



***Landscape of destruction:
An archaeology of the Second World War in northern Finnmark, Norway***

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The Second World War left a long line of monuments on the Norwegian coast. In many regions of the northern parts of Norway especially in the county of Finnmark these monuments are the oldest buildings standing although they only remain as ruins in a modern rather rural landscape.

With the carrying out of the so called "Weserübung", Norway was attacked and occupied by Germany on the 9th of April 1940. This occupation first comprised the southern half of Norway up to Narvik. It took two more months till the 10th of June before Norway surrendered. Although the occupation of the northern parts of Norway especially of the Finnmark was not planned from the beginning, Hitler gave the order for the occupation of this region on the 13th of August in the same year. By the 9th of September the Finnmark in common with the other regions of Norway had a German administration and at this point the occupation can be seen as completed.

There are several reasons for the occupation of Norway. For a large part of the war Hitler was convinced that the allied forces would attack Germany through Norway despite military investigations by the Wehrmacht which concluded that Norway was not the right place for major invasions by sea due to its difficult coast and logistical problems. Nevertheless several minor and major raids on the Norwegian coast especially on the Lofoten in 1941 reinforced Hitler's suspicion. A further reason for the occupation of Norway was to secure the Scandinavian resources especially the Swedish iron mines. The importance of the long coast with its many Fjords provided bases for the German marine

should also not be underestimated.

With the German attacks on Russia Norway and even more the Finnmark got a central role in the war. From this point onwards Germany was not only fighting in central Russia but also in the polar regions with the new enemy. This front is known as the Litza front and was only a few kilometres east of the Norwegian Russian border of today. Owing to this, the northern harbours of Norway, like the harbour of Honningsvåg, were of considerable importance.

To secure the Norwegian coast Hitler ordered the building of coastal defence posts from the southern most parts of Norway all the way up to the north eastern front.

The occupation of Norway was very intense - there was one German soldier for every eight Norwegians and by 1942 most of the coastal posts were officially finished. That the war was quite calm in Norway can be seen from the fact that most of the coastal batteries never fired a single shot throughout the whole war. Still Norway was not a very popular place for the soldiers of the Wehrmacht. This was not only because of the harsh weather, the polar nights and the Norwegian partisans; an additional and very important reason was the fact that because there was so little fighting in Norway it was hard to become a hero of war in this region. For this reason the Wehrmacht published special travel guidebooks to make this theatre of war more attractive. Special mention was made of the Nordic Arian women.

With the strengthening of resistance in Finland in 1943 plans for an evacuation of the Finnmark and the northern parts of Troms were developed but it took till the October of 1944 for these plans to be carried out. With the Russian advances on Murmansk and the conquest of Kirkenes on the 25th of October Hitler gave the order to evacuate the whole Finnmark region and to burn it to the ground. There were only a few buildings and two villages which were not destroyed. Most of these buildings were churches close to graveyards. An example for this is the church of Honningsvåg which was the only building left in the middle of a ruined town. Before leaving the region the Wehrmacht then also blew up their coastal posts. Even though the 70.000 people who were evacuated were the major part of the population of the Finnmark some 25,000 Norwegians managed to stay hidden and waited for their liberation.

After the war the Finnmark quickly got repopulated and rebuilt. In this process new ideas of architecture and urban planning came to the fore. These ideas of the 1950s still

dominate the landscape. The few buildings left from before the war are an important part of the local identity.

In July and August of this year I had the opportunity to record some of these coastal posts in the north of Finnmark. This work was carried out in cooperation with the North Cape Museum in Honningsvåg and Prof. Olsen from the University of Tromsø. Thanks to the financial support of the North Cape Museum I was able to work together with a professional surveyor for three weeks. In this time we mapped the posts of Gamvik and Porsanger with a total station and also carried out a major photo documentation. As this study is the first systemic recording of German coastal posts in this region the primary aim was to get a general overview of the monuments that still exist. We decided to map Gamvik in a scale of 1:500 and Porsanger at a scale of 1:1000. We also recorded a few special features in more detail. This general approach is also the reason why we put no major emphasis on the few remains of material culture still left. Further on I conducted small surveys in and around Honningsvåg and on Svaerholdklubben east of the Porsanger Fjord.

