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EXCAVATING WAR AND IDLENESS: THE CASE OF SVÆRHOLT

Stein Farstadvoll^a, Ingar O. Figenschau^b, Bjørnar J. Olsen^a
and Christopher L. Witmore^c

^aThe Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies, UiT the Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway; ^bThe Arctic University Museum of Norway, UiT the Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway; ^cThe Department of Classical & Modern Languages & Literatures, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, USA

ABSTRACT

For the last decade, the World War II prisoner-of-war camp and battery at Sværholt in northernmost Norway have been objects of archaeological investigation. This article presents the results from excavations and associated studies, including new descriptions of extant structures and found artefacts, comparative osteological analyses of middens, and their implications. Our purpose in presenting these results is to: 1) explore what an extraordinary array of unearthed material can reveal about the conditions and fates of those involved in, or affected by, the German occupation during the war; 2) to show how the archaeology of Sværholt, with all its heterogeneity, leads us in a direction at variance with historical generalizations and expectations; 3) to convey how the extant ruins and remains provide affective glimpses into their formative causes: the abandonment and near-complete destruction of the battery, garrison, hamlet, and POW camp, during a few intense days of evacuation in November 1944.

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Sværholt: an introduction

Sværholt, an abandoned Norwegian fishing hamlet, is situated as far north as one can get in mainland Europe (Figure 1). At roughly 71° north, the hamlet is located near the very tip of a long and mostly uninhabited peninsula, to which it lends its name. To the north, the cape rises to form a mesa just over 120 metres high called Sværholtklubben only to abruptly terminate in dramatic cliffs engulfed by the open Barents Sea. To the south, the land slopes sharply but less severely into a low postglacial isthmus, which forms a bridge to the main Sværholt peninsula. Bays lie on each side of this isthmus – Sværholt proper to the east and Eidsbukta to the west.

Like numerous other hamlets in this region, Sværholt's existence was based on a mixed economy of small-scale farming and fishing that had characterized northern coastal living since Medieval times. Prior to that the land had for 10 or more millennia provided food and shelter for groups of hunters and fishers who seasonally returned to the cape to live and harvest. The hamlet settlement was established as part of the Norwegian 'fishery colonization' of this northernmost coast from the 13th to the 16th century. While

CONTACT Stein Farstadvoll  stein.farstadvoll@uit.no  The Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies, UiT the Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway

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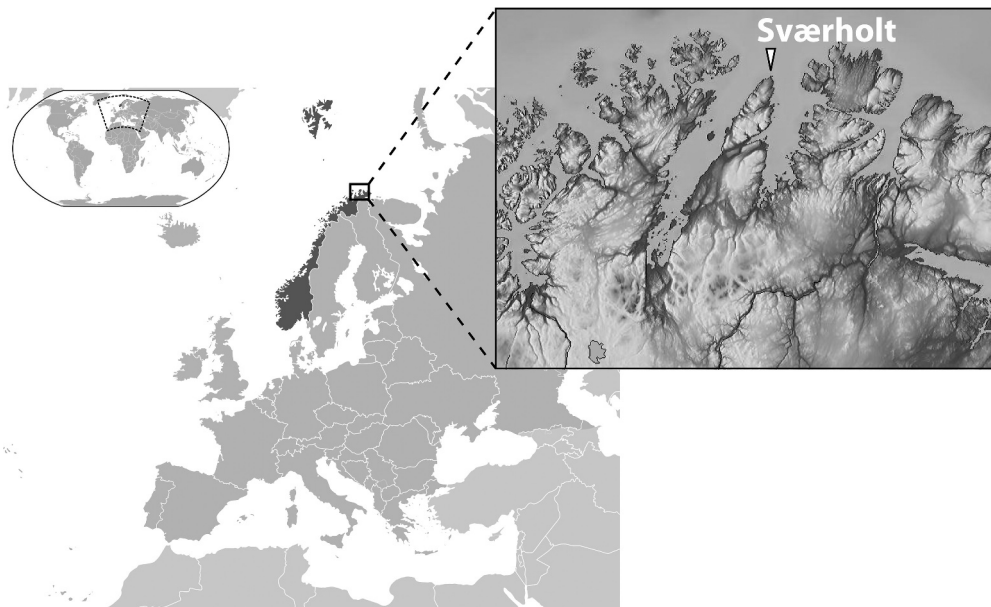


Figure 1. Map of Norway, Finnmark, and the tip of the Sværholt cape. Source: Wikimedia commons. Illustration: Radoslaw Grabowski.

economically based on commercial fishing enabled by new markets and exchange networks, this expansion was equally motivated by political ambitions to establish control over this rich coastal region, then inhabited primarily by the Sámi (Hansen and Olsen 2014). Though the hamlet population thus was predominantly Norwegian, the Sámi continued to make seasonal use of the Sværholt area until the 20th century and the peninsula still offers summer pasture for reindeer belonging to Sámi herders.

Today the rich heritage that has emerged over several millennia of past habitation dots the land of the two bays and the isthmus, enduring as vestiges of Stone Age subterranean dwellings, pits made by Iron Age Sámi for extracting oil from blubber fat, and mundane Sámi burials in the abundant scree fields and fossil beaches. Since 1942, however, these and the many other vestiges have been entangled with more conspicuous ruins, a harsh legacy of bunkers, trenches, barbed wire, and gun positions. In that very year, the peaceful life within this small community was suddenly disrupted by a new and brutal modernity. After meticulous reconnaissance work, German military strategists had found Sværholtklubben ideal for hosting one of the more than 1500 batteries that would make up the *Atlantikwall*, the more-than-colossal coastal defensive line built along the Atlantic seaboard from Arctic Norway to the French-Spanish border (Jasinski, Soleim, and Sem 2012; Jasinski 2013; Sæveraas 2016; Wilt 1975). In the course of a few summer months this austere land was irreversibly transformed to accommodate a massive war infrastructure that included bunkers, trenches, artillery and gun positions, roads, block-houses, shelters, tunnels, minefields, barbed-wire fences, a garrison, and a prisoner-of-war camp (see Figure 2 and 3). The local inhabitants, numbering less than 40 people at the time, were allowed to stay, but they now found themselves a Norwegian minority in the



Figure 2. Aerial photograph of Sværholt from June 2018. The battery foundations, bunkers and remains of the blockhouses are discernable at the northern summit of the cape (Sværholtklubben). Photo: The Norwegian Mapping Authority. Illustration: Stein Farstadvoll.

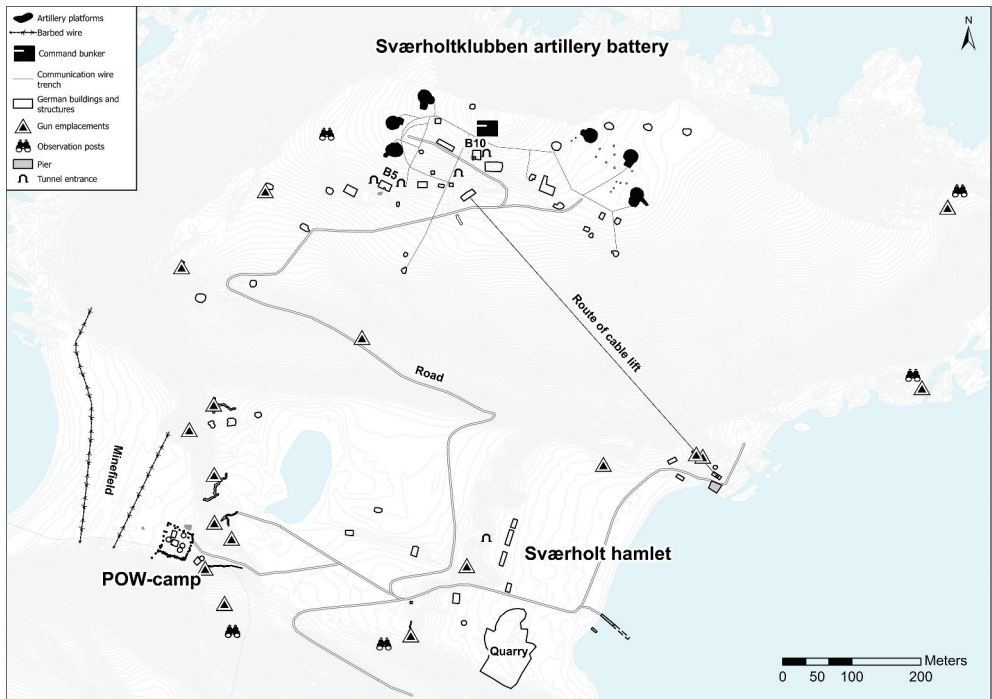


Figure 3. A generalized overview map of the surveyed WW2 structures at Sværholt. Map: The Norwegian Mapping Authority. Illustration: Stein Farstadvoll and Ingar O. Figenschau.

new demography of Wehrmacht troops and Soviet prisoners of war that was to last for the next two and a half years.

The main artillery of *Heeres-Küsten-Batterie 1/971* with its long-range guns, bunkers and lighter weaponry was placed at the summit of Sværholtklubben, where it controlled a wide expanse of the northern coastal fairway connected with the strategic Soviet port of Murmansk to the east, the destination for the allied convoys. The German garrison proper, catering to the needs of the 150 soldiers and officers who manned the battery, was built in the hamlet with buildings for quartering, administration, cooking, dining, storage, and social gatherings. A waterworks was also built, where water was piped to the garrison from a basin set into the south slope of the terrace above the hamlet. The harbour, which already contained two operational landing piers, was expanded with various workshop facilities (e.g. bakery and smithy), a cable-lift station, a stone quarry and gravel-crushing depot, which produced aggregate for concrete production. In the Eidsbukta area, on the west side of the isthmus, a prisoner-of-war camp was built to incarcerate the 50–60 Soviet prisoners who were permanently kept here as slave workers. This area was otherwise equipped with trenches, gun emplacements, and bunkers, all along a raised beach terrace¹ delimiting the area to the east. In the fossil beach area below, barbed-wire obstacles and an extensive minefield carpeted with 1778 landmines prevented access from the sea in the west. The protective sphere of this terrestrial fortress was extended into the ocean with another 817 underwater ordnance mines moored around the cape and in the surrounding sea (Gamst 1984, 119, 204, 217).

