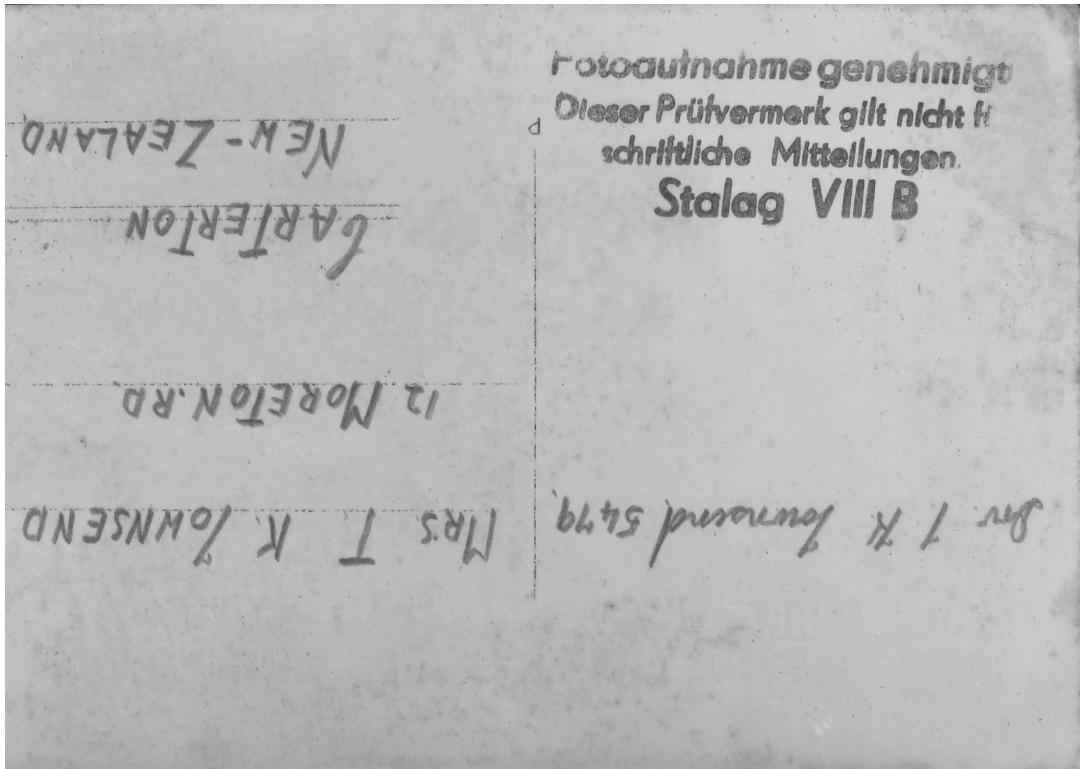


Unknown place and photographer and unknown as to how Keith obtained the photo.

Note: The truck is right hand drive so must be a captured vehicle.

Appendix 6 – Stalag VIII B photos

(“ Fotoaufnahme genehmigt Dieser Prüfvermerk gilt nicht für schriftliche Mitteilungen Stalag VIII B”)



Bottom Left – Keith Townsend



Back Second Left – Keith Townsend



Appendix 7 – Dentist Invoices to POW No 5479

Peter Hahn
 staatl. gepr. Dentist
 Postfachkonto Breslau 261 61
 Ruf 36

Knurow O. S., den 194
 Ludendorffstr. 2 a

Herrn/Frau/Frl. 5479
Knurow

Erlaube mir für operative und technische Bemühungen
 vom 194 bis 194
 RM. 50.00
 zu berechnen.

