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## **Remembering and Forgetting, Discovering and Cherishing Engagements with Material Culture of War in Finnish Lapland**

### **Abstract**

The Second World War left considerable material remains in Finnish Lapland, ranging from remnants of structures destroyed in the 1944–45 Lapland War, through to small artefacts connected to soldiers, prisoners of war and civilians. These material remains have variously been saved and cherished by survivors and their families, forgotten or disregarded as ‘war junk’, ‘discovered’ by hobbyists, amassed and exchanged by private collectors, and/or accessioned into official museum collections. These various processes represent engagements with material culture of war that take on various meanings and embodiments, depending on the different individuals and organizations involved.

We have conducted interviews with different individuals engaging with Lapland’s wartime history, and observed the treatment of material culture, for example through exhibitions (both public and private) or through personal meaning-making practices. While some objects become accessioned to state-sanctioned collections, others remain ‘officially’ unknown and unrecognized (although known – even exchanged – through private channels). We discuss how different values and practices of treating the material war heritage emerge, depending on the actors involved, reflecting and reconstructing the culture commemoration.

**Keywords:** Second World War, Lapland, war heritage, material culture, difficult history, musealization

## Introduction

War is a severe crisis to a nation but also to local communities that are perpetrated by foreign and sometimes also domestic military forces. The attitude towards war heritage in these areas reflects the complex processes of both mental and material reconstruction and returning to peace. The ways in which members of local communities remember the war may sometimes be contrary to national, 'official' war narrative.

Until recently, national narratives of the Second World War (WWII) in Finland have not paid much attention to the final chapter of WWII events, the Lapland War, and its traumatizing effects on the local residents (Tuominen 2015). The way of representing WWII in Finland in two phases, as the Winter and the Continuation Wars, place the Lapland War as an epilogue of the latter, a scene that happened far in the north after the peace was already set (Tuominen 2015, 40–41). Public celebrations and popular culture have emphasized the events of the 'heroic' Winter War (see Kivimäki 2012; Löfström 2011) and the traumatic loss of Karelia in the Continuation War (e.g. Fingerroos 2012; Korjonen-Kuusipuro & Kuusisto-Arponen 2012). In the post-war years, the memory culture<sup>1</sup> of WWII was shaped according to (geo)political orientation and a clear generational divide (Kinnunen & Jokisipilä 2012). For example, in the peace conditions the Soviet Union demanded that paramilitary organizations and any semi-fascist organizations, including the women's auxiliary organization Lotta Svärd<sup>2</sup>, be banned. After the war, the political environment of Finland turned leftist, and the younger generations grew critical towards war and public reminiscence of WWII (see Tuominen 1991). A shift allowing more complex and critical scrutiny of the war period occurred later in the 1980s and 1990s (about new war history in Finland see e.g. Kinnunen and Kivimäki 2006), but also led to the emergence of neo-patriotism and the

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1 Memory culture refers to the collective ways of constructing, interpreting and representing a common past from the viewpoint of the present. Connecting to the scholarship of "new cultural memory studies", it works as an umbrella term including different dimensions of memory, personal and collective memories as well (trans)national cultural memory. (See also Sääskilahti 2016; about concepts in the field of memory studies see e.g. Heimo 2010, 37–38.)

2 The Lotta Svärd organization, women's voluntary paramilitary organisation was founded under the civil war of 1918. During the Second World War, it mobilized women to replace men in field hospitals, at air raid warning positions, and other auxiliary tasks in close cooperation with the army. Lottas were officially unarmed. The organization was disbanded after the war and former Lottas were asked to destroy their lotta dress and all the material culture connected to the organization and also keep quiet about their past as a lotta. It took until 1996 for the material heritage of Lottas to be gathered into a museum. (Kinnunen 2006.)

glorification of WWII veterans and Lottas (Kinnunen & Jokisipilä 2012; Kinnunen 2006).

In the 2010s, the German period of Lapland and the events of Lapland War continue to interest Finnish people, also younger generations who did not personally suffer from the consequences of the war but who could still sense the silences and tension surrounding it. A new wave of popular culture (books and films, see e.g. Hiltunen & Sääsilahti 2017) has brought up difficult issues and taboos. In addition, public discussions of interpreting and representing the WWII legacy of Lapland have evolved around, for example, museum exhibitions (Koskinen-Koivisto & Thomas 2017; Thomas & Koskinen-Koivisto 2016). The need to revisit topics that discuss shame and taboos demonstrate that collective traumas still exist and need attention (Sääsilahti 2013; Tuominen 2015). One way of approaching difficult and traumatic history is to study the meanings inscribed to material culture (e.g. MacDonald 2009; De Nardi 2014). Material war heritage, remains of military matériel and settlements, as well as different artefacts from times of conflict, often carry complex and ambivalent meanings that are not otherwise articulated, reminding people of difficult experiences and the darker sides of humanity but also about survival (De Nardi 2014; Povrzanović Frykman 2016). In this article we discuss how the residents of a small Sámi village, Vuotso (Vuohčču in Northern Sámi), encounter and engage with the material remains of WWII. We consider the different ways of framing, or 'valuing' material heritage (e.g. Jones 2017), and how these values reflect the ways of coming to terms with difficult history related to WWII, particularly associated with Germans in Finnish Lapland.

Our research is conducted within a multidisciplinary research project *Lapland's Dark Heritage* (2015–2018). Between 2015 and 2016 we engaged in ethnographic fieldwork, carrying out interviews and visiting local sites and museums connected to WWII, including initiating public archaeology projects (Banks, Koskinen-Koivisto & Seitsonen 2018). Working with research colleagues as well as local informants and volunteers, we have been seeking to understand the different views on, and attitudes towards, the WWII material heritage in northern Finland, to map out different forms of engagement with the WWII German material heritage, and to analyse the meanings and wider implications of those engagements in local and universal contexts. The kinds of engagements with WWII heritage that we have met and examined, such as collecting militaria, treasure hunting, and putting up memorials, are intentional activities initiated by individuals in order to resist forgetting the war and its consequences. These activities, which can include (re)discovering artefacts and places related to traumatic memories/

atrocities, revive topics that were forgotten and suppressed for a long time, and can be perceived as *difficult* or *dark heritage*, concepts we will discuss in more detail later.