For nine summer seasons – from 2011 to 2019 – the WW2 legacy at Sværholt has been subject to extensive archaeological investigations, including detailed surveys and recording, excavations, and soil-science mapping. Initially our excavations were focused on the POW camp and its immediate infrastructure (see Olsen and Witmore 2014; Grabowski et al. 2014; Olsen and Pétursdóttir 2017), but since 2015 they have expanded to also include the German garrison and the battery. Excavations have always been carried out in tandem with repeated surveys and fieldwalking. The bays, the isthmus and the cape, as well as the adjacent areas to the south, have been explored, studied and discussed again and again. Integral to our approach is the emphasis on fieldwork as an ongoing process of material acquaintance. Two keywords here are *presence* and *patience*, and thus, the ways of knowing that become possible as one gradually and repeatedly familiarizes oneself with the particularities of a place (e.g. Bradley 2003; Tilley 2008; Olsen 2012; Farstadvoll 2019; Figenschau 2020; Witmore 2020). This way of *becoming* knowledgeable about Sværholt has slowly revealed to us that what remains here will, in singular and varied ways, also reveal something distinct and different about the existence and destiny of those involved in or affected by this occupation. Such a research methodology, for us, is tailored to the specificity of the place and those things left precisely here, where suggestions concerning the past they inform, no matter how subtle, partial, or intermittent, may arise through a sustained and open engagement.

In this article we present some further results from the investigations at Sværholt. Our purpose is threefold. First, to explore what an extraordinary array of unearthed material can reveal about the conditions and fates of those involved in, or affected by, this occupation. Second, to show how the richness and idiosyncrasies of the archaeology of Sværholt lead us in a direction at variance with historical generalizations and

expectations. Third, and finally, to convey how the ruined record provides affective glimpses into its formative causes: the abandonment and near-complete destruction of the battery, garrison, hamlet, and POW camp, during a few intense days of evacuation in November 1944.

The POW camp in Eidsbukta

Situated in the western Eidsbukta area, the POW camp lies approximately a half-kilometre across the isthmus from the Sværholt hamlet (Figure 4 and 5). The square outline of the prison yard is still traceable by collapsed posts and stubs. Covering an area of about 1800 square metres, the camp was surrounded by a double perimeter fence of barbed wire. The main gate was located at the northeastern corner where it connected to a road leading to the hamlet and with a northern branch running uphill to the battery on the cape. A secondary gate was located at the southwest corner of the camp. Cutting through the southern edge of the prison grounds, a creek provided running water for drinking and washing. The camp has been described in more detail previously (see Olsen and Witmore 2014; Grabowski et al. 2014), and we shall here recapitulate some features in the course of addressing a few new ones.

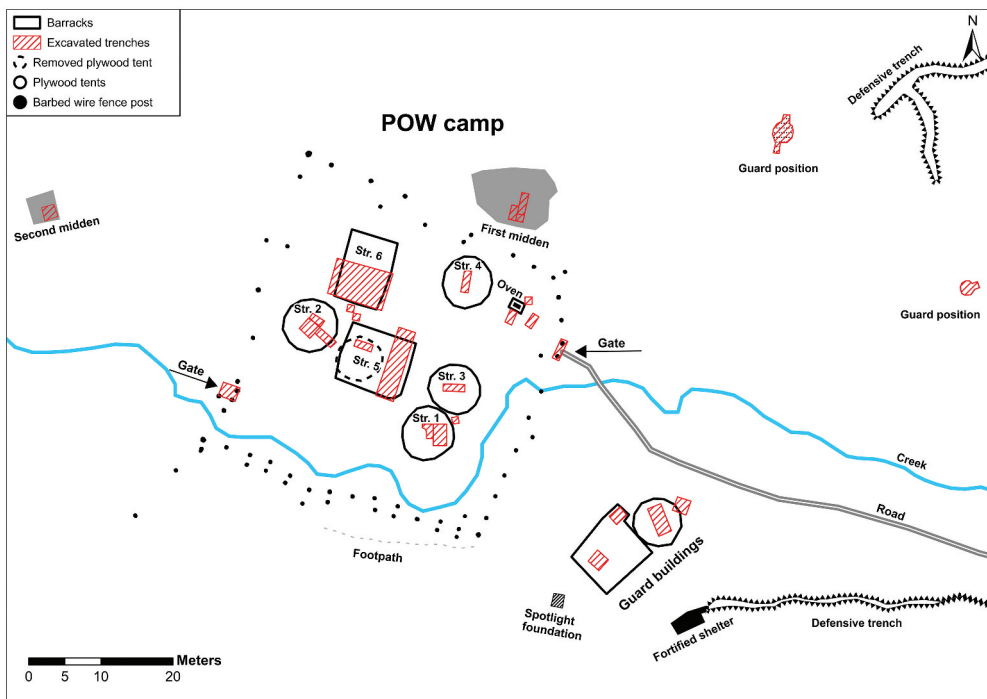


Figure 4. A map of the POW camp in Eidsbukta and the location of the excavated areas. Illustration: Stein Farstadvoll and Ingar O. Figenschau.



Figure 5. The POW camp in Eidsbukta seen from the south. Photo: Bjørnar Olsen.

Camp tents and barracks

Inside the camp are the vestiges of six buildings; four prefabricated, circular ‘tents’ constructed of plywood – so-called *Finnenzelte* (see US-Army 1943, 75–79; Pool 2016, 177; Seitsonen et al. 2017, 11) – and two rectangular barracks. The outline of an additional plywood tent can also be spotted as a circular imprint in the vegetation at the SW corner of the southernmost barrack that later replaced it. The plywood tents – structures 1 to 4 – have a diameter of 5.5 m, while the two barracks, structures 5 and 6, measure 9×6.5 and 8.5×7.5 m respectively.

Our excavations inside the buildings suggest a sequence where the plywood tents initially provided housing for the inmates, but later were used for other purposes or dismantled altogether. At some point in the life of the camp, the two barracks replaced these tents as buildings for dwelling. As already mentioned, one indication of this sequencing is that one of the barracks, structure 5, was built on top of the foundation of a tent that was removed. Excavation of structure 1, moreover, which still contains a large iron cauldron inside the wall foundation, showed that this tent initially had an earthen floor and was used for dwelling, as also indicated by quite rich and varied finds. Situated next to the creek, however, it was later refurbished to serve as a bath or laundry. For this a circular hearth was constructed to accommodate the iron cauldron, while the rest of the floor was covered piecemeal by a thin layer of concrete (Figure 6). Another two plywood tents – structures 3 and 4 – also contain traces of added concrete floors, which,



Figure 6. Trench showing the concrete floor in structure 1, a plywood tent, and the iron cauldron. Photo: Þóra Pétursdóttir.

combined with sparse finds, make it rather unlikely that they were continuously used as dwellings (Grabowski et al. 2014, 7–10).

Structure 2 is the only plywood tent that does not yield any clear evidence for a change in use. The floor consisted of trampled earth, while small deposits of burnt coal and other debris, probably stemming from cleaning the fireplace, were found just outside the doorstep. Finds were abundant and mixed, mostly relating to processing and maintenance, food consumption, leisure and everyday activities. Consisting mostly of cuts of rubber but also pieces of leather (including soles), shoe fragments and debris from making and maintenance of footwear were particularly frequent. Most of the leather seems to originate from worn-out German army boots, while a good portion of the (black) rubber was derived from vehicle tires; the rest came from unknown yellow/white natural latex sheets with a striated surface (Grabowski et al. 2014, 10, 19). Critical for survival, footwear demanded constant repair and replacement. Some of the half cuts found are clearly hoods for clogs or ‘slippers’, which were commonly used by the POWs in the north (Lundemo 2010, 40–41; cf. Hennig 2009, 74). The shoe material from structure 2 represents different stages of processing, and the amounts may suggest that this tent, while it retained the character of a dwelling, was transformed into a workshop.

The two barracks were constructed of light prefabricated materials set upon pier (stacked stone) and beam foundations with an elevated wooden floor. These buildings

were also secured by 'roof anchors' where heavy gauge wires were stretched across the roof and fixed to solid stones on either side to stabilize the barracks under extreme weather conditions. Following an initial test trench, structure 5 was explored by a trench of 10 × 2.5 m excavated across the eastern section of the barrack. While the finds were not very abundant, they contained a high proportion of 'personal' items (including buttons, shards of alcohol and medicine bottles, iron toe and heel plates, and fragments from the copper chain of a necklace) indicative of the barrack's use for quartering. The relatively few finds from the floor area may suggest that the building had been cleaned out prior to evacuation. Lending support to this possibility is the higher density of finds just outside of the entrances, especially at the southernmost of the two. Here, there was also a refuse pit filled with bone debris, bottle glass, iron fragments from tins and cans, cuts of leather and rubber, broom bristles, etc. Soil samples showed elevated phosphate levels in the pit and along the outside of the eastern wall. These results indicate that the space just east of this barrack was perhaps used for temporary storage of waste and rubbish prior to being transported to the main midden outside the compound (Grabowski et al. 2014, 10–12).

The remains of most buildings inside the camp indicate that they were taken down and dismantled in a relatively controlled manner prior to the final withdrawal. One trivial but telling indication relates to the remains of the roof anchors of structure 5 where all the wires for this barrack were systematically cut right above the stone weights and removed. The situation, however, proved to be very different for the second barrack, structure 6. The excavation of a 5 × 8-metre trench yielded finds suggestive of a third and final phase of the POW camp, probably associated with the last days or weeks up to the Wehrmacht evacuation of Sværholt between November 11 and 15, 1944 (Gamst 1984, 119). During this time the remaining prisoners were crammed into this lone, remaining camp dwelling where they stayed until the building was set ablaze before the ultimate withdrawal. Indicative of this final event are the complete stretches of roof-anchor wire splayed over the barrack area and still secured to large boulders – a telling indication of their sudden collapse (Figure 7). Along the outer walls heaps of broken glass, deformed by fire, mark the location of the windows; inside, pieces of a smashed stove were dispersed across the site alongside burnt wood and other evidence of intensive burning (Grabowski et al. 2014, 11–13, 15–20).