Obigen Betrag dankend empfangen zu haben, bescheinigt
 Knurow, den 23. 7. 194 2

Peter Hahn
 Dentist
 KNUROW
 Ludendorffstr. 2 a

A. Brzenska
 prakt. Zahnarzt
 Sosnowitz, Hauptstr. 7.
 Sprechstunden 9-12, 3-7
 Fernsprecher 62-315
 Konto: Stadtpostkasse
 Sosnowitz

Sosnowitz, den 14. 7. 44

Gefang. 5479
Milowitzer Grube

Für zahnärztliche Bemühungen Chirurgische Behandlung
LG Extr. + Gyg.

berechne ich
 RM. 5.-

A. BRZENSKA
 prakt. Zahnarzt Einzelanstellung umseitig!
 Sosnowitz O.S. Hauptstr. 7
 Ruf: 62315
 Betrag dankend erhalten
 Sosnowitz, den 14. 7. 44

Appendix 8 – Photographs (Probably in E75 POW Camps)



Middle Back = Keith Townsend



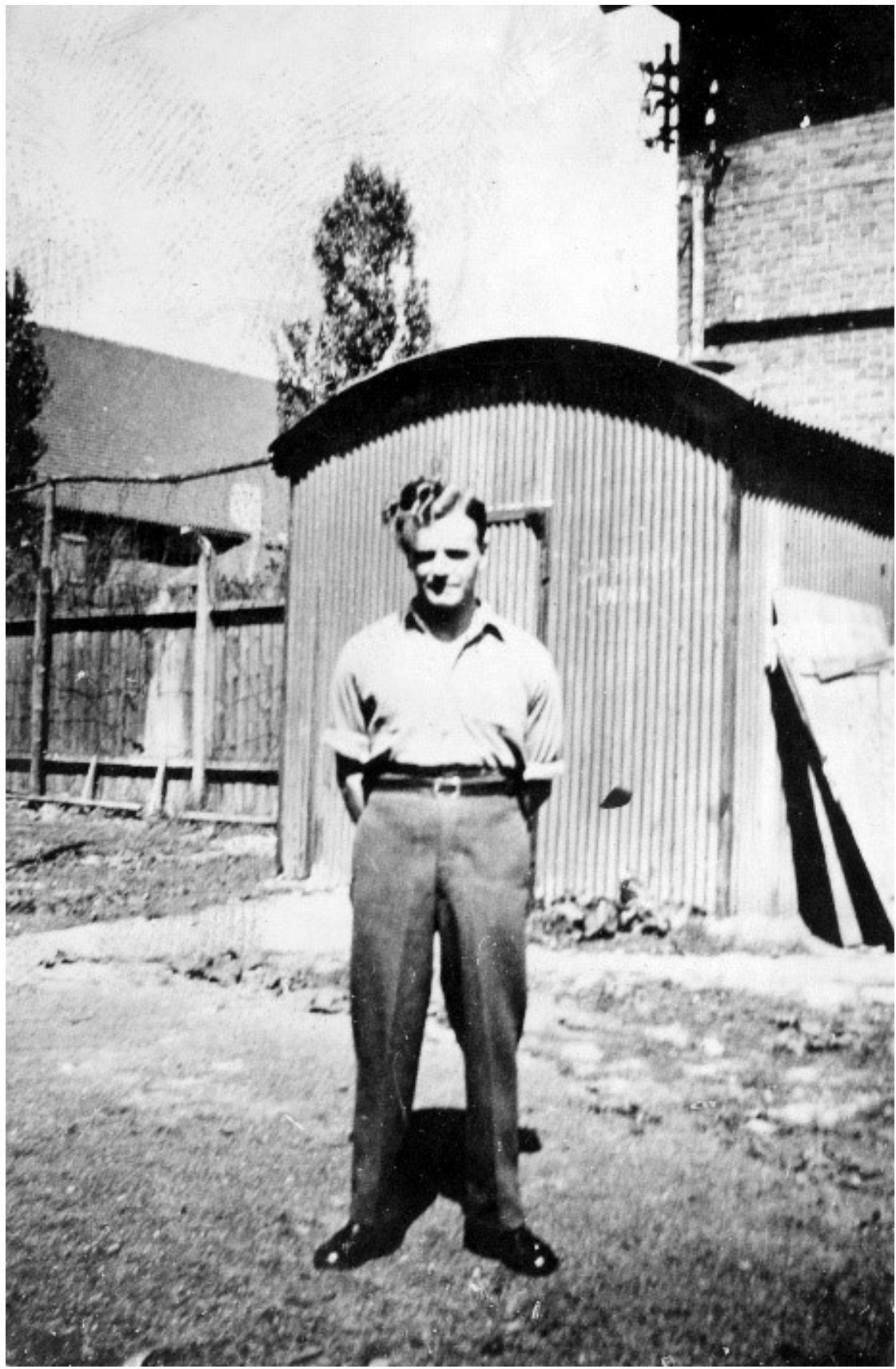
Middle = Keith Townsend The photos show Keith in rugby strip, so this is probably camp E75 where he recieved the rugby medalian