Vuotso (see Figure 1) is located in the municipality of Sodankylä, close to Sompio Nature Park and Urho Kekkonen National Park. With a population of 350, it is the southernmost Sámi reindeer herding community in Finland. Vuotso is a thought-provoking example of emerging heritage consciousness, with an elevated interest in WWII expressed by, for example, the local school, a resident history hobbyist/activist and local elders. Villagers themselves took the initiative to invite members of our research team to the village.

As a result of the interviews, as well as our own observations of how different actors have treated or interacted with the material culture – for example within museums or within private collections that may or may not involve display in some way – we began to notice several distinct types of engagement with this material heritage. In order to distinguish the motivations and perceptions behind the engagements, we asked ourselves the following three questions:

1. How do the interviewees perceive the value of WWII material heritage for themselves and their community?
2. In what ways do personal experiences and perceptions of WWII affect the ways in which material culture is used, given particular status or otherwise framed by different actors?
3. How do meanings related to the material culture of war, including individual objects, by Vuotso residents, reflect the ways in which difficult histories of WWII in Finnish Lapland are remembered and treated?

We analyse the interplay of different actors and their doings that range from remembering and forgetting to discovering and cherishing. While some objects enunciate personal memories, others symbolize collective understandings of the history of the local people and are therefore meaningful for the community. Furthermore, material remains of war can carry meanings even when they are deliberately forgotten or hidden from view. From our interviews, we identified four types of engagements with the material remains that in their part reflect the attitudes towards heritage of WWII in Finnish Lapland: Material saved and cherished; Material neglected; Material (re)discovered, and, Material musealized.

### **A brief historical background**

Finland essentially experienced three different periods of armed conflict during WWII. The Winter War (1939–40) and the so-called Continuation War (1941–44) were fought against the Soviet Union, which was attempting to annex Finland's territories. The Moscow Armistice of 1944 resulted in Finland ceding Karelia, Petsamo, parts of Kuusamo and Salla, several islands in the Gulf of Finland and Porkkala (which returned to Finnish sovereignty in 1956), although the rest of Finland retained its independence. As part of the Moscow Armistice, Finland also had to agree to expel the German army from its borders, which led in September 1944 to the beginning of the so-called 'Lapland War', ending in April 1945.

During the hostilities with the Soviet Union, Finland had become a co-belligerent with Germany, with upwards of 200,000 German soldiers stationed on Finnish soil from 1941 until 1945. Most of these soldiers were based in Finnish Lapland. The tiny village of Vuotso, at that time consisting of eight Sámi households (Magga 2010; Seitsonen & Koskinen-Koivisto 2017), swelled in numbers as German soldiers arrived, and also prisoners of war (PoWs). Vuotso has an astonishing, yet little known WWII history and material legacy connected to the German presence in Finnish Lapland (Seitsonen & Koskinen-Koivisto 2017). In 1941 when the German troops came to cooperate with the Finns against the Soviet Union, they established a large military complex at Vuotso. The complex, which included an airport, artillery base, car repair centre, and Vuotso Rasthaus, hosted over 2,000 Germans and other workforce (PoWs as well as Finnish soldiers and civilian labourers). The Germans and the Vuotso villagers lived as close neighbours for almost four years and were on friendly terms. Vuotso elders that we have interviewed, who at the time of the German presence were children and teenagers, told us that Germans and Finns exchanged services and food, interacting with the help of PoWs, but also children who quickly learned the language (Magga 2010; Seitsonen & Koskinen-Koivisto 2017).

In 1944, this friendly co-habitation ended after Finland signed the Moscow Armistice with the Soviet Union, which included a condition that Finnish troops would quickly drive the Germans out of their territory (Vehviläinen & McAlister 2002, 150). The schedule for withdrawing the troops and their equipment – in all more than 200,000 soldiers, tens of thousands of prisoners of war, numerous vehicles as well as huge amounts of military and civil equipment – was unrealistic, and warfare was soon expected. Before the outbreak of the 'Lapland War', the civilian residents of Lapland were evacuated to southern Finland and Sweden (Tuominen 2015; Lehtola 2015). Most Laplanders were eventually able to return to their home villages, but in most

cases, there were no houses left. Finnish Lapland, its villages, dwellings and infrastructure had suffered massive destruction from a German army that, retreating to northern Norway, applied 'scorched earth' tactics. This meant that the withdrawing troops destroyed not only their military installations but also the local civilian infrastructure, buildings and dwellings, including bridges, railroads, telephone poles and culverts, and barn houses, by setting them on fire or using ammunition. The destruction was vast, especially in the areas that had German settlements. In the municipality of Rovaniemi that surrounded the township of Rovaniemi, and in the municipalities of Sodankylä, Turtola, Savukoski, Enontekiö and Inari, an estimated 90% of the dwellings and infrastructure were destroyed, with deleterious effects on the vernacular architecture and way of life (Tuominen 2015, 50–51).<sup>3</sup>

### **Fieldwork in Vuotso**

Members of our project team have visited Vuotso several times to view the physical remains still visible around the village and surrounding forest. The first of these visits took place in 2010, before 'Lapland's Dark Heritage' as a funded research project even started, when one of our team members was invited by a local person – a female heritage activist who after moving in the area and getting to know the local people and history, became interested in the WWII settlements in the area. She wanted to invite an archaeologist to see the settlements and give an expert opinion on their value. This was part of her efforts to collect information to prevent clear cuts in the area owned by the Finnish Forestry Commission (*Metsähallitus* in Finnish) in which she succeeded (Interview 1). Later, this person arranged for us to interview the elders, who she and the rest of villagers saw as the key experts of the area's war heritage (see also Seitsonen & Koskinen-Koivisto 2017). The insights we gained through these interviews, as well as a visit to the local school (also as invited guests) reflect the ways in which the local people see the role of heritage authorities and experts, including academics. As we discuss later, this is not always necessarily in a positive light.