Equally telling for the last phase of use prior to the abrupt departure was the variety, condition, and vast number of finds from this barrack. Especially frequent were items of an everyday and personal character, including fragments from wine and other alcohol bottles, glass and ceramic cups, uniform buttons, iron boot heels and toe plates, glass chess pieces from at least two sets, mostly melted, and a large number of gaming pieces. The latter were found in clusters along a line in the centre of the floor area, just east of the platform from the smashed stove, indicating an interior wall, possibly with shelves or other storage compartments. Few items were unaffected by fire, though some well-preserved items were found adjacent to the inside of the eastern wall. Particularly intriguing was an intact and corked cologne bottle still containing some of its original contents found in a deeper pocket – as if tucked under the turf embankment. On top of the bottle, and partly folded underneath, was a sheet of copper alloy, which also covered a few other items (pieces of garment, string, leather, and paper). The content and context of this assemblage is suggestive of a cache or hideaway; the fact that it was unaffected by



Figure 7. Photo of the southwest section of barrack 6. Note the roof-anchor wires crisscrossing the excavated surface. Piles of melted glass and gaming pieces are also visible in the photo. Photo: Christopher Witmore.

the fire may lend further support to this being a deposit intentionally hidden underneath the floor planks.

The prison yards

Open-air yards are natural gathering areas in POW camps, as also is likely here. However, the climate at 71° north does not make them very tempting apart from in the long days of summer. The prisoners were regularly/daily allowed out to work in the hamlet and elsewhere (Sagen 1999, and personal communication) – and it is likely that the dwellings to a larger extent were ‘their’ spaces when confined to the camp. Speaking in support of

this is the fact that neither our soil chemical analyses nor our hundreds of walks across their low, thinly covered surfaces have revealed many traces of outdoor activity.

One exception, however, was the northeastern corner of the camp adjacent to the main gate. Here levels of phosphate and magnetic susceptibility (MS) were exceptionally high in the area around an open-air stone oven. This prisoner-built oven, with the horizontal dimensions of 1.85 × 1.40 metres, and a height of 1.2 metres, is also the only construction left intact in the camp. Its hybrid blend of stacked stone and hand-packed concrete, is strikingly different from any of the German constructions at Sværholt (cf. Olsen and Witmore 2014, 168–169). Similar stone ovens (often called ‘Russian ovens’), however, have been used throughout this northern area since medieval times and are associated with a past, and voluntary, Russian presence in these waters. Such ovens were used commonly for baking bread, but here excavation revealed a concrete channel leading from the oven to a collapsed iron stove, suggesting an alternative use as a smoker. Its prominent position near the main gate may be strategically motivated since this yard is within direct sight of the main guard positions. Being a natural gathering point, the oven was also an obvious object of surveillance.

This well-monitored open-air space starts just inside the main gate and extends into the areas framed by tents 3 and 4, and the two barracks; it constitutes one of possibly three yard areas in the prisoner compound. Here trenches excavated across the main gate, and in the yard near and immediately in front of the oven, yielded mixed finds of charcoal, iron and concrete, in addition to the aforementioned smoker features. Two other small trenches were excavated in the passage between the two barracks and structure 2. Interestingly, the finds from this less visible area were numerous and included a few tin-can fragments, window glass, nails, coal/coke pieces, ceramic stove-tile fragments, portions of a butter knife, and some rim sherds from a porcelain dinner plate.

A second yard area opens to the west of barrack 6 and tent 2, in the northwestern corner of the compound, where it was visually shielded from the guard area near the gate, but not from the positions on the terrace. From this part of the camp, save for the barbed-wire fences, prisoners would have had an unimpeded view over the mined fossil beach and out to the sea. A third possible yard, framed by tents 1 and 2, the length of barrack 5, and the stream, lays to the southwest. Located on the west side of this yard, just north of the stream was the secondary gate. Though we opened a trench in an exterior niche between Structure 1 and 3 adjacent to the creek, it did not yield anything but birch bark and bits of charcoal. A trench excavated across the secondary gate revealed a threshold stone with other raised stepping stones in a marshy area by the creek. A discarded food tin was left upon the threshold.

Guard huts and positions

At a slightly higher elevation, 20 m east of the prison compound, stand the remnants of two guard dwellings, a plywood tent and a small barrack. Two trenches were excavated in the small barrack, one across the accessway and another in the southwestern inner corner, yet these turned up few finds. A stove base of stacked stone was exposed in the centre of the floor area, while heavy gauge wires found in the entranceway indicate the use of roof anchors. The two trenches dug in and immediately outside the plywood tent proved more rewarding.

The structure itself is hardly distinguishable from the tents inside the camp but the finds suggest some very significant differences. For one, copious amounts of unused coke and coal lay about the surfaces, both inside the tent and just outside the entrance – a strong indication of greater access to fuel compared to the prisoners' dwellings where little coal seems to have gone to waste. The presence of an intact iron hoe/fire rake may be seen as another manifestation of this affluence, as are, possibly, the many fragments of asphalt/tar shingles, which probably were used to cover the earthen floors or shore up leaky roofs. No such items were present in the trenches excavated inside the camp. An intact ink bottle, still with the cork stopper, attests to the routine activities of recording and control performed here. An iron toe-plate for a boot may indicate maintenance but also contraband activities, as similar items were found inside several of the inmates' dwellings (see also Figenschau and Arntzen 2017, 154; Hennig 2009, 72). Strongly indicative of such transactions across the barbed-wire fence is the large piece of tire rubber with extensive cut marks found on the floor in this guard dwelling. We may recall how fragments of identical black-tire rubber were found inside the camp, especially in structure 2, where they were processed into hoods for clogs and other footwear items (Figure 8). Other indications of unauthorized exchange likely involving the guards relates to the many traces of alcohol found inside the camp, and also, though less frequent, of perfume and tobacco. The latter include a pipe fragment (structure 2, with more in the middens) and a bunch of pipe cleaners discovered hidden beneath the floor in the test-trench of structure 5 (Olsen and Witmore 2014, 177, 185)

Excavations were also conducted in a gun emplacement and a guard position east and above the POW camp. Compared to the defensive positions set along the ridge of the raised-beach terrace, the location of the gun emplacement – in the terrace slope below – is a bit odd. Given its field of vision, its purpose may have included camp surveillance and



Figure 8. A German 'Fulda' brand tire with cut marks and a hood for a clog made from tire rubber. Photos: Stein Farstadvoll and R. Skjørten Hansen.



Figure 9. A guard position overlooking one of the camp gates and the area around the oven. Photo: Bjørnar Olsen.

control – it is the only position from which one may view the northwest yard in the prison compound. Excavation exposed a circular concrete floor, surrounded by a low wall of dry-stacked stone, accessed through shallow upslope trenches with turf steps shored up by wood and tar felt. Apart from its construction features, there were hardly any finds from this structure. The guard position is holed into the higher rim near the crest of the ridge above the creek to the south (Figure 9). A tight-circular burrow of stacked stone and turf, it was accessed from the upper west side by well-built steps. The floor was covered with asphalt shingles and fragments of tar-felt. Among the few finds were pieces of a cap to an iron bottle and a spent cartridge.

Middens

Two middens or refuse dumps were excavated in the course of our fieldwork. Displaying both the highest phosphate and MS-levels within the sampled area, the first midden was identified just a few metres outside the northern perimeter of the camp. The soil science mapping combined with excavation and test-pitting indicate that the dump covers an area of at least 60 m². Two trenches, one measuring 1 × 4 m from 2011 and 2012, the other, 2 × 1 m from 2015, showed that the trash was deposited in pits, up to 0.7 m deep (Figure 10). Huge amounts of garbage were recovered, including alcohol and medicine bottles, tin cans, pieces of rubber and leather, iron heel and toe plates, cartridges, fishing equipment, textile fragments, buttons, coins, nails, bolts, washers, window glass,



Figure 10. A 1x2-metre trench dug in the midden in August 2015. The pictures show the middle and bottom layer of a waste pit, which is delimited by the original intact surface (grey area) on the right side. Photos: Bjørnar Olsen.

potsherds, bits of plastic/bakelite, string/wires, slag, coke and coal, and myriad wood fragments (Figure 11). The midden also contained faunal material. A total of 3177 bone fragments (weighing 1652 grams) suggests a diet predominantly composed of fish (98%), mostly cod supplemented by haddock and plaice (Figure 12 a, b). The cod was primarily from small to medium sized specimens (shorter than 60 cm), and the many head bones indicate that whole and therefore likely fresh cod were brought to the camp. There were, however, also crushed bones, which probably represent dried cod and cod-heads. About 2% of the bones were from mammals and birds – cattle, sheep/goat, fox, pig, and seagulls (Vretemark 2013, 2016). The presence of fox is intriguing, especially since one hipbone had clear traces of butchering, suggesting that even *Vulpes vulpes* occasionally was consumed.



Figure 11. A collage of different types of objects found in the midden, from left to right: A Norwegian sardine tin can, a collection of rubber cuttings, a brush, a E. Merck Darmstadt medicine bottle, a 'schnapps' bottle, a button and a collection of leather cuttings, and a set of fishhooks. Photos: Ingar O. Figenschau and Stein Farstadvoll.

Another conspicuous feature is the number of alcohol bottles in this midden. Red wine (Bordeaux and Bourgogne types), white wine (Alsace/Mosel/Rhine types), and even several champagne bottles are common alongside beer bottles as well as bottles for schnapps or other hard liqueurs (see Olsen and Witmore 2014, 185–186). A broken brown glass bottle with a screw cap marked 'E. Merck Darmstadt', may be indicative of other stimulants. Merck is a German pharmaceutical company that pioneered the commercial manufacture of methamphetamines, opiates, and cocaine. During WW2 the company was a major supplier of the narcotics used by Wehrmacht personnel and its director was closely associated with the Nazi party (Steinkamp 2008; Ohler 2015). Though the traces of intoxicants may suggest that the guards shared the dump with the prisoners, and thus represent their consumption and possibly the need to get rid of evidence of on-duty drinking, alcohol bottles, as we have seen, were also found inside the camp (Grabowski



Figure 12. a) A pile of fishbones and, b), a fishing net found in the first midden at the POW camp. Photos: Stein Farstadvoll and Radoslaw Grabowski.

et al. 2014, 15–16). While reuse to hold drinking water is possible, alcohol consumption among the POWs is mentioned in local testimonies (Sagen, interview).