Left = Keith Townsend





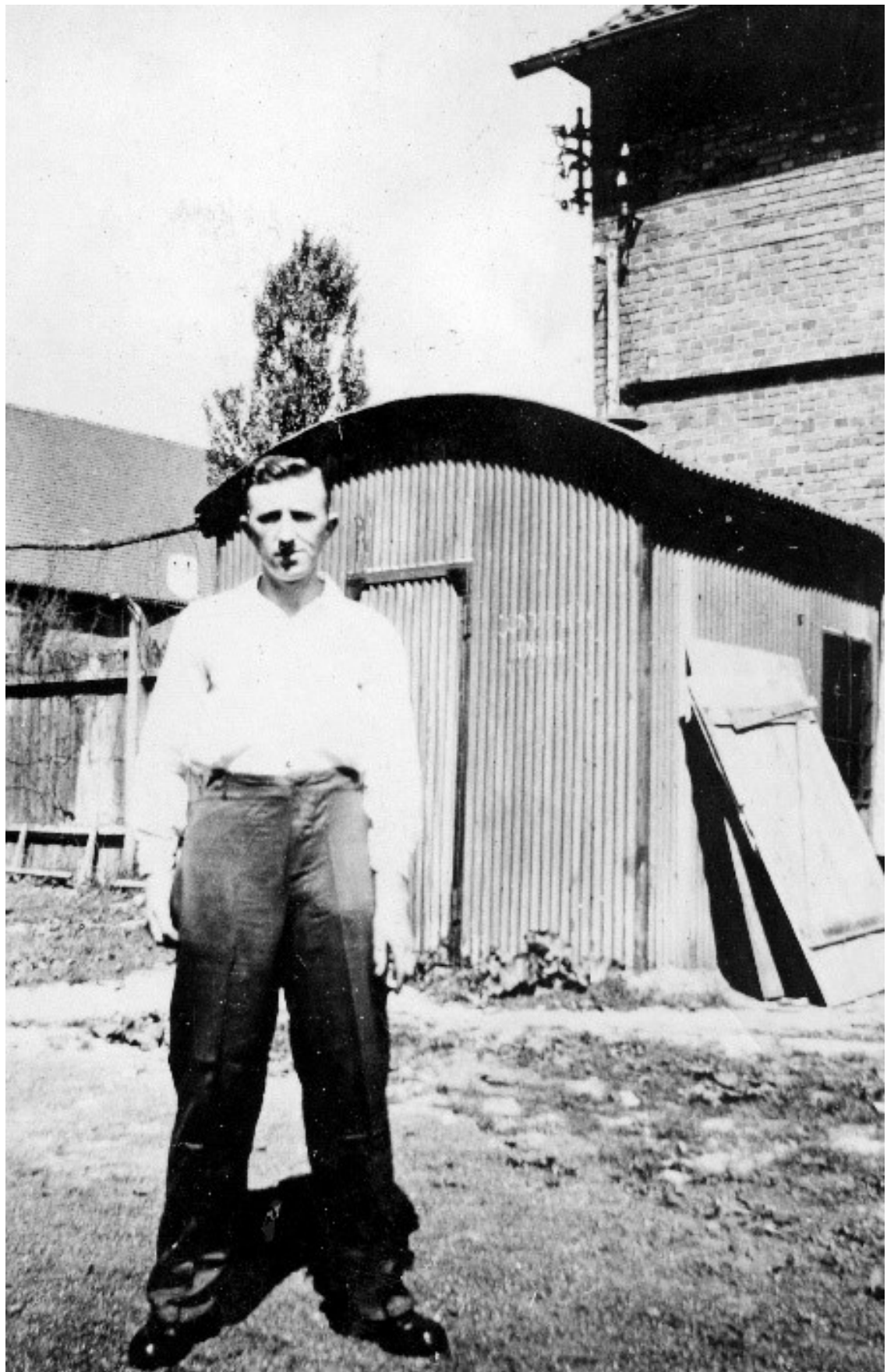