Elsewhere, our research team has discussed the oral histories of the local elders of Vuotso connected to the German period and Lapland War (Seitsonen & Koskinen-Koivisto 2017), including the significant impact of evacuation and destruction of their homes and villages on local people during the Lapland War. Here, we take a closer look at the interviews with the elders from the perspective of material culture, as well as other engagements with material war heritage

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<sup>3</sup> The statistical information of the scale of destruction in official documents varies, and therefore it is difficult to offer exact numbers and estimate the scale of destruction in each area. (Tuominen 2015, 50).

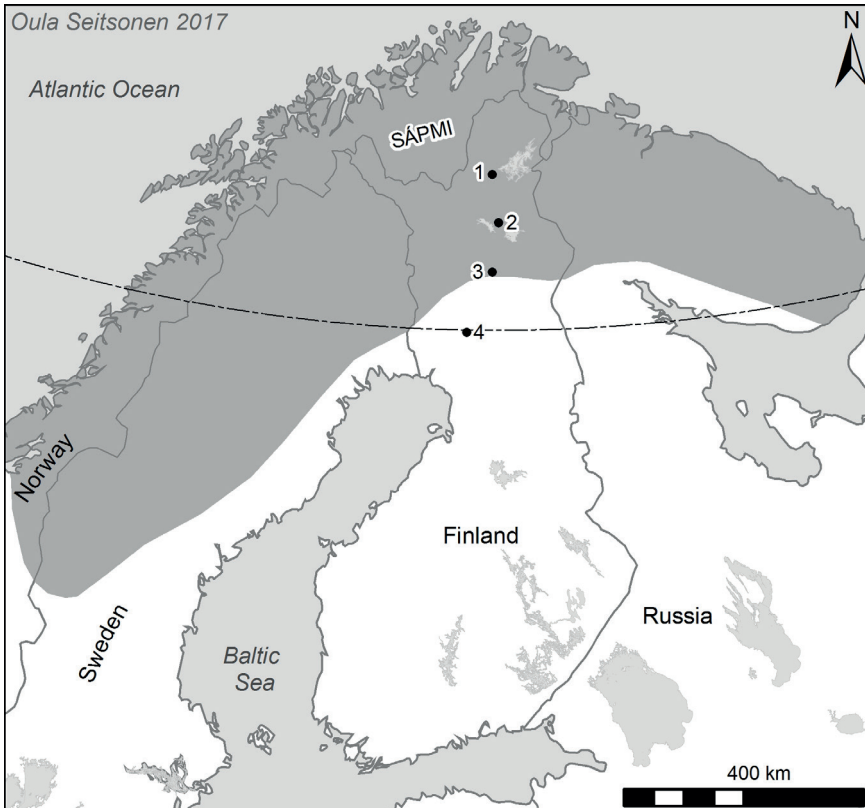


Figure 1. Map of Finnish Lapland including Vuotso. Oula Seitsonen 2017.

by other individuals working in, visiting, and residing in Vuotso. This includes also younger generations who are scrutinizing the material heritage as a link between generations. In August 2015, we interviewed four Vuotso elders who are survivors of WWII (Interviews 2, 3, 4 and 5), and were also invited to speak to the pupils at the local school that teaches students from preschool (starting at the age of 6 years) up to ninth grade (students up to 16 years). During the same visit we also familiarized ourselves with the nearby Tankavaara sites (the Gold Prospector Museum, the Tankavaara Visitor Centre run by the Finnish Forestry Commission, and the Tankavaara War Trail located at the historic WWII battlefield of the area), and interviewed museum staff (Interview 6).<sup>4</sup>

4 As we have promised in the consent forms of the research project, we provide here our interviewees with full anonymity. In the case of Vuotso residents, especially the heritage activist and the survivors of the WWII, the interviewees are introduced with year of birth. Due to the small size of the community, they are easily recognized but they have also talked about their WWII memories in public outside of this research and are aware of this publicity.



We acknowledge that in order to illuminate the regional and national memory culture of WWII, our research material from Vuotso is in many ways limited. However, we found it fruitful to concentrate on that location because – despite its colourful history and potential to lure outsiders (such as war history enthusiasts) – it has remained outside of public attention and major touristic activities; a condition that at least some of the residents would like to change. In addition to the in-depth interviews that we carried out, we also draw upon our informal observations made in the area, including social interactions with villagers in unofficial settings such as the village store, and from discussions generated after several presentations made at the local school. We have plans for future work in and with the village, for example alongside the school to investigate the WWII archaeological heritage in various ways. However, at the time of writing, these ideas represent merely discussions of potential future projects.

### **Ethics of engaging with the material heritage of WWII**

The concept of difficult heritage emphasizes that some groups may perceive certain heritage troublesome and even painful in today's perspective (e.g. MacDonald 2009). *Dark heritage*, on the other hand refers to the potential dark force of heritage, to the interest and fascination over death, war and other atrocities, and to a motivation to engage with it (e.g. Koskinen-Koivisto 2016). It is also related to the notion of 'dark tourism' in tourism studies (Stone 2006). In our research, we noticed that not all local people see WWII heritage as dark heritage. The motivations of the history hobbyists, collectors and heritage activists in Finnish Lapland lie in safeguarding local heritage, raising awareness of its existence, and also in making it part of the national WWII narrative (Herva, Koskinen-Koivisto, Seitsonen & Thomas 2016; Koskinen-Koivisto & Thomas 2017; Koskinen-Koivisto, forthcoming). Nevertheless, the concept of difficult and dark heritage opens up insights into the processes of engaging with material legacy of war and the ways in which different groups such as locals and tourists, amateurs and officials, as well as different generations view the WWII heritage.

There are ethical considerations in researching material culture relating to traumatic events within living memory. As has been observed by anthropologist Bonnie Clark (2008) during her ongoing archaeological and ethnographic research at the Amache WWII Japanese-American internment camp in Colorado, USA, using artefacts derived from painful and often very personal lived experiences also brings with it challenges. She has noted for example the consternation of some survivors upon seeing the material objects retrieved from, and associated with their time at the camp, being referred to as 'artifacts' (sic.).