The second midden was found in 2018 and excavated in 2019. Situated a little less than 40 m west of the camp – outside the sampled soil area – a quadratic pit, measuring ca. 4 x 3,5 m, and still open had been dug near the fossil boulder beach (Figure 13). The pit, 0.9 m deep, was less than half-filled with garbage. This partial filling, and the fact that it was never covered, strongly suggest that this was the last midden established and that it came into use after the first dump area was filled up and covered. As with the first midden, the 2 x 2 m trench yielded copious amounts of material though with some significant differences that further inform us about POW life during the last months of the occupation. The composition of finds was much the same as in the first midden, and included more or less familiar material such as cuts of rubber and leather, shoe and sole fragments, heel plates, textile, gauze, buttons, nails, bolts, washers, fittings, a zinc bucket, a horse shoe, a jam (?) glass, bottles, tin cans, lids, knives, spoons, coins, cartridges, shards from light bulbs, mirror and window glass, plastic and bakelite fragments, paper, coal and coke. Of the more special finds may be mentioned a signal cartridge, fragments of a French field bottle, a plectrum, a partly filled toothpaste tube, and pieces of a German newspaper which read, among other things: ‘... und der Einlad ... Churchills an ... Kapitulat ...’ (‘... and the invitation ... Churchill to ... surrender ...’). One difference from the first midden, though, is significantly fewer traces of alcohol consumption.

The faunal material, on the other hand, was considerably more abundant compared to the first midden. A total of 13,530 bone fragments (6801 g) were recovered, and, as with



the first midden, the overwhelming majority derives from fish (97.5%). The remaining 2.5% are from reindeer, cattle, dog, sheep/goat, and bird (a few bones of seagull, oaks, duck, and ptarmigan) (Vretemark 2020, 2–3). Among the mammal remains, reindeer is most common with 112 bones (with another 86 undecided cattle/reindeer), followed by cattle, dog and sheep/goat. The latter is hardly represented (one bone only) – as in the first midden, caprine remains are rare. This is intriguing given that sheep were the predominant livestock in this area (and most likely the one present in the material rather than the less common goat). The presence of reindeer and dog is new compared to the first midden, and it should be noted that some of the dog bones (all likely from a young specimen), have traces of butchering (Vretemark 2020, 4).² Among the fish, cod species predominate (93%), roughly distributed between cod (*Gadus morrhua*; 80%) and haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*; 20%). As with the first midden, small- to medium-sized cod is the norm and the body-part distribution suggests that the specimens mostly arrived at the camp whole and fresh. In addition to the cod species, flatfish (*Pleuronectiformes* sp. 3.3%, mainly plaice *Pleuronectes platessa*), herring³ (*Clupea harengus* 2.6%), salmon (*Salmo salar* 1.0%), and a few bones of catfish (*Anarhichas lupus*)⁴ were also present (Vretemark 2020).

The presence of reindeer and salmon in this midden is interesting. Apart from indicating a more varied diet, which also included herring, both are strong seasonal indicators. Salmon only enter these waters during late spring and summer, and reindeer have the same seasonal presence migrating from the interior to the coastal areas for summer

pastures. Assessment of reindeer bones undertaken by Maria Vretemark shows they are from young bulls which correlates well with the fact that the outer tip of the Sværholt peninsula traditionally is reserved for bulls.⁵ There are also some interesting depositional differences in the use phase of the second midden. Without any discernable stratigraphy it was excavated in five mechanical layers. Though the difference is relative and rough, of course, it is interesting to note that salmon and reindeer both peak in the middle-lower layers (3 and 4), which fits rather nicely with what to expect from a depositional sequence starting in late winter, before the spring arrival of these species, and ending in November, well after they return to their winter habitats. That the garbage pit was never filled and covered, further speaks to the abrupt departure that makes its mark on so much of the Sværholt assemblage.

The material from these middens adds considerable nuance to common assumptions concerning POW diet derived from the available ration lists from WWII. Though these rations varied over time, between areas, and with respect to the prisoners concerned, one gets an impression that the per-week rations given in 1942 to a Soviet POW classified as 'normal worker' (*Normalarbeiter*) in Norway consisted of: bread (2600 g), meat (250 g), fat (130 g), potatoes (5250 g), 'nutrition' (150 g), sugar (110 g), tea (14 g), and vegetables ('only if available') (Lundemo 2010, 42–43). As one can see, the prescribed staple consists of bread and potatoes, while fish, which dominates in the middens, find no mention. Needless to say, neither are intoxicants listed among such rations. Though the remains of



Figure 13. Photo of the second midden at the POW camp with two of the authors. Note how the midden pit is only partially filled. Photo: Bjørnar Olsen.

tinned food are quite plentiful in the two middens, the faunal remains suggest that local resources, especially fish, constituted a very important addition to the diet. The surprising presence of fish equipment in the first dump, with numerous hooks and large fragments of a cotton fishnet, along with a needle for net mending found in structure 2, may support oral statements that the inmates were allowed to fish in the hamlet harbour area where they commonly worked (see [Figures 11 and 12b](#)). This was also where the hamlet fishermen brought their catch ashore, and there are testimonies of fish changing hands during these frequent encounters (interviews Gunnlaug Sagen and Oddvar Sjøveian).

The garrison in the Sværholt hamlet

The garrison was situated along and near the harbour road, at the upper westernmost end of the hamlet fields. It was protected by lighter gun positions located at the edge of the steep raised-beach terrace delimiting the western fringe of the hamlet and along the surrounding slopes. Additional defensive positions were placed among rock outcrops along the shore to the north. The remains of the garrison casernes are still clearly visible. Foremost among them is a row of three large foundations situated at the foot of the beach terrace ([Figure 14 a, b, and Figure 15](#)). Since no excavations have been conducted inside these buildings, the identification of their wartime functions is based on surface finds, historical photos, and local informants (e.g. Sagen 1999). The northernmost, measuring 12 × 6 m, housed the kitchen and may also have served as a mess hall for lower-ranking personnel. The next, measuring 22 × 6 m, was used for quartering and possibly dining, while the southernmost, measuring 19 × 6 m, was a combined office and quartering building. Unlike the former, the foundations of the latter contain a basement level perhaps used as a larder, while at the surface level a partial concrete floor covers the southern end. Despite the consistent widths of these three foundations, wartime photos reveal how, unlike the northern two buildings which were built from prefabricated kits, the office and quartering building was a stacked-timber construction. Further south and immediately east of the tip of Veiberget ('the road cliff'), was a 12 × 6 m building used for social gatherings called the 'cinema' by the locals (Sagen 1999). Finally, what we interpret to be a storage house, measuring 14.5 × 8 m, was nestled in the corner formed at the intersection of Veiberget and the beach terrace. Wartime photos also show that a number of plywood tents and small barracks were erected below the cliff and adjacent to the harbour road during the construction phase. Traces of some of these buildings are still visible, though most were used only temporarily during the construction phase (after which they perhaps were relocated to the POW camp). During this phase, some of the villagers' houses were confiscated for Wehrmacht use, this also included the more opulent house of the wealthy hamlet 'proprietor', which for a period was used for POW quartering before the camp in Eidsbukta was completed (Sagen 1999; Oddvar Sjøveian interview).

Given the finds from the first camp midden in Eidsbukta, the initial objective in targeting the garrison was to locate middens that could yield comparable faunal and other material for understanding differences in diet and living conditions more generally. Unable to use soil science sampling, we conducted extensive test pitting in the area surrounding the garrison buildings, focusing on spots where rich vegetation indicated nutrition-rich soils. Circular depressions dug for the foundations of tents adjacent to the row of garrison buildings, as seen in the historical photos, offered their qualities as later



Figure 14. A) 1942 image of the German garrison under construction in the Sværholt village. Note the plywood tents in the back that were later used as midden-pits after the POWs were moved to the camp in Eidsbukta. b) Photo of the same area today. Photo: Unknown German soldier, and Bjørnar Olsen.

dumps for Wehrmacht garbage. Some of these dumps were packed with faunal material, especially fish bones. Excavations were conducted in 2015 in two of these ‘tent dumps’, one 12 m west of SW corner of the middle building and one 7 m west of the NW corner of the kitchen building. In addition, we also excavated a small midden discovered 24 m east of the NE corner of the kitchen building. All three trenches measured 1 × 1 m. In 2018, we excavated two more 1 × 1-metre trenches in the first and southwesternmost tent dump.