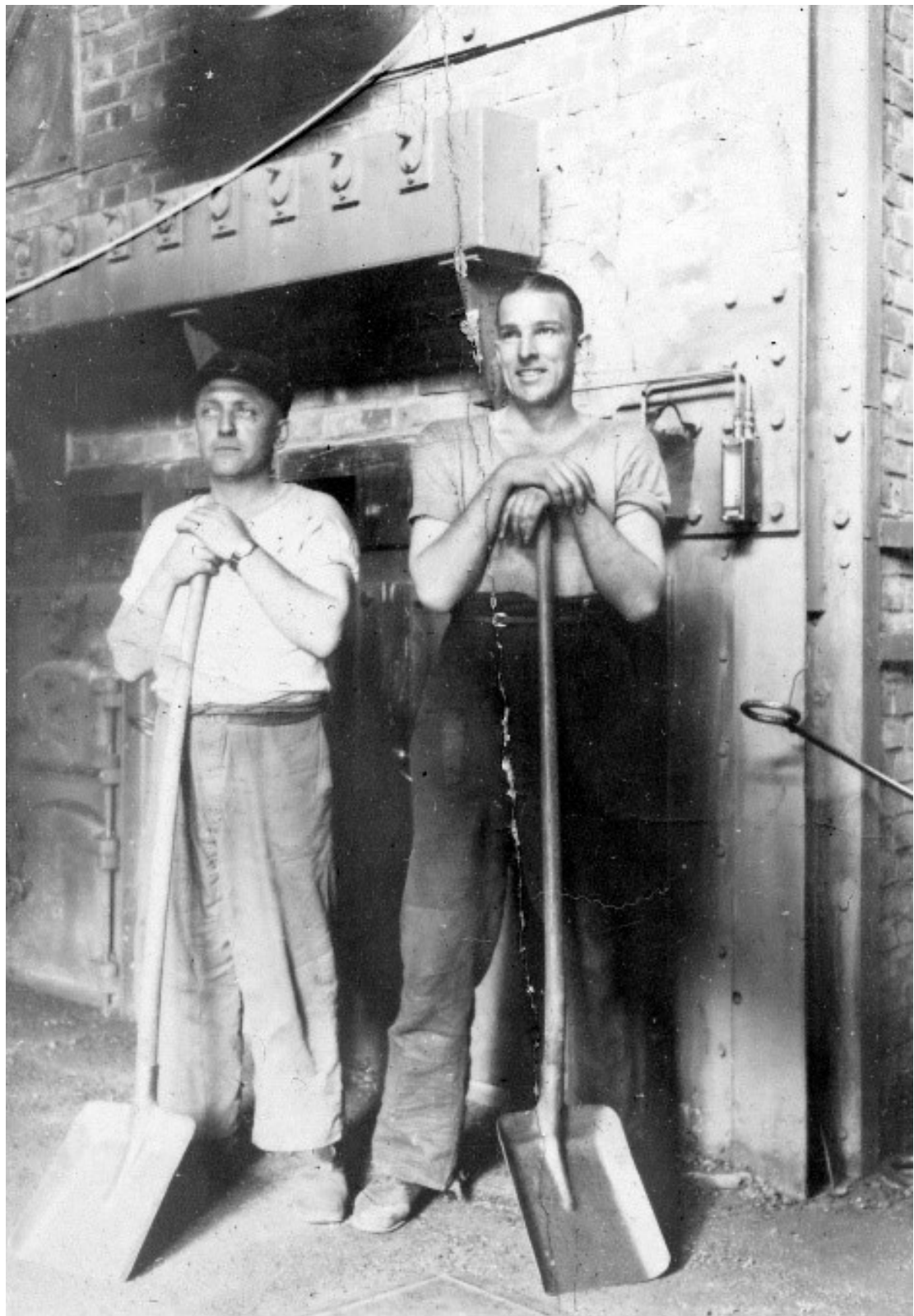