To some, this scientific treatment of material from their personal pasts was a jarring experience. Archaeologist Gabriel Moshenska observed similar reactions among former prisoners of the Stalag Luft III PoW camp in Silesia, who 'gave an impression of unease' around the archaeological work being carried out, and 'appeared to find the bagging and labelling of finds particularly discomforting' (Moshenska 2006, 63).

We also have responsibilities as researchers interested in dark heritage that we do not exploit the memories of our informants for our own gains, while acknowledging that an output of our research is inevitably academic articles such as this one. There can be the risk of reigniting memories that have been purposely suppressed in order to allow people to survive and rebuild their lives (see e.g. Connerton 2008). That is not to say, however, that all the recollections and associations surrounding the material we discuss are necessarily as difficult or 'dark' as each other. Following Philip Stone's (2006) suggestion that there are different 'shades of darkness' for the phenomenon of dark tourism, we would argue that 'dark' heritage may similarly fall across a spectrum, influenced by factors such as the individual actor's proximity – temporally, spatially and emotionally – to the original event or period, as well as the perceived 'darkness' of that event or period (see also Koskinen-Koivisto & Thomas 2017, Seitsonen 2018).

Indeed, some of the people we have interviewed in different parts of Lapland have reacted to the title of our research, namely the very use of the term 'dark heritage'. Those who have expressed concern to us about the concept have assumed that it suggests a negative attitude towards the war and military historical hobbies, demonizing the Germans and criticizing the Finno-German alliance. One of our interviewees in the Rovaniemi area (Interview 7) also saw the title of our research as having political connotations to the time of the Cold War, when, according to the interviewee, Finns needed to please the Soviet Union by calling Germans fascists. We have also faced some refusal to participate in our studies, for example when we approached a group of hobbyists who were mapping airplane crash sites. A museum professional who already collaborates with this particular group recommended for us to contact them. However, the group's leader's reason for refusing to speak with us was that, in their view, they had nothing to do with 'dark heritage', because they simply 'methodologically' documented and reported their field trips. Oula Seitsonen, who communicated with the group on behalf of the project, has suggested that in an amateur context, this comment is an interesting example of 'professional' distancing and neutralizing (Seitsonen 2018, 153). The crash sites are directly related to the deaths of pilots, and indirectly to various other darker themes, such as the bombing of both military and civilian

targets. However, in Vuotso, as is the case in Inari – which also has a significant Sámi population – nobody has expressed any criticism to us regarding our title or approach. Instead, many people seem to regard the fact that there is academic interest in the material culture of WWII in Finnish Lapland as a positive development. We have, however, drawn some blanks in our attempts to interview more than a just a handful of people, and also have had difficulties reaching people in Inari village. This reflects, in part, the problem of not ‘being there’ in the field for longer periods of time but instead paying sporadic one to two-week visits to our study locations (see e.g. Lewis & Russell 2011).

### **Engagement type 1: Material saved and cherished**

Some of the engagements we encountered in our fieldwork involve conscious acts that are managed by institutions responsible for regulating heritage regimes such as museums (i.e. the public sphere), but others are less controlled and less intentional doings, taking place at the level of personal meaning-making. These may also be conscious, deliberate actions, or may connect to collective practices and attitudes towards material war heritage. We discovered with most of the people that we interviewed in Vuotso that certain objects that had been kept as *mementoes*<sup>5</sup> since the war period developed a special status with individuals and within family narratives. These were not objects donated to museums – a different process that we discuss later – although they have the potential in the future to be offered to memory institutions should the owners or their descendents decide to do this.

Cultural Geographer Sarah De Nardi (2014) has noted the significance of material mementoes in enhancing and enabling oral histories of WWII, and as a physical source of coping mechanisms when revisiting difficult memories. Single mementoes can be loaded with both positive and negative affects, and memories are not articulated through language but evoke embodied and sensory memories of stress and fear. One example of a memento related to the sensory memories of war was told to us by a male interviewee (Interview 2) who was a small child when war began and whose earliest memories include witnessing Russian bombings right above his home. Soviet aircrafts regularly bombed the German military base of Vuotso. Our interviewee told us how he had often stood on the stairs of his home, seeing the aircrafts and even the pilots in them and hearing how the shells were dropping to the ground next to him. He decided to take one shell as a secret memory of the war and kept

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5 *Mementoes* serve as a reminder of an absent person, or place signifying particular events, people and experiences (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 331). The relationship with mementoes is therefore very much based on an affectionate view of the objects, which are symbols of something lost and bygone.

it with him through the post-war years. According to Moshenska, children's act of collecting can represent a way of establishing some degree of control, integration, and ownership in the middle of war and crisis (Moshenska 2008). The same interviewee guided us twice to visit a German artillery base called Taivalselkä in Vuotso. On the first visit he insisted Koskinen-Koivisto to take with her a memento of war, a piece of exploded ordnance, to commemorate what had happened during the war in Vuotso. This suggests that material memories of war continue to have significance and symbolic power among the villagers even decades after the conflict.

In Vuotso, we also encountered mementoes that carried happy memories of the pre-war life that had survived the evacuation journey ahead of the Lapland War, now treasured by their owners as rare and beloved survivors of a lost time and lost homes. In September 1944, the situation leading to long evacuation journeys was somewhat chaotic. The 1944 treaty between the Soviet Union and Finland demanded that German troops leave the country in two weeks; an unrealistic timetable considering the number of German troops, the vastness of their settlements and the amount of equipment they hauled. Because armed battles between the Finns and Germans were anticipated, the Finnish military headquarters issued an immediate evacuation order for the civilians. At this stage, the Finns and the Germans still worked together: German trucks and buses transported civilian refugees southwards, while Finnish vehicles carried German supplies northwards (Tuominen 2015). The evacuated people, most of whom did not know how long they would travel or where they were eventually heading, were not allowed to take with them more than essential clothing and cooking equipment. They had no idea if they would ever be able to return to their homes, but belongings had to be left nonetheless. Some people had time to hide the most valuable essentials, but in many cases many important family treasures such as family albums and ancestors' artefacts were left in the abandoned houses. Therefore, very little was saved. As the Lapland War got underway, whole homes and settlements were destroyed in the 'scorched earth' tactics that the Germans employed as they retreated from Finnish Lapland (Seitsonen & Herva 2011).