The faunal material from the trenches was abundant, with a total of 10,034 bone fragments recovered (12.694 g). Though there are differences between them, which may represent seasonal variation, we will here, for the sake of simplicity, treat them as a whole since all are related to the garrison where they were processed and consumed. As with the



camp middens, fish bones are predominant, constituting 91.4% of the excavated material, while mammals and birds count for the remaining 8.6% (Vretemark 2016, 2020). There are, however, some important differences. First, the share of mammal bones (8%) is significantly greater than in the camp, and with respect to the sparse representation of sheep/goat in the camp material, it is of interest that sheep/goat here counts for 75% (604 bone fragments) with the rest divided between cattle, reindeer, hare and whale (here ordered with respect to decreasing frequency). Beyond its status as a somewhat scarce resource, this preference for sheep/lamb may explain why so little of it ended up in the camp. The composition of body parts makes it likely that the animals either were slaughtered here, or brought to the garrison unbutchered, suggesting local procurement. Another feature to note, and which counts for all livestock bones, is that that material from the garrison commonly contains larger bone fragments, with many whole bones, while the camp material almost entirely consists of small broken pieces. Another consistent attribute of the latter, in comparison to the garrison, is that the bones stem from poorer or less meat-

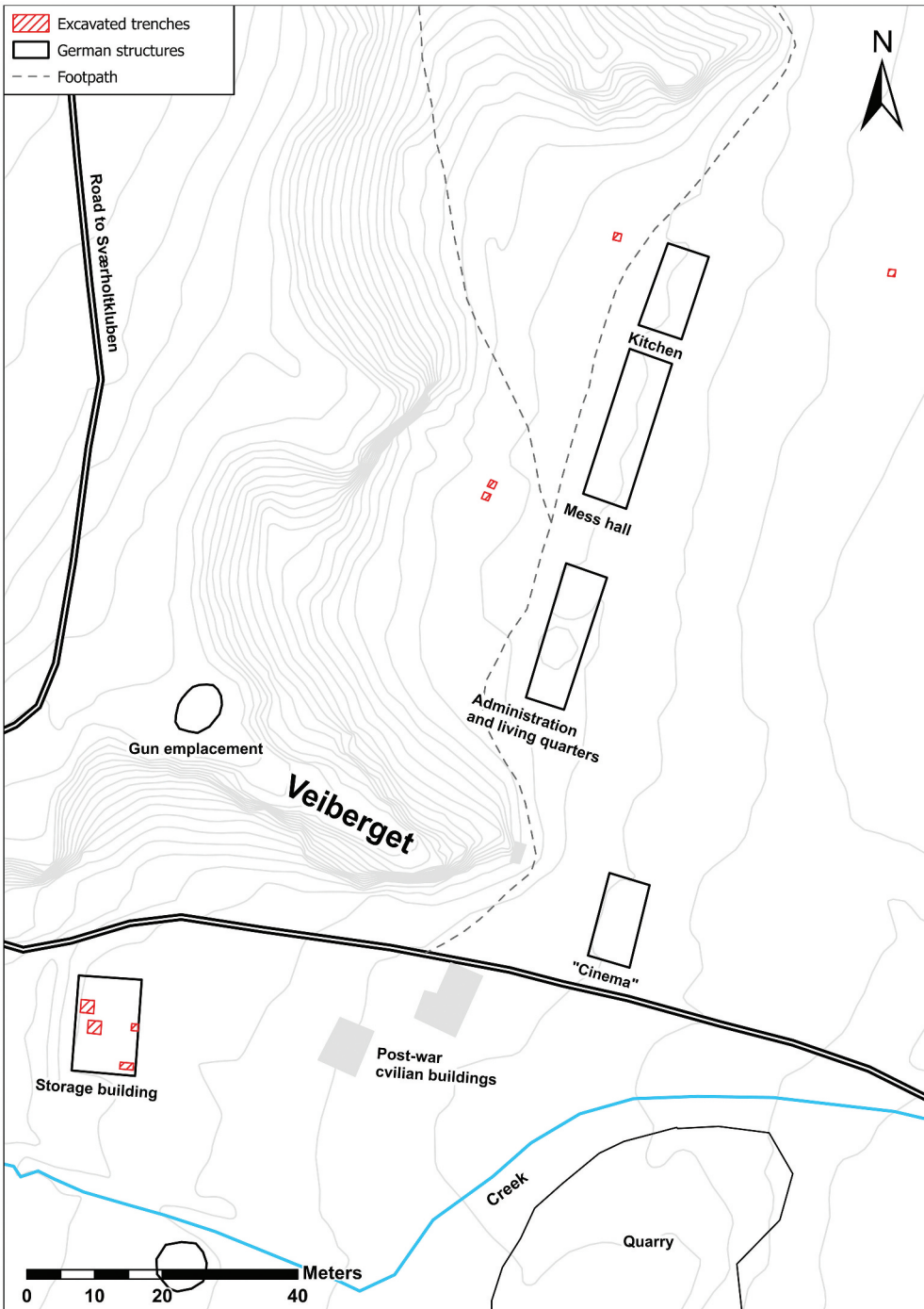


Figure 15. Map of the excavated trenches in the Sværholt hamlet. Map: The Norwegian Mapping Authority. Illustration: Stein Farstadvoll and Ingar O. Figenschau.

rich portions of the animals. Of the sheep consumed in the garrison, they are predominantly lamb or from specimens younger than 1.5 years (Vretemark 2016, 6–11).

There are other significant differences with respect to fish when compared to the camp material. Consisting of cod (*Gadus morrhua*) and haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*) in similar proportions to the camp, in the garrison material cod species are even more dominant (99.6%). There are also size differences, since the cod represented in the garrison material is primarily from mature specimens longer than 60 cm. Another significant difference is the sparse representation of flatfish/plaice, which may support the suggestion that their presence in the camp material actually represents prisoners' catch. Neither is herring, which would be seen as a species in demand, identified in the garrison material, which may, apart from bait herring, speak to a lack of availability (see note 3; Vretemark 2016, 2–5; 2019, 1–2).

Among the other fish species represented in very small shares are catfish (*Anarhichas lupus*), common ling (*Molva molva*), salmon/sea trout (*Salmo* species), halibut (*Hippoglossus hippoglossus*), carp (*Cyprinidae* species/*Cyprinus carpio*) and perch (*Perca fluviatilis*). While their quantitative presence is insignificant, most of these species are highly sought after, often for festive meals. Most interesting here, however, are the two freshwater species, which have no natural presence in this area. Whereas perch is present in the interior – more than 150 km to the south – carp has no natural presence in northern Fennoscandia at all. Since neither species was subject to trade in this region, they must have arrived here through Wehrmacht networks or through other connections involving personnel stationed at Sværholt.⁶ In this respect it is interesting to note the similar presence of exotic bird species. Again, the number of bones are sparse but they do include birds like hazel grouse (*Tetrastes bonasia*) and western capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*), which both occur in the interior forest area 150 km or more to the south and southeast.⁷ Alongside ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*), the most common birds in the garrison material are hazel grouse and western capercaillie; both are considered delicacies and with natural habitats in the Sværholt area they are therefore favoured species for hunting. Thus, the presence of these species in the material, along with perch, may be indicative of hunting and fishing, some involving journeys to recreational areas in the inland region, among the personnel in their leisure time. Spent shotgun shells found in the camp midden strengthens this conclusion.⁸ Interestingly, all bones of ptarmigan, hazel grouse and western capercaillie were found in the same trench⁹ and layer (Vretemark 2016, 12), likely a single context deposit, which may be seen as a result of such an interior hunting trip and/or a special garrison meal where these birds were served.

Apart from the substantial faunal material, the excavated trenches also yielded many finds that provide further insights into garrison life. Finds include nails, screws, rivets, nuts and washers, buttons, textile fragments, leather fragments, tin cans, bottle glass, window glass, lamp glass (including glass chimneys for kerosene lamps), mirror glass, pieces of communication wire, a smoke grenade, bricks, coal and coke. One thing to be noted is the moderate presence of alcohol bottles. Those found consisted of sherds from wine, beer and liquor bottles, including a ceramic bottle likely to have held a *jenever* or other 'schnaps' liquor. More expected in large numbers are the sherds from faience and porcelain tableware. These included fragments from plates, tea or coffee cups, bowls, pitchers, vases and other decorative items, with some of the latter of glass. Sherds of terracotta flower pots



Figure 16. Decorated ceramic sherds found in a midden in the Sværholt hamlet. Photo: Stein Farstadvoll.

were also found. Surprisingly heterogenous are the styles and decoration, from a variety of producers (Norwegian '*Egersunds Fayancefabrik*', French '*Opaque de Sarreguemines*' and Dutch '*Petrus Regout Maastricht*' (Royal Sphinx)) (Figure 16), which is far from what one might expect in ordered and controlled Wehrmacht casernes (Figure 17). Much of this material is likely of pre-war origin, and, in fact, only a few remains of likely Wehrmacht designed items were found (see also Figenschau 2019, 118).

The preference for non-Wehrmacht tableware was further emphasized by the three trenches excavated in the storage house to the south of Veiberget, less than 150 metres away. Here, two 2 x 2-metre trenches excavated in the western section of the floor revealed a huge amount of white porcelain, including Wehrmacht porcelain tableware; plates, bowls, serving vessels, cups and pitchers, obviously stored in a compartment of the building. As indicated by the midden material from the garrison casernes, these purposely designed tablewares, by producers such as *Bohemia Ceramic Works*, *Villeroy and Boch*, and also Norwegian *Porsgrund Porselænsfabrikk*, do not seem to have found their way to the other investigated 'domestic' contexts, whether in the garrison or the POW camp. An exception is the battery area at Sværholtklubben where Wehrmacht porcelain does occur in some of the excavated contexts (see below). Other finds, such as technical equipment, batteries, fuses, bolts and screws, underline the storage function of the building. A 2 x 1-metre trench excavated next to the southern wall also suggests that the building may have been used for ammunition storage, since a large number of cartridges were found on the floor here. This may have included ammunition confiscated from the locals since many of the cartridges were prewar Norwegian-produced specimens.



Figure 17. A layer of smashed and fire-cracked official Wehrmacht ceramics unearthed in the storage building. Photo: Bjørnar Olsen.

The battery at Sværholtklubben

Located at the summit of the Sværholtklubben cape (locally named 'Klubben'), the artillery battery was comprised of six 145 mm calibre, long-range guns, each capable of firing artillery shells up to 18 kilometres out to sea (Gamst 1984, 119). About and between these artillery positions other military constructions were gouged into solid bedrock. The command bunker was embedded at the apex of Klubben, while on its flanks, east and west, were placed two secondary bunkers. Elsewhere, lighter gun positions, large surveillance spotlights, a radio link and communication trenches, a cable-lift station, four tunnels for storage and escape/protection, two open-air latrines, a sun deck, as well as 12 buildings, mostly blockhouses used for storage, warming shelters, quartering, offices, and mess/kitchen facilities for personnel on duty were positioned across the broad slope to the south. All heavy weapons and building materials were hauled to these fortified heights along a steep and winding road from the harbour in the hamlet. Lighter materials were transported to the summit by a cable lift established on a harsh gradient from the north side of the harbour. Our excavations at Sværholtklubben were limited to three features: a storage building (B5), an officers' quarter (B10), and an associated sundeck.