The coastal post of Gamvik is situated on the northern end of the modern day village next to the church which was built in the 1950s. When this post was ready for use in January 1942 it was equipped with six 14.5 cm guns which were brought there from France and had a range of up to 19km. Next to the post (and to the west) there was also a prison camp but it is no longer visible in the field. When evacuated in October 1944 Gamvik was burned down several times as the population hid and tried to return to the village while the Wehrmacht was still in the region.

The main features of Gamvik are the six gun placements. These structures are worked into the rock. The entrances to these placements are flanked by small concrete shelters. In the middle of five of these placements the steel bases and the rails for the guns are still left although they are damaged in different degrees. At each placement there are remains of further shelters, tunnels and bunkers. These are mostly connected by trenches which are still more or less visible today. Next to the features in close relation to the gun placements there are also a few bunkers, shelters and tunnels which are autonomous as well as some placements for lighter guns and searchlights which were also partly directed to the village. There is a system of paths through the post which is used today. As some of these paths end at the gun placements it is very likely that these paths correspond to the road system

during the Second World War.

On the eastern side of the church there are two further shelters, one bunker and one larger tunnel. This part of the post was part of the harbour surveillance as can be seen by the gun opening pointing south out of the bunker which was blown out during the destruction of the post. Further traces of destruction can be observed in the whole post and give interesting insights into the architecture. What is most astonishing is the high density of big pieces slate in the concrete of the bunkers. This inappropriate building material can be seen as an indicator of the difficult supply situation of the Wehrmacht in the Finnmark.

The coastal post of Porsanger which was called Nordkapp by the Wehrmacht was part of the securing of the Porsanger Fjord. In combination with the posts in Honningsvåg and on Svaerholt the entrance of the Fjord could be blocked for all naval traffic. This was particularly important as several German boats and submarines were positioned here and there was a central airport for the Finnmark to the south of the Fjord in Lakselv. The post was equipped with four 17cm guns which could reach up to 20km. During the occupation some 200 German soldiers were stationed here. The area of the post in Porsanger is far bigger than Gamvik and the military architecture is a lot more advanced. Three of the guns were put on concrete bunkers and the fourth was integrated in a bigger bunker where it was completely protected. The south western part of the small peninsular is covered with remains of several bunkers, shelters and trenches which are partly connected by radio cable. On the north western side of the peninsular the foundations of the Wehrmacht's barracks can still be seen and the south eastern side is dominated by the barracks of the POW camp. Close to the Wehrmacht's barracks the entrances to two tunnels can be found which go deep into the mountain and were not finished. This is a phenomena which can also be observed at other places in Porsanger. The concrete of the gun placements is still partly covered by the wood of the building process and close by are the remains of cement bags and gravel heaps. Similar evidence can also be found at other posts like Svaerholt where there are still vast remains of building material. This clearly shows that the building activities went on during the whole time of occupation even if the posts were recorded as being finished. When Porsanger was evacuated in December 1944 this coastal post was also completely destroyed. The remains of one of the bombs which was used to blow up the biggest bunker is still lying in its ruins. It is very likely that it took several blasts to destroy some of the bunkers as the concrete slabs are lying in positions which do not look like the result of one singular big explosion.

In addition to the unique importance of these remains as a part of the Second World War at the northern periphery of this conflict the coastal posts of the Finnmark give rise to general questions on the military heritage of monuments of this period. Apart from concentration camps the main emphasis in Germany concerning monuments of this type is directed to more or less intact structures. The ideas in Paul Virilios *Bunker Archaeology* are a great basis of discussion for these features : the close to sacred character of the monolithic bunker floating on the beaches of France : the anthromorphic design of the blockhouse and the beginning of his theories of dromology : the missing foundation resulting in the numerous inclined plains due to erosion. It is an interesting fact that so far no archaeologist seems to have used Virilios *Bunker Archaeology* as a basis of discussion. In the areas of philosophy, literary studies and even psychology *Bunker Archaeology* has been a subject of articles and books. The main difference between the ideas of Virilio and the reality of the bunkers in Finnmark is the degree of destruction. Apart from one small Leitstand on Svaerholt all bunkers in my research area have been blown to pieces. This gives them a completely different aesthetic effect compared to the many examples of still intact bunkers in the rest of Europe. They are no longer primary monuments of a gigantic defence system. Neither do they convey the idea of safety in the time of a cruel conflict. In contrast to the rebuilt villages and towns of the Finnmark which are the living monuments of a rebuilt region they are the dead monuments of a destroyed landscape which is even forgotten in many parts of Norway.