We were invited to visit the home of one of our interviewees, the only female of the survivors (Interview 3), to see the items that she had safeguarded from the time before the destruction. These were a German honey bowl (Figure 2) given as a gift/exchange for letting an Ingrian PoW use a sewing machine in the house to patch up German soldiers' uniforms, and a ceramic vase that the interviewee's father had given to her for her twelfth birthday right before the evacuation journey began. Both objects were valuable and fine objects at the time. During our interview, we heard a long story connected to the bowl



Figure 2: A German honey bowl given to the family of the interviewee (Interview 3) during the war. Photo by Suzie Thomas, 12.8.2015.

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about Germans and the Ingrian prisoners. Our interviewee began to explain that the Germans were generally very friendly and polite towards the locals. The interviewer's family also developed a warm relationship with one particular Ingrian prisoner and were shocked to witness a scene where the PoW's wife was deported to another camp and the couple had to say goodbye, very likely for the last time. The interviewee also mentioned a contradictory feeling that the bowl evoked for her. For a long time, she felt that she had had enough of honey and never ate any for the rest of her life. This affectionate, and in many ways contradictory, history described how a gift – or more accurately, an artefact of exchange – became a cherished memento of complex and ambivalent transnational war history.

### **Engagement type 2: Material neglected**

While some objects become revered and treasured, saved to personal collections where they remind of lived life, personal and local history, and in many cases, survival and continuity, others are neglected. This may be an accidental forgetting over time, or may be a more conscious awareness of a site or an object's presence and meaning, leading to a deliberate choice to ignore it. In addition to single objects we have also discovered sites that have been deliberately avoid-

Figure 3: Stone cross at Taivalselkä artillery base, Vuotso. Photo by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, June 2016.

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ed and thus collectively forgotten. These kind of places have been seen as sites of forgetting or oblivion (*lieux d'oubli*) that are avoided because of “the disturbing affect that their invocation is still capable of arousing” (Wood 1999, 10). In our research, we have also found disregarded and neglected material outside of the home. This has included so-called ‘war junk’ and remains of military sites in the wilderness (Seitsonen & Herva 2011), but also features that were originally intended for memorialization.

The material culture of WWII is concretely present in Vuotso as ruins of German military settlements such as a former artillery base at Taivalselkä, which was once located next to a German military airport. The Germans destroyed both the airport and the base when they left the village during the Lapland War, but there are plenty of signs of wartime military activity in the landscape, such as remains and packages of ammunition, dugouts, and large holes in the ground.<sup>6</sup> Our interviewees told us that, despite warnings, the boys of the village used to play with the unexploded ordnance (UXOs). This was obviously dangerous, and sometimes resulted in tragic accidents. One of the village boys was killed at the artillery base in 1958 (see Magga 2010), and several others were hurt in the explosion. All the interviewees involved in the conversation remembered the occasion. One of them, the youngest of the survivors (Interview 2) told us that his older brother had arrived at the scene of the accident and had later installed so-called self-made grassroots memorial; flat stones in the form of a cross (Figure 3).



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6 After war, the Germans set hundreds of thousands of landmines on the roadsides to stop the Finnish army. These mines presented a serious threat to the civilians who returned to their destroyed home villages after the war, and killed approximately 300 people in the area of Lapland in the late 1940s (Virkkunen 2012).

As we later learned, the stone cross materialized a long-lasting collective trauma that remained among the community. In early June 2016, Koskinen-Koivisto visited the place, together with the interviewee. When she phoned him to ask if they could go to see the site, he mentioned that he had not visited there for over 15 years. He, however, promised to visit the site in advance and to take her there. He also said that most people outside of the village do not know the location of the artillery base, and hardly any people visit there (even our research group had not been to the area before). On a cloudy and cold Friday morning, the interviewee took Koskinen-Koivisto there in his all-terrain vehicle. The distance from the meeting spot, the village grocery store, to the artillery base was not long but the ground was very wet. As he had checked the place the previous night, the interviewee managed to find the place easily. The stone cross was located next to a clear path and was now marked by him with a red lace in a tree branch above. The excursion resulted in a meaningful experience for the village community. Upon returning to the village shop, Koskinen-Koivisto met four brothers of the dead boy who told her that as children they had not been allowed to visit the place due to the parents' safety concerns given the nature of the tragedy that had occurred there. The brothers asked our interviewee if he could take them to see the memorial.

In the context of war and difficult history, visiting to a memorial, be it official or a grassroots memorial, is not only an expression of personal sorrow, but an important collective act demonstrating a right and a need for mourning and processing of traumatic and controversial pasts (Peltonen 2003; see also Koskinen-Koivisto 2016). The fact that the brothers had not visited the site reflected the ongoing process of dealing with the memories of WWII and destruction that cast their shadows not only on the immediate postwar years but also over the next generations of villagers. Long effects of controversial conflicts and their aftermaths have also been studied in the context of the legacy of the Finnish Civil War of 1918. Studying the sites of memory of the Civil War, oral historian Ulla-Maija Peltonen noted that the need to establish official memorials commemorating the deaths at both sides, the White and the Red Finns, has continued to be important long after the conflict period (Peltonen 2003). Even though Vuotso has no official war memorials, the fact that the forest hides war remains and sites of memory seems to be important for the local identity. The consciousness of WWII history seems important to the generation of witnesses. For them, the chance to share their experiences by showing us, the outsider experts from the south, mementoes and sites such as this grassroots memorial is about raising consciousness and perhaps also decolonizing and embodying the difficult history.