Storage building B5

Our excavations began with test trenches in a large rectangular building, 'B5' (an abbreviation for 'Building 5'), with the horizontal dimensions of 19 × 10.5 m (Figure 18). Like



Figure 18. Drone photo of B5. The faint outline of the southernmost trench is visible in the entrance to the building. Note how the back of the building is formed along a seam against which the bedrock was quarried out to form a hollow. Photo: Ingar O. Figenschau.

most other buildings at Sværholtklubben, B5 was also set within a hollow cut into the bedrock. Between a sheer rockface to the north and a wall raised from flat rectangular slabs of schist to the south, a wooden framework was set over beams upon recesses and stone piers. Upon this, a floor, panelled walls, and a roof was raised. The south facing wall is bisected by a large, 2.8 m wide central doorway with a stone and concrete threshold and two openings for large windows. Like all buildings not dismantled, B5 was burnt down. Visible on the floor are the remains of tiled stoves, along with other scattered finds, including a Wehrmacht porcelain plate produced by *Bohemia* in 1941 with a *Parteiadler* on the base, melted copper alloy, ferrous metal fragments, bricks, nails, etc. Interestingly, a midden deposit was located about 5 m to the south-south-west of the entrance on top and inside a sloped stone heap formed partially by excavated debris from the construction of the building. The scattered midden material consisted of burnt refuse and coal slag

from the stoves, fish and mammal bones, glass sherds from liquor, beer, and wine bottles, a rusted can still containing black shoe polish, a sherd from the base of a white *Porgrunn porselensfabrikk* bowl, an iron door handle, a transparent glass food jar, shards from window panes, tin cans, electrical-wire snippets, fired rifle cartridges, and much more. Were one to look under slabs in the stone pile they would see more midden material deep amidst the rubble. The amount of 'domestic' finds suggest that the building, one of the largest on Sværholtklubben, may have served additional purposes, such as a repair shop or garage, with the possibility that personnel/guards were stationed here.

The excavation at B5 was confined to two 1×1 m test trenches dug in the entrance area outside the central door. The first, excavated immediately adjacent to the concrete doorstep, uncovered a small range of finds, mostly rusted screws and nails, curved iron bars, and shattered window panes. The second trench, opened 2 m from the doorstep, revealed approximately the same artefact assemblage, except for carbon cathode from a Zinc battery and an iron double-lever door handle. The handle was probably from the entrance.

Officers quarter and associated terrace

'B10', the second building test-trenched on Sværholtklubben, is interpreted as the officers' quarter. Its significance is indicated by its close proximity to the command bunker and the direct, 32-metre-long cable trench that connects them. Compared to other buildings here, B10 is peculiar. It is smaller with a more quadratic base measuring 9.8×9 m. With a height ranging from 1.4 to 3.1 m, its walls are composed of carefully stacked slabs, grey-into-rust, with a seemingly 'polished' finish. The floor inside was partly covered by stone from wall collapse and a thin vegetation layer. Centrally placed were the remains of a tiled stove, and strewn about the floor were a lot of artefacts: melted shards of glass, lengths of copper wire, iron nails and timber hooks, partly burnt wooden planks, melted copper-alloy tubes, and more. In front of the entrance in the southwest corner of the building was a well-built corridor with tightly stacked stone walls. East of this, and framing the south-facing large window was yet another wall, possibly indicating some roofing over the area in front of the window. Placed on one of the stones in the eastern wall of the entrance corridor, was a copper-alloy ashtray; on another, were the fragments of an out-of-place black sedimentary rock containing fossils from an extinct scale tree of the genus *Lepidodendron*.

Another unique detail with B10 was a small alcove, measuring 0.9×1.6 m, on the western wall of the entrance corridor, which probably served as a guard post (Figure 19 and Figure 20). The northern section of the alcove had a bench, 0.8 m long and 0.48 m wide, made from an extended part of the stonewall. The first excavated trench, which covered the floor inside this alcove, revealed a large heap of smashed glass bottles concentrated in the southern half below the bench. Most of the glass shards were from 0.33-litre green beer bottles with crown cap finishes, but there were also some sherds from clear, preserved food jars, clear liquor bottles, and porcelain vessels. On the floor outside the alcove we also uncovered two spent 9 mm casings, probably from a Luger or some other handgun. It is likely that someone fired a gun inside the entrance corridor among others who smashed bottles in the alcove just before the structure was burnt and abandoned.



Figure 19. B10 with the recently excavated sundeck to the left. Also, note the entrance corridor with alcove in the left wall. Photo: Ingar O. Figenschau.



Figure 20. The 2 x 1-metre trench inside B10. One of the authors is sitting in the entrance. Photo: Bjørnar Olsen.

A second test trench, 2 × 1 m, was dug from inside the western wall and towards the centre of the building. Underneath the vegetation and topsoil was a layer of sand and rocks containing tar-paper fragments and nails interpreted as remnants of the collapsed roof that originally also may have been camouflaged under a layer of turf and soil. In the western part of the trench, close to the wall, planks were uncovered under the collapsed roof, while in the eastern part lay a row of densely stacked wine bottles. Softened and melted by a blaze in the midst of evacuation, the stacked bottles, probably stored in a space underneath the floor, were further flattened when the wall panel, floor and roof collapsed (Figure 21). Fragments of burnt coarse textile were found in and around the systematically stacked bottles – at least three bottles high and nine wide – and the stack continued south beyond the edge of the trench. Their shapes suggest exclusive origins, including Burgundy, Bordeaux, and Rhine. An interesting feature is that several of the wine bottles have a volume of 1 litre and thus depart from the 0.70-/0.75-litre norm. This may suggest an adaptation to scarcer storage and transport conditions – and possibly higher demand – during the end of the war. At any rate, the affluence of a wine store left to melt at the summit of Sværholtklubben brings yet another dimension to the last days of *Heeres-Küsten-Batterie 1/971*. Among a range of other objects found in the mixed burnt building layer, were graphite rods from zinc-carbon batteries, sherds from a porcelain bowl, shards of window glass, glazed ceramic bottle sherds probably from a *Jenever* bottle, iron bolts, screws and nails, porcelain-wire isolators, a copper-alloy faucet, tin-can fragments, and rubber-insulated copper wire.



Figure 21. The 2 x 1-metre trench inside B10. A compressed layer of melted and stacked bottles can be seen to the right. Photo: Bjørnar Olsen.

Adding to B10's singularity is an elevated terrace, dug out to accommodate an area measuring 20 square metres, adjacent to the western wall of the building; this most likely served as a sundeck. Here, the third and largest trench, measuring 4 × 5 metres, was opened over the whole of the elevated sundeck at the upper west side of the officer's quarter. At the centre of the rectilinear terrace, the trench revealed a pavement of large slate slabs with well-fitted joints. Measuring over seven square metres, this paved surface was just broad enough to accommodate a small table and a few chairs. The trench also yielded a varied assemblage of finds with distinct distributions. Scattered over eastern section of the terrace, next to the officers' quarter, was window glass, bottle and porcelain sherds, and a piece of a crock jar. Very likely representing the last days of consumption, the bottle sherds were from wine, beer and spirit bottles. Though lacking maker's marks, the porcelain is of Wehrmacht design, and includes fragments of a saucer, plates and a piece of a pitcher or teapot. More varied were the finds from a small midden accumulated in a declivity formed by the cut into the slope at the northwestern corner of the terrace. Despite its modest size, this midden contained a rich assemblage of accumulated debris, including gaming pieces, remains of several lightbulbs, an electric plug, many fragments of lantern glass, a bakelite container for *Losantine* tablets,¹⁰ a few shards of bottle glass, porcelain and faience, a pair of scissors, toothpaste tubes, tin cans including some well-preserved aluminium sardine cans, twist-key can openers, a coin (*Reichpfennig*), a padlock, a support hook for German uniform tunic, buttons, and a snap. The light bulbs and lantern glass may indicate use of the sundeck into the darkness of mild autumn evenings. Actually, the autumn of the 1944 evacuation is reported to have been extraordinarily warm. Other sundry bits of rubbish were found throughout a 1 x 5-metre trench opened downslope from the southwest corner of this terrace. In addition to more broken glass and fragments of light bulbs, there was a toe plate, remnants of coke, and burned garbage. Likely stemming from the use of the sundeck, waste deposits were also discovered in the slope between the extended trench and the west side of the entrance corridor. Apart from pieces of coal, slag refuse and alcohol bottles, these surface finds included glass fragments from a honey jar. Parts of a raised embossing read '... ach-gruppe Im ...', so that the full label would have read '*Reichsfachgruppe Imker Gewähr für echten deutschen Honig*' – meaning it was produced for Wehrmacht consumption.

Excavating war

What does this mixed array of things from the nine years of fieldwork at Sværholt reveal about the conditions and fates of those involved in, or affected by, the Wehrmacht occupation? How do they inspire knowledge that adds nuance to historical generalizations? How do they prod us towards accounts that come to variance with our expectations? Prior to answering these questions, one has to consider the integral particularities of these things and of the conditions that led to their destinies. Unlike written sources, the things encountered at Sværholt are neither left here to be 'read' nor cast aside with the intention to record 'what happened'; they do not form part of any ordered archive of the war. As we have seen, things have gathered at this place without any respect to what is appropriate, to what fits together, or, even less, to avoid discursive contradictions and confusions. Their frequencies, appearances, and noted differences are not easily correlated with common notions of historical significance or value.

Their deviance from historical accounts is neither a matter of written information being wrong or accounts being inaccurate, nor is it about relinquishing common scholarly practices of systematizing data that bears upon the coherent production of analytical narratives. Academic writing is by habit and tradition ordered into accounts, leading from data, through analyses, to results and conclusions (Lucas 2019; Olsen and Pétursdóttir 2021). However, what is decisive is to acknowledge the difference of the archaeological record and how it may inspire other accounts, alternative modes of telling, and even narrower *petits récits* (Lyotard 1984). Moreover, despite the controlled military context of origin at Sværholt, the archaeological record allows for an unparalleled, uncensored presencing of the past that also brings to attention features and memories neither intended nor wished for. The archaeological lot – and commitment – is to deal with *what there is*, with that which has survived and gathered in a particular place. Given how these finds may range from the inconspicuous and banal to the unexpected and disquieting, the challenge for the contemporary archaeologist is to resist any temptation to sacrifice what turns up in a trench to accommodate an agenda of significance prescribed by the effective history of writing about war (Figenschau 2019, 5–8, 2020, 138).