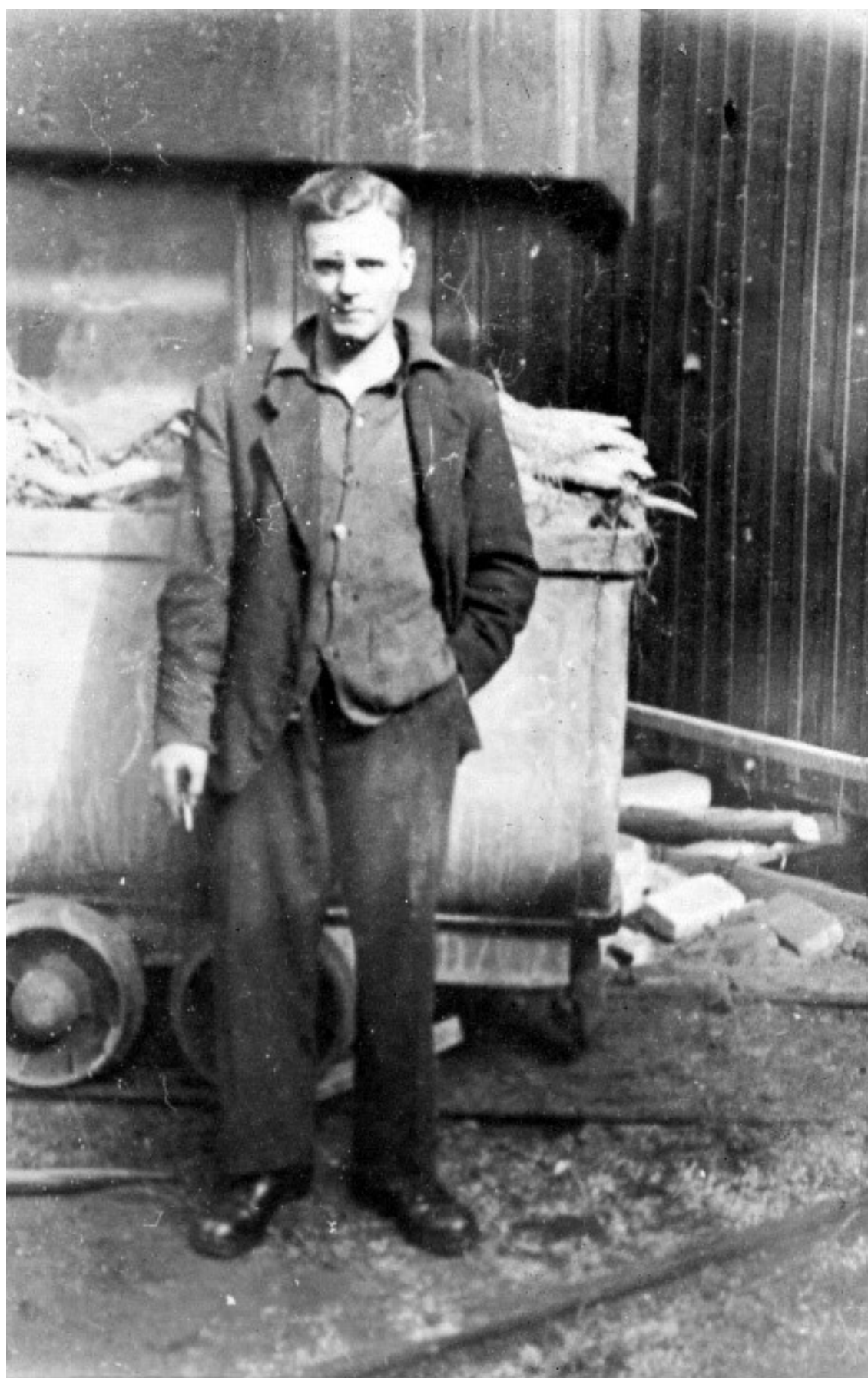