If Koskinen-Koivisto had not asked from our interviewee to see the stone cross, she never would have found out that the artillery base was a place in-

tentionally forgotten in the wilderness, avoided by the villagers and almost taken back by nature. Nina Sääsilahti (2016) has characterized Lapland as a post-conflict environment in which rupture and continuity are present simultaneously; landscape and minds include things that are lost, and things that are left. One of the signs and witnesses of continuity and recovery is the forest growing on the former military settlements and battlefields. This is obvious in the area of Taivalselkä artillery base. When the Germans were there, trees in the area were felled in order to ensure a good visibility and vigilance but since then, over a period of 70 years, it has grown into a thick forest. The forest is exactly as old as peace. Our interviewee thinks that a clear cut is still not possible due to the danger of UXOs. It seems as if the villagers have agreed to keep the place hidden. From what we could tell, it also seems to be unknown to most of the outsiders, such as war historians and hobbyists outside of the village as well as to the anonymous the metal detectorists treasure hunting for WWII militaria (presumably southerners) that are reported to visit the other German settlements of Vuotso regularly (Herva et al. 2016; Seitsonen & Koskinen-Koivisto 2017). For example, the fact that the area appeared not to have been disturbed may suggest that people have not known that it exists (although if they do know the back history, it may also have been left out of respect or even safety fears). During Koskinen-Koivisto's visit in June 2016 and another visit by the project group as a whole in August 2016, there were no physical signs of metal detecting or other forms of artefact hunting anywhere. The deliberate forgetting or disregarding of this particular site may have helped a community (and one family in particular) come to terms with a tragic incident caused by – but taking place after – WWII, but simultaneously may have contributed to the site's protection by keeping it anonymous and unknown to artefact collectors and others who might otherwise have disturbed it.

### **Engagement type 3: Material (re)discovered**

As discussed above, the forests of Vuotso and the rest of Finnish Lapland are still full of physical remains from WWII. For some people the ruins of the destroyed settlements and battlefields are mysterious sites, places that offer opportunity for discovery and treasure hunting. This active dimension of the heritage scene, taken up by unofficial and amateur historians and/or archaeologists especially around WWI and WWII history, has been noted across Europe (e.g. Ferguson 2013; van Hollebeeke, Stichelbaut & Bourgeois 2014).

The activity of rediscovering transforms once dismissed war junk into *collectibles* that form *ensembles* of the material heritage of WWII. For the Vuotso villagers we have talked to, the abundance of war junk in the landscape seems natural, as it has always been there, and is part of the history of the village.





Figure 4. Treasures found from German settlement in Vuotso shown to us by the interviewee. Photo by Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto 7.6.2015.

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For those who come from outside of the community, the closeness of the war remnants may be exotic and intriguing. Interestingly enough, when it comes to war history, the most active person in the community, at least with regards to our study, is a retired lady who was born and spent her childhood in Rovaniemi but lived most of her life in Southern Finland. She moved to the Vuotso area in a cottage as a result of ‘downshifting before the concept was invented’ (Interview 1) about 15 years ago. This person, who we have identified as a local heritage activist and history expert, invited us to Vuotso and organized most of the interviews that we conducted. Although not born in the village and thus not a native or family member, she is known even among the schoolchildren as a history expert, and has gained the elders’ trust in her attempts to document and safeguard the local war heritage. Even though she is critical of treasure-hunting by random visitors, she herself has a small collection of objects that she has found from the German settlements, which she showed to us during the interview. She told us that she has only taken small objects that are numerous and has left larger or rarer objects in situ. Among the most interesting objects she has found (Figure 4) is an unused identification plate which she has shown to some villagers who doubt its authenticity, and a compact which she thinks is ‘a real treasure’.

When describing her interests, she announced to us that she is most interested in the services and everyday life in the German settlements. She has read an impressive amount of literature about the Lapland War, trying to gather the bits and pieces of information available about Vuotso’s WWII history. She has discussed her readings with both local history hobbyists and professionals

as well as experts of academic and popular history all around Finland. In addition, she has invited and sat down with the villagers who lived through the war.

As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has noted, the collectibles are meaningful because they have a prior history but at the same time collecting is a future-oriented act, which involves a possibility for new acquisitions (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 332). In the case of WWII sites and 'treasures' discovered within them, the future of their management is an important question. As the person who has taken interest in and responsibility for the local heritage, the activist we interviewed expressed deep concern about treasure-hunters who come to the area, and reported how 'every time I go there with somebody, they want to take a memory with them'. She has told people, including an enthusiast friend, not to take anything but to leave things on the site. It appears that she and some of the villagers shared an idea of making the WWII sites accessible for visitors by clearing some of the paths around them. This aspiration includes putting up signs informing passers-by of the sites' existence and their status as places of significant cultural heritage environment that should not be invaded.

In our research we have interviewed several collectors, antique dealers and museum experts who have confirmed that artefact collectors are active in Lapland and they are interested in WWII material (Thomas, Seitsonen & Herva 2016). One of the wartime survivors who is a reindeer herder and thus intimately familiar with all the material remains in the landscape, stated that he is aware of lot of materiél but has decided not to reveal its whereabouts to anybody else, not even to other villagers. Several collectors have offered money in return for directions to those places. He has, for instance, found a stockpile of eagle insignia which he deliberately moved to a hidden cache deep in the forest so that they would not end up in the hands of collectors. In this case, while he is discovering or re-discovering material himself, he is choosing not to divulge this knowledge to others but rather keeping knowledge of the material's whereabouts and existence personal to him. The interviewee told us that he has also taken the most valuable objects he has found to a museum nearby, the Gold Prospector Museum (Interview 2). We have also found out that some of the younger villagers have their own collections of WWII material that they have discovered. This became evident when we visited the local school showing the pupils and villagers examples of artefacts and junk we have found and scrutinized, and when we received evaluating comments on our ensemble (Herva et al. 2016). It seems to be important for the collectors to reveal their expertise on war history and artefacts, which exceeds that of the academic researchers.

#### **Engagement type 4: Material musealized or not musealized**

A final example of engagement is the musealization of material. The public sphere of heritage has been problematized at different times as sometimes authoritarian and state-sanctioned, but at other times like in the context of museums as creating a space for different dialogues and stories to emerge (Ashley 2005). Some museums in Lapland have taken an active role in the memory culture of WWII displaying difficult issues while others have ignored the topic (Thomas & Koskinen-Koivisto 2016). In addition to the Provincial Museum of Lapland located in Rovaniemi (which according to the *national plan of acquisitions to collections through cooperation* TAKO is responsible for collecting the material heritage of WWII and the reconstruction period), an entire new museum was founded in 2011 in Salla municipality that is dedicated to these themes (Koskinen-Koivisto, forthcoming). The National Museum of the Finnish Sámi, Siida, that thus far has not displayed much war heritage, is currently mapping out war historical sites in the Sámi area and working on integrating war heritage into part of their updated main exhibition.