This resistance, as we have seen, may mean addressing not only those finds in the middens that confirm and even magnify the POWs inferior diet and miserable status, such as dried-cod heads, foxes, and dogs, but also acknowledging those finds that are at variance with abject images of hardship, including reindeer meat, salmon, and cod brought fresh to the camp. And equally, the likely condition that the POWs themselves, occasionally at least, had leave to contribute to their own sustenance by fishing, a practice that has also been documented in other places like in Finland during the war (Seitsonen et al. 2021). Bottles of wine, beer and liquor found in the camp dumps and dwellings demand that we consider how here, at *this place* – where it by all means was abundantly present – alcohol was actually being consumed by the prisoners. Or, is the image of champagne in a POW camp just too difficult to grasp in face of the narrative already known? Does wine and perfume among POWs trigger a stopgap injunction to prevent us from straying too far by indulging unlikely or improper scenarios for the incarcerated? Moreover, resisting the canon of the already written and known, should also, as we have tried, involve caring for the details and trivial aspects of everyday matters. This may imply, for example, acknowledging the significance held by a tube of toothpaste left behind at an officers' sundeck, as well as by its accompanying artefacts such as a *Losantine* tablet case, gaming pieces, sardine cans, and a padlock. 'Fragments, small details', Alfredo González-Ruibal writes, 'are not just evocative: they may tell the very truth of the war' (González-Ruibal. A. 2020, 3).

Some things are more salient than others, though, 'demanding' some kind of response. The 'Russian' oven in the POW camp is such a thing (Figure 22). Constructed by the prisoners themselves, with their fingerprints still visible in the concrete used to firm it, the oven is the only intact built feature surviving in the camp today. Due to the impending context, as our excavation disclosed, the original baking function of this kind of oven had been compromised to serve the more accommodatable purpose as a smoker. The high phosphate content in the soil around it supports what was archaeologically revealed, and a qualified guess is that fish, in all likelihood those prisoner-caught specimens, were smoked in the oven. Even today the oven radiates a peculiar otherness and it is very likely that the prisoners and guards alike conceived of the oven as something explicitly



Figure 22. The Russian oven in the POW camp at Sværholt with an open trench in the foreground. Photo: Christopher Witmore.

'Russian'. As noted, its prominent and conspicuous placement near the entrance to the camp, may well be due to the surveillance rationale. Nevertheless, by being so prominently positioned it was inevitably afforded an unforeseen significance, becoming a familiar and welcoming feature for the (mostly) Russian prisoners upon returning to camp after a strenuous day; one that likely also evoked memories of home, of other places and times. It nevertheless calls for reflection that the fragile oven was left to stand during the frantic days of evacuation, when everything around it was destroyed or dismantled, allowing also for its current survival as an unintentional monument to their hardship and erstwhile presence. This deviance, of course, may be due to the presumed insignificance of the oven; something not even worth demolishing. Still, it cannot be ruled out that it was spared as an act of sympathy for the inmates or, in the very least, as an expression of some modest measure of tolerance and acceptance.

We have earlier discussed whether such sympathy may have been enhanced by being stationed at this place (Grabowski et al. 2014; Olsen and Witmore 2014; Olsen and Pétursdóttir 2017; see also Seitsonen and Herva 2011; Seitsonen et al. 2017). Conditions at 71 degrees north are indeed challenging and more so for those relocated from far away southern places who, more or less, had to be here involuntarily. Imagine the experience of spending months at one's post or in a plywood tent, watching each other through the double perimeter fence. Imagine climbing the winding road to the wind-swept, ice- and snow-covered summit of the cape during winter darkness with the foaming sea deep below, all the while not knowing, whether POW or soldier, when – or if – you could leave. Maybe that shared fate of dislocation and alienation, though indeed very differently initiated and implemented, also allowed for some fragile bonding and eased the archaeologically witnessed non-commissioned transactions across the fence? Such exchange may be seen as grounded in nothing more than being beneficial; guards on duty may have paid for their boot repair with a decent cut of tire rubber or an iron boot heel; or occasionally with a share of their alcohol or tobacco (see Hennig 2009, 70–75; Steffenak 2008, 155–156). Still, the amount of material that changed hands may also have been fostered by, and in itself fostered, some measure of mutuality. Among the hamlet population, empathy for the Soviet POWs was naturally felt and strong,¹¹ and local testimonies describe how food was left, both secretly and overtly, near the trails frequented by the inmates, and also on the harbour shore where fish were 'accidentally' lost or left behind by fishers processing their catch. These testimonies also describe how soldiers and even officers turned a blind eye to these illegal food supplies and other violations of those prescribed rules of behaviour (Sagen 1999 and interview; Sjøveian interview).

Idleness

Often-forgotten aspects of war are the trivia of everyday routines, of waiting, and, of course, idleness. As noted by Harald Welzer, 'Many of the facets of war have an everyday character, which is barely conveyed, because, in the first place, it is obvious, and secondly, unspectacular and thus hardly worth telling' (Welzer 2014, 189–90; see also Legendre 2017; Figenschau 2020, 11–15). Such is also the case with the Sværholt coastal fort. Not being involved in any significant combat during its two and a half years of operation, *waiting* was a kind of constant for prisoners and Wehrmacht personnel alike. The idleness was particularly tangible during the winters, when outdoor work and activity for six to seven months were restricted by snow, freezing wind, and darkness.

This idleness, albeit experienced very differently, also included the inmates, who also had to cope with far more severe living conditions than those on the other side of the isthmus. A vast share of the excavated material from the camp and its middens is about this everyday coping, offering silent testimonies for how the inmates, in various ways, got on under these circumstances. The paucity of unused coal within the camp, for example, when compared to more copious amounts around the guard positions, conveys an explicit measure of difference in how the cold was kept at bay in the long hours of winter dark. Myriad cuts of leather, rubber, and other portions of shoes speak to the importance of footwear and the meticulous labour expended to keep out the wet and cold. Idle, 'leisure' time, however, also brought mental challenges – fear, home-longing, boredom –

that needed to be eased (see Nansen 2016; Legendre 2017, 55–57). Gaming pieces and chess sets hint at moments of distraction while POWs were confined to the camp. The very gaming pieces themselves, moreover, which came in nice shapes with different bright and dark colours, added aesthetic and pleasing sensory dimensions to prison life, as did perfume, toiletries, and alcohol, which also likely triggered memories of other times and places (Figure 23). One might expect the same from music and singing, with or without the stimuli of alcohol. In both of the middens, and one of the plywood tents (structure 2), well-worn plastic plectrums were found, strongly indicating how stringed instrument(s) were played (cf. Hennig 2009, 74–75). Routine activities, handcrafts, cutting and sewing, repairing and making footwear, may also be mentioned in this connection. Apart from the obvious practical benefits, such work is both creative and distractive, and helps preserve a sense of self in an insane and alienating context.

Though on a different level, idleness in cramped domestic spaces was also an issue for soldiers and officers. Boredom, homesickness, and ‘cabin fever’ were common (Hennig 2009, 68–69; Reese 2005; Seitsonen et al. 2017, 22–23), and were dealt with in various ways here. Leisure time activities included card and board games, and reading, with drinking as an ever present means to escape and bond. They also were permitted the privilege of a ‘cinema’ that, apart from movie screenings, housed social gatherings and performances of different kinds (Sagen 1999). Routines were important also to them, and beyond what was requisite militarily. When German officers brushed their teeth at Sværholtklubben, and turned off the lanterns before retreating to their quarters after an evening at the sundeck, these were also acts of performed normality. In the garrison casernes, flowers and decorative objects provided a sense of home, as one, whether intentionally or unintentionally, tried to uphold some fragile distinction between domestic and military life. The preference for non-Wehrmacht tableware testified by the finds in the garrison middens speak to this distinction, as does the affluence of unused Wehrmacht cups and dinnerware in the storage building nearby. Wehrmacht porcelain ware was functional, even aesthetically pleasing, and acceptable in an on-duty setting at the battery but not necessarily what you wanted to encounter during meals and recreation in the garrison casernes.

Being not in any front-line position, the possibility for recreational retreats for the soldiers was limited. However, the possibility to hunt and fish in the area around Sværholt likely presented itself. Ducks and ptarmigan are valued bird species common to the Sværholt area, also during winter. For officers, retreats to Wehrmacht-run hotels or recreational centres were more likely, and in Finnmark such facilities were available in, for example, the Lakselv area, and further south in Sør-Varanger and Finland. Such retreats may also have included sport/leisure hunting and fishing. As noted above, there are species present in the garrison middens, including fish, that have their natural habitat much further south and which possibly stem from such recreational hunting-fishing trips. Especially indicative here is the likely single context deposit that included bones of the highly sought hunting birds – hazel grouse, western capercaillie and ptarmigan – all birds which may have been brought back from such a trip and eaten at as part of a special garrison meal, perhaps with matching wines.

Even archaeology may have been a leisure time activity among some of the Wehrmacht personnel stationed at Sværholt. On the fossil beach terrace above the row of garrison casernes are a number of rectangular depressions that are vestiges of Stone Age dwellings.



Figure 23. A photo showing diverse sets of gaming pieces found in the camp. Many of the pieces were damaged when the barrack was burnt down. Photo: Stein Farstadvoll.

These subterranean dwellings date to c. 5000–5500 BP and one of them exhibits clear traces of an excavation trench placed as to exactly cover the floor area. A small test trench dug by us to investigate the matter confirmed a perfect fit with the extent of the floor layer. Apart from our investigations, no other archaeological excavations have ever been undertaken at Sværholt. Though we cannot know for certain that this was done by any soldiers and officers, it is hard to think of any other likely option. The turf cover is very thin at this part of the terrace and not usable for fuel or as building material. The road from the hamlet to Sværholtklubben cuts through the site and during the construction several of these dwellings were likely disturbed and easily recognizable finds – ground slate tools, and

artefacts such as arrows, knives and axes – may have been exposed. Finds encountered in this way may have spurred curiosity and interest, eventually leading to an excavation.