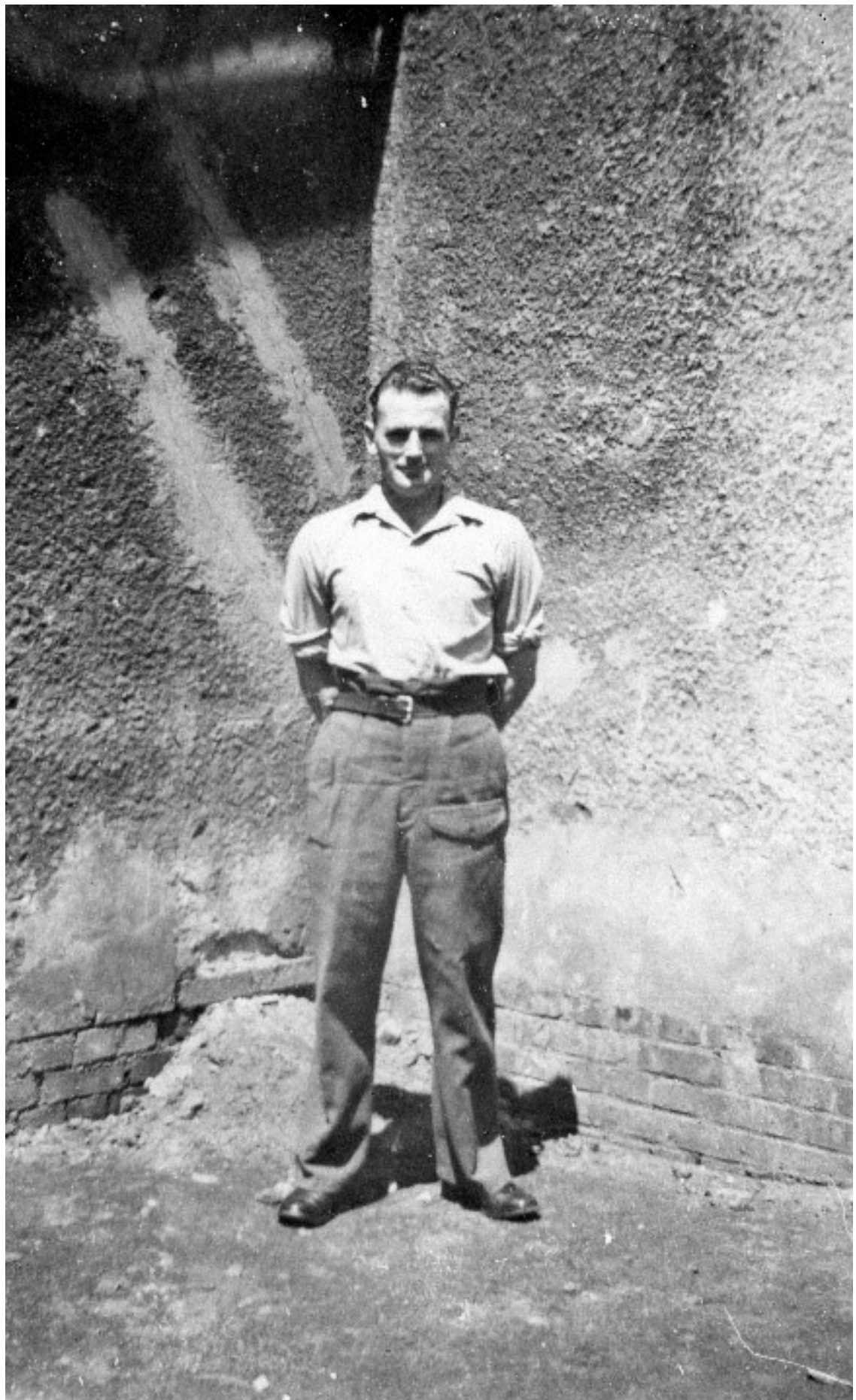




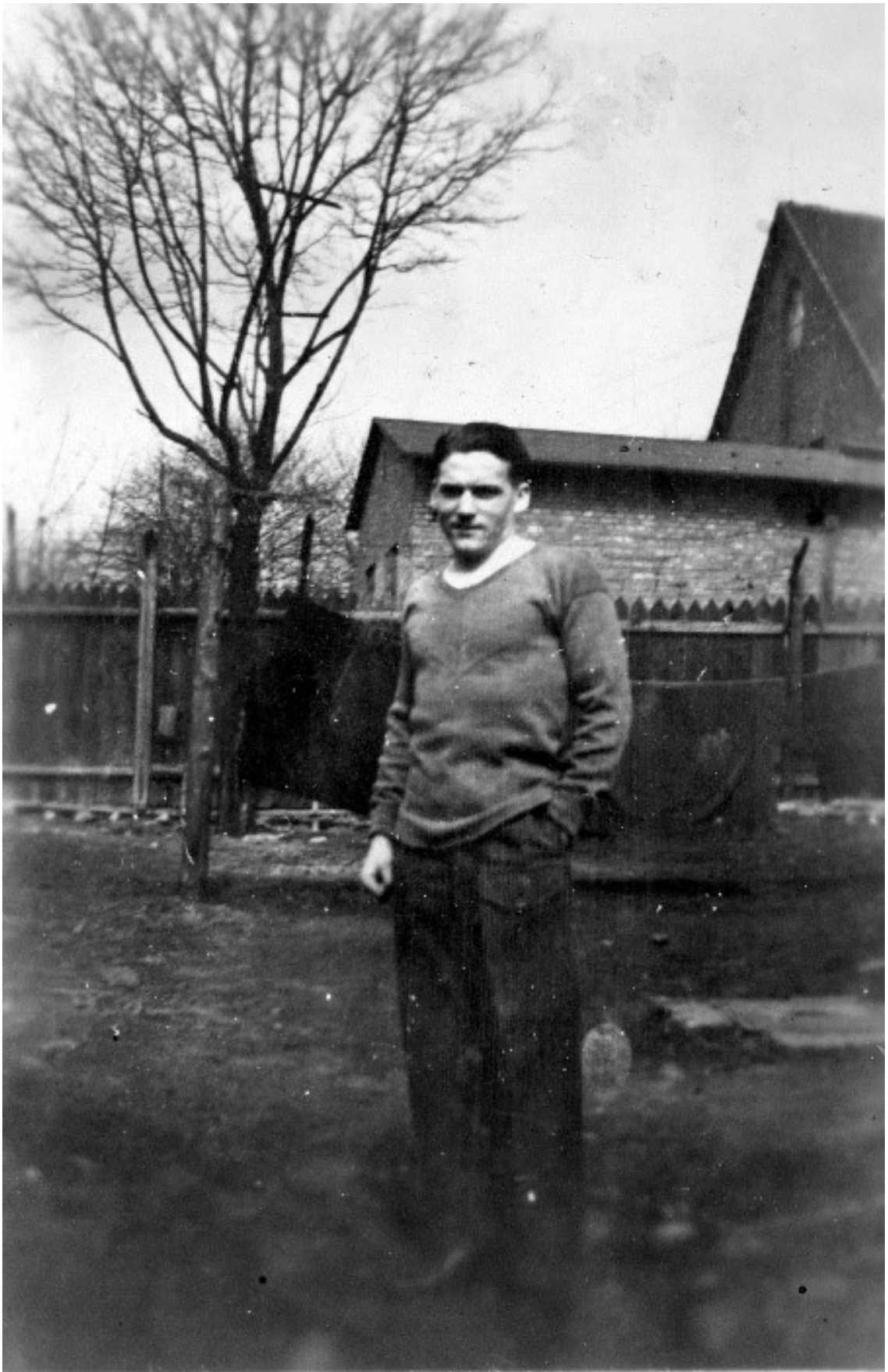