The acquisition by an official museum or similar memory institution not only dislocates the objects from its original (or the latest) location and owner (see Mulk 2009, for example, concerning Sámi objects in Swedish museums and complications over repatriation), but alters the status of the object: ‘the special, “musealised” status of objects in museums – their selection due to a connection to a significant individual or as representative of communities, historical periods, artistic or craft styles, or scientific advancements (to name a few possibilities) – transforms them from mere objects into “museum pieces”’ (Grove & Thomas 2016, 2).

As we knew from the beginning of our research project, the status and treatment of war remnants in Finland is a complex issue both legally and in practice. None of the WWII sites are old enough to be regarded under the Antiquities Act 1963/295 and only few of them have received a status of significant cultural heritage by the Finnish Heritage Agency (*Museovirasto* in Finnish, formerly known as the National Board of Antiquities in English). According to legislation, all war junk – including the smallest objects found in the ground – is property of the Finnish Defence Forces, and most valuable WWII artefacts found in the wilderness of Lapland should be reported to the Finnish Military Museum in Helsinki, in its capacity as part of the Forces. In practice, the Finnish Heritage Agency has responsibility for recording, processing and in some cases acquiring for the national collection chance finds made by the public (often metal detectorists). They are supported in this endeavour by the regional network of provincial and municipal museums, which act as agents to receive finds reports on behalf of the Finnish Heritage Agency (see also Wessman, Koivisto

& Thomas 2016). The roles and responsibilities of different institutions thus appear to overlap, which – as we have heard in our discussions – often causes confusion among both professionals and the hobbyists. Furthermore, most of the WWII remnants found at the sites are considered very common and therefore lacking informational value, and thus few museums are interested in them.

It is noteworthy that in Finland, along with the official museum institutions, there are hundreds of local amateur museums (*kotiseutumuseot*) run by (private) heritage societies and volunteers. These small ethnographic museums collect and display local everyday life objects and histories. Their origin lies in the same national project of documenting and safeguarding (local) agrarian culture that formed the ethnographic collections of the National Museum and Finnish Heritage Agency and gave rise to ethnological research and scholarship in Finland (Vilkuna 2017). Small local museums operate in close co-operation with state-funded provincial museums, but most of their activities are planned and carried out solely by volunteer work and paid summer workers (often high school students). In the area of Lapland, the agenda of local ethnographic museums has been to cherish the few material remains, objects and local architecture from the time before the destruction of the Lapland War.

In the municipality of Sodankylä, which administratively includes Vuotso, there is a local ethnographic museum run by Sodankylä Society (*Sodankyläseura ry*) located in the municipal centre some 90 kilometres from Vuotso. Interestingly, none of the Vuotso residents we interacted with mentioned it in relation to local war history. If they needed to interact with a museum specialist, they turned to the staff of the privately-run Gold Prospector Museum located near the village, or even to the Provincial Museum of Lapland in Rovaniemi. It also seems that war period is not represented in the Sodankylä local museum collections, which, nonetheless do include plenty of local Sámi artefacts especially related to traditional reindeer herding. During our visit to the local Vuotso elementary school, we found out that one of the teachers, herself Sámi, was very critical of our research and especially the archaeological part of it. In her opinion, any piece of information or an artefact of the Land of the Sámi should stay there, and taken to the National Sámi Archive and Siida. In Vuotso, there is a local village association (*Vuotson kyläyhdistys*) but its active members and chairperson did not show any interest towards communicating with our research project. This may reflect the attitudes of some of the villagers towards our study, or may simply demonstrate that war heritage is not of specific interest to the individuals running the society.

As mentioned earlier, the closest museum institution to Vuotso is the Gold Prospectors Museum located just a few kilometers north of the village in Tankavaara. The museum is adjacent to one of the most significant battle

sites of the Lapland War. As we have discussed elsewhere (Thomas & Koskinen-Koivisto 2016), the main focus of this museum is the activity and history of gold panning and prospecting; even major world events such as WWII are at best incidental to the gold prospector narrative. Despite this, museum staff have commented that they are approached from time to time by both local villagers who have found interesting objects from the surrounding areas or even at home, and hobbyist treasure hunters with metal detectors (actors who for us are most interested in material (re)discovered). The hobbyists ask the museum questions about the status of the WWII material still in the nearby forests, including whether the museum requires – or indeed already owns – the material, and attempts to find out whether they as treasure hunters are permitted to search for and take the material. In some cases, they also bring their discoveries to the museum to enquire as to whether the museum would like to take the material into their collections. These interactions suggest that the hobbyist treasure hunters – often from further afield such as southern Finland or even Germany or Switzerland (Herva et al. 2016) – regard the museum as an authority on its surrounding landscape, despite the museum not extensively covering the theme of WWII in its exhibitions. While part of this may be down to a perceived connection between gold prospecting and prospecting for other material (such as the WWII material heritage), it may also suggest an understanding of the museum as having some kind of control over which material is to be saved – musealized – and which material the treasure hunters may engage with in their own ways.

The Gold Prospector Museum is managed by a private foundation – the Gold Museum Foundation (*Kultamuseosäätiö* in Finnish) – rather than being the museum of a municipality or having national museum status. This distinction may not matter or even be apparent to many museum visitors, but in the context of our discussion it affects the status of the museum concerning its actual authority concerning the WWII material. As a private foundation-run museum, the Gold Prospector Museum would generally not be involved in the finds-reporting process, beyond offering advice as they currently do. This means that in a pragmatic sense, even if it was legal to remove WWII material from the landscape without permission, this museum would not be the ‘right kind’ of museum for finders to approach on this matter. This raises interesting questions about the public perception of museums as a heritage authority, and also their failure – for whatever reasons – to distinguish between different kinds of heritage authority and their respective legal and policy-based roles.