Postscript: destruction, abandonment, presence

Ever since our first encounters with Sværholt, we have been astonished by the pervasiveness of the evacuation destruction. Among the most articulate debris of the last days' inferno are the wrecked battery installations at the summit of the cape where everything but a small machine-gun position was completely destroyed. Across these heights, concrete monoliths were blown up, buildings and other wooden structures were burned down, and those movable things deemed to be of further military value were taken away. Today the blasted structures dotting the heights appear as frozen tokens of the frantic retreat. The shattered carapace of the command bunker recalls an explosion so fierce as to heave its metre-thick concrete roof with crowning cupola high enough to partially fold it upside down like a broken sheet cake (Figure 24). Similar memories are held by the shards of concrete and rebar, corrugated iron and chunks of stone that rained down upon the heights, the slopes, and even made their way down to the hamlet fields; fields which hold their own memories of how every home was burnt to the ground. Along with other ruined structures big and small, including the concentrated heaps of smashed German beer bottles left by the curve of the road at Sværholtklubben, they recall the hurry, despair, and agony associated with the retreat (Figure 25).



Figure 24. The blasted and folded ruins of the command bunker on top of Sværholtklubben. Photo: Ingar O. Figenschau.



Figure 25. A pile of broken beer bottles by the road leading up to Sværholtklubben. Photo: Bjørnar Olsen.

This, of course, was not something particular to Sværholt. Coordinated Wehrmacht destructions moved from east to west in the region during the late fall of 1944, starting in the Litza Valley, 50 km east of the Norwegian-Russian border. Here, troops had been deadlocked for three long years following an unsuccessful 1941 campaign to seize the vital northern Soviet port of Murmansk (Ziemke 1959, 141–156; Jacobsen 2014; Mann and Jörgensen 2016; Jacobsen 2017). In October 1944 a massive and decisive Red Army attack eventually forced the Germans to flee. In response, Adolf Hitler issued his *Führerbefehl* ordering the complete and forced evacuation of all Wehrmacht personnel, prisoners of war, and the civil, local population. In less than a month 50,000 local people had been forcefully evacuated from the county of Finnmark, while the remaining 23,000 who escaped sought refuge in the barren mountains. All in all, nearly 200,000 Wehrmacht personnel with equipment and supplies were moved out of this northern Russian, Norwegian and Finnish territory, in an unmatched evacuation manoeuvre (Ziemke 1959; Hauglid, Jensen, and Westrheim 1985; Gyllenhaal and Gebhardt 2001; Gorter, Gorter, and Suprun 2005; Mann and Jörgensen 2016, 185). Near complete was the destruction of the built environment, since upon withdrawal, the troops were also instructed to implement the tactic of scorched earth. Homes, barns, bridges, schools, shops, factories, and assembly buildings were reduced to smouldering heaps. Boats were burned and scuttled. Roads were demolished. Telegraph poles were chopped down. Livestock and family pets were killed. As the troops retreated nothing of advantage was to be left for the enemy, including those locals who had managed to escape into the mountains (Westrheim 1978; Olsen 2019; Isachsen 2016; Johansen 2013; Elstad 2020). And so it was that

Sværholt came to witness its own destruction. The small settlement was burnt to the ground; military installations were dismantled or blasted, and the locals were deported along with soldiers, officers and POWs.

Many of the things excavated over the nine summers at Sværholt are affected by the destruction and the period of its nearing, providing uncensored glimpses of the last weeks of occupation as well as of the devastating formation process of which they themselves became victims. The half-filled garbage pit left exposed below the POW camp in Eidsbukta is one of the many mundane expressions of the rush to get away, while the objects melted into mangled mounds on its stone-slab floor speak to how the storage depot in the hamlet came to a sudden and devastating end. The trash accumulated at the sundeck at Sværholtklubben, and the careless disposal of garbage on the slope beneath it, is a telling indicator of how the dire prospect of defeat was starting to dawn on otherwise orderly officers. When the evacuation days arrived, things moved fast; beer bottles were smashed in the guard's alcove outside their quarter (Figure 26), a Luger was fired, cigarettes were smoked before, or even as, the building was set on fire with its large store of wine sacrificed to the flames.

While infrastructure was being dismantled or destroyed all over Sværholt, a final, repressive displacement took place in the POW camp. Prisoners, along with their legal and illegal belongings, were restricted to the cramped interior of the last standing barrack building when not labouring in the evacuation. Here is where, for maybe just a few weeks or even days, as we may conjecture, they seem to have carved out some scarce moments for themselves, speculating about what was coming, about whether they might soon be



Figure 26. The excavated floor in the alcove in B10 revealed a layer of intentionally smashed glass bottles and spent handgun cartridges. Photo: Bjørnar Olsen.

free of subjugation, or how, without being noticed, they might get hold of that precious bottle of cologne hidden beneath the floor planks. And on that day of departure, at some point between November 11 and 15, 1944, the prisoners, mostly empty-handed, were subjected to their last forced march over the isthmus to the hamlet, where evacuation vessels waited in harbour. As they topped the crest of the terrace, did they perhaps look over their shoulders to catch a final glimpse of the camp, only to see smoke rising from the barrack, along with all their things, engulfed in flames?

After the war most of the local population returned to the ruined hamlet to rebuild their homes and barns, in some cases making use of what was left behind for temporary shelter before more proper dwellings were raised. Apart from one house, even these 'proper dwellings' were all small vernacular dwellings neither built in accordance with the architectural designs prescribed by the national post-war rebuilding programme nor with support of its funding. Anyway, the post-war economic and social infrastructure in Norway came to work against small coastal places like Sværholt. Without road connections or adequate harbour facilities, the hamlet fell to gradual desolation during the 1950s and 60s. And the scars of war and the evacuation destruction did little to prevent it: 'we arrived to barbed wire and land mines', one of the hamlet residents recalls, 'we believed that everything should become as it was before ... All those who left should gather here again. But this didn't happen' (Sagen 1999, 8). Today the Sværholt hamlet is abandoned and derelict but the war continues to haunt the place. Though pervasive, the evacuation was far from complete. Remaining barbed-wire obstacles endure to trap reindeer; undetonated mines remain on duty; blasted bunkers are still conspicuously present alongside shattered battery emplacements, surveillance posts, trenches, tunnels, roads, and barrack ruins. Unlikely to heal from the presence and impact of these stubborn occupants, the very surface of the land continues to hold its scars and memories, as if staging its own resistance to the illusion of a past left behind.

Notes

1. Both this beach terrace and its equivalent west of the Sværholt hamlet were formed as part of the postglacial Tapes transgression culminating c 6000 BP.
2. Since there is a slight possibility that they, rather than dog, are fox bones, samples are currently undergoing DNA analysis. So far, however, no conclusive results have been obtained.
3. Herring is commonly used as bait in long-line fishing and low-quality herring was cheaply available for this purpose. Though one cannot rule out that the herring represented here has been fished by the POWs (or the locals) and eaten fresh, salted or smoked, the prisoners may have been fed with bait herring.
4. Note that bones of salmon and herring are far less durable than the other species and thus may be underrepresented.
5. The reindeer is domesticated and the Sámi herders keep the bulls here to prevent them from disturbing the does and calves during the summer growth season.
6. Carp is a traditional Christmas Eve dinner in Central Europe, including areas of Germany and Austria. However, since it should be prepared fresh this is not a likely explanation here.
7. In terms of hazel grouse, a subspecies, *Bonasa bonasia griseonata*, nests in the area next to the Norwegian Russian border.
8. In a newspaper chronicle published right after the end of the war, the author Carl Schøyen criticizes how Nazi officers had hunted common eider (*Somateria mollissima*) birds at Sværholt in the protected nesting season during the war (Schøyen 1945).
9. Trench 2, the 1 × 1 m trench dug 7 m west of the NW corner of the kitchen building.

10. Losantin (calciumhypochlorit) tablets were issued as decontamination agents to be crushed, mixed with water, and applied on skin as protection against gas blisters. Losantin tablets were issued in a bakelite box containing 10 tablets and produced between 1935–1945.
11. This coastal northern area had developed strong ties to Russia through trade and exchange over the course of centuries; and, in general terms, leftist and communist political sympathies were stronger here than elsewhere, also fostering the pro-Soviet partisan resistance movement conducting intelligence and sabotage work against the occupation forces.

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Notes on contributors

Stein Farstadvoll is a Postdoctoral fellow at UiT The Arctic University of Norway and a member of the Unruly Heritage: An Archaeology of the Anthropocene project. His research focuses on archaeology of the contemporary past, conflict archaeology, critical heritage studies, heritage management and thing-oriented theory

Ingar O. Figschau works at The Arctic University Museum of Norway. He received his PhD in 2020 as a member of the project, Object Matters: Archaeology and Heritage in the 21st Century. His PhD investigated the archaeological heritage and afterlife of WWII in northern Norway along the Lyngen Line, a German line of defence built at the end of the war.

Bjørnar J. Olsen is a Professor of archaeology at UiT The Arctic University of Norway and the director of the Unruly Heritage project. Previously, he also led projects like *Ruin Memories: Materiality, Aesthetics* (2009-2014) and the *Archaeology of the Recent Past and Object Matters: Archaeology and Heritage in the 21st Century* (2015-2019). Recent publications include the book *After Discourse: Things, Affects, Ethics* (2021) where he was the main editor.

Christopher L. Witmore is Professor of Archaeology and Classics at Texas Tech University. Chris's research focuses on land, agrarianism, multispecies ecology, and object-oriented approaches in archaeology. He has worked on a diverse array of archaeological projects in Greece, Iceland, Norway, Romania, Sicily, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Among his recent publications is the book *Old Lands: A Chorography of the Eastern Morea, Greece* (2020).

ORCID

Stein Farstadvoll  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6162-2063>

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