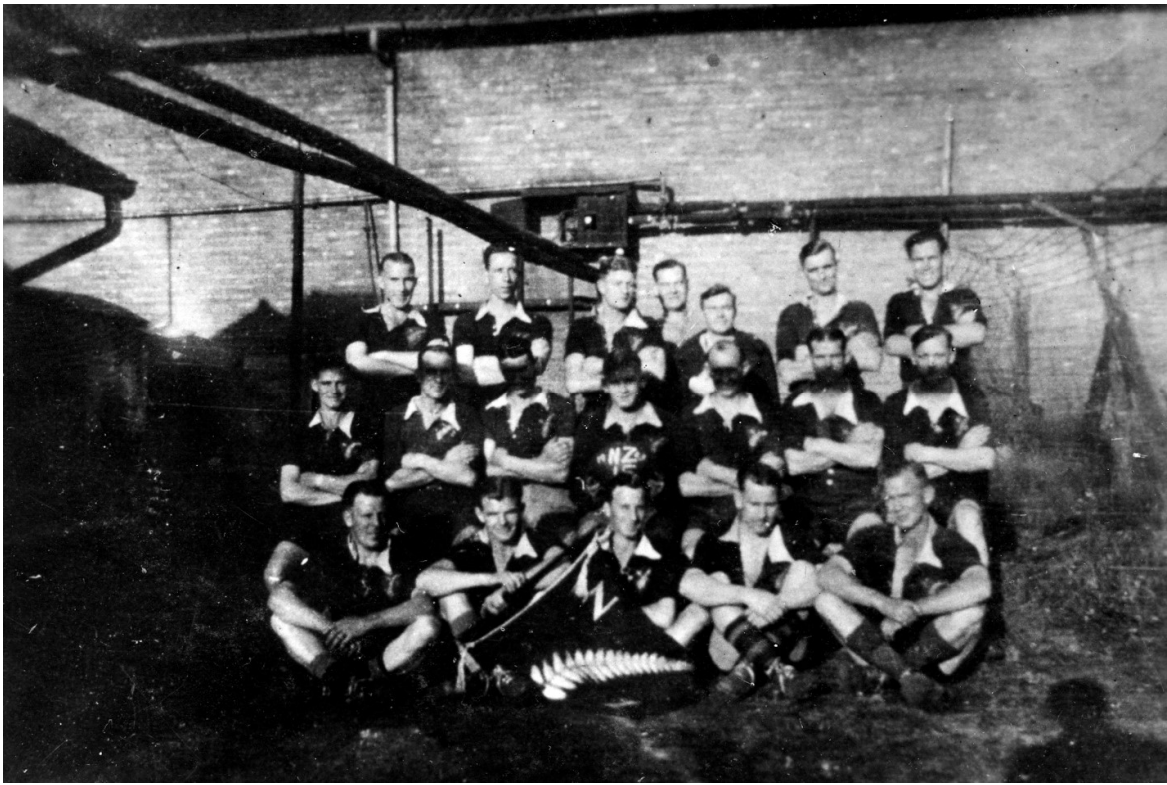












New Zealand Rugby Team?



Australian Rugby Team?