The musealization or heritagization of the cultural material from WWII seems to be seen by many locals, especially the elderly in Vuotso as a means of safeguarding the material for future generations. One of our interviewees,

a reindeer herder and a former forester who knows the surrounding forests thoroughly, mentioned that he has taken some war-related finds to the Gold Prospector Museum. He was not interested in keeping any himself, but believed that the artefacts should belong in a museum (Interview 2). It seems that the Gold Prospector Museum close by would be most accessible to the villagers as well as visitors, but displaying WWII heritage even at the local level is not in its scope. Siida, for its part, is located about 110 km away from Vuotso, and the Provincial Museum of Lapland in Rovaniemi at the distance of 216 km.

We asked all our interviewees in Vuotso what they think about the war remnants: should they be cleared from the forest, left on site or somehow safeguarded? Most of them are used to having these remains in the landscape and think that they should be left there to bear witness to the history of the area. Some of them would like to see the material to be protected and made accessible to visitors by clearing some of the vegetation around them and setting up information signs. This, some reasoned, may lead not only to proper resources for conserving the sites, but also an added benefit to the village in the form of tourism. Interestingly, we learned that there was also some resistance within the village to developing the sites as a visitor attraction, and that this resistance came to a large extent from the younger villagers who suspected that visitors to historical sites in the wilderness would disturb the traditional livelihood of reindeer herding. This might implicate a generational difference in perceiving the value and meaning of WWII heritage to local identity, but also a raising criticism towards colonizing effects of tourism and capitalism.

## **Discussion**

Forms of engagements with material heritage of war that we discovered by focusing on the case of WWII heritage in Vuotso result from different motivations, roles and relationships with material heritage as well as attitudes towards its significance. In each of our identified typologies of material and its treatment, different actors take on the role of engaging and interacting – hence assigning the material culture its status. In the first two examples – material saved and cherished and material disregarded – it is local people, especially those with a family history or personal experience closely connected to WWII in Finnish Lapland, that are the most active and involved in these processes, giving meaning to the object and sites as reminders of the traumatic local war experience of evacuation, destruction, losing of homes as well as continuing hardships but also survival. The mementoes are cherished as their purpose is to preserve and transmit memories of complex and difficult history.

Other influences may also come into play, for example the role of national narratives and official histories in privileging which material is remembered

and which is intentionally forgotten, as well as personal reasons connected to loss and grief which may lead to the intentional 'forgetting' of a place or object. In the third example, that of material (re)discovered, it may be a range of individuals who are involved, including locals, and also incomers, who now live locally but may have come to the region from further afield (consider Savage Bagnall & Longhurst's 'elective belongers' 2005), and occasional visitors such as seasonal residents (who may have for example a caravan or summer home), or tourists. Actors here may also have a personal connection such as family history related to the area or a strong affinity with this period in history for some other reason. They may also have other motivations such as the treasure-hunting hobby, and as Herva (2014) has suggested, people may also be drawn especially to Lapland due to its appeal as at once a pristine wilderness yet also a mystical, peripheral and exotic place. For some of the Sámi of the area, this appeal represents a threat of continuing the colonizing attitudes towards the area. For others like the elders who witnessed the WWII, the interest in the history of the area is a positive thing.

The final engagement we have listed, that of material musealized (or not musealized) represents a fusion of institutional interests in the form of the museum staff and the organizations they represent, and of personal interests through the desire of would-be donors and heritage activists to ensure the protection and recognition of the material heritage through enabling it to be officially sanctioned as heritage, by the 'professionals' and official organizations. When something is recognized as having heritage value, it becomes public and collectively shared, although it can continue also to be contested even then (e.g. Zolberg 1995).

Another constant theme through all the characterizations is the power of material culture in engaging with the difficult past and adhering to continuity (see also Hirsch & Spitzer 2006; De Nardi 2014). Whether it is a personal memento that is treasured as a personal belonging, a forgotten piece of 'junk' in the landscape, or an item that is discovered and donated to a museum, material culture connects the past with the present calling for interpretation of its existence and journey through the time. Furthermore, WWII remains of Finnish Lapland provoke questions of ownership and treatment both at the national and local level. Leaving objects and war junk untouched to where they have laid over 70 years is also active doing but its function is a counteract to possessing: instead of claiming a private ownership, it enunciates a collective ownership to the war remains in the Northern (indigenous) territories and the presence of history – even dark or painful – in the landscapes of Lapland.

The Vuotso villagers' collective sense of ownership and attentiveness in acting as custodians of their local past makes sense as an indigenous reaction and

act of self-identification against Lapland's long colonial history and marginalization by southern authorities (Herva et al. 2016; Nyyssönen 2013). Many history hobbyists that we have interviewed in Lapland hope that the objects found there would stay and be displayed locally, not taken away to Rovaniemi or to Southern Finland, thereby continuing the colonizing trend still prevailing in many practices of the heritage scene that most Lapland residents, especially the indigenous Sámi, want to change.

Regardless of the forms of action, all four engagements with the material heritage of war in our typology seem to aim at somewhat similar goals: establishing continuity and authenticity of the material heritage of war. None of the agents we have interviewed or interacted with; the villagers including the heritage activities or the first hand witnesses (the elders), the school or the local museum professionals, wish to hide or wipe away the memories of the war from their landscapes or minds. Even if disregarded or forgotten for years, the WWII heritage sites continue to be important for most of the local residents and their sense of community and identity. Different forms of engagements with the material culture of war are part of an ongoing process of coming to terms with the past that also reaches to the future.

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## SOURCES

### Interviews

Vuotso:

Interview 1. 7.6.2015, Vuotso with female heritage activist, born in 1949.

Interview 2. 10.8.2015, Vuotso with male survivor, born in 1939.

Interview 3. 10.8. Vuotso with female survivor, born in 1931.

Interview 4. 11.8. 2015 Vuotso with male survivor, born in 1934.

Interview 5. 11.8. 2015 Vuotso with male survivor, born in 1930.

Other interviews:

Interview 6. 11.8.2015 Tankavaara with female, museum professional.

Interview 7. 29.4.2015 Rovaniemi with male history hobbyist.

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