# Chapter 9
# Reinforced Concrete, Steel and Slaves: Archaeological Studies of Prisoners of World War II in Norway—The Case of Romsdal Peninsula

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**Abstract** During World War II, Norway experienced the biggest number of German troops and foreign PoWs relative to its own population of any country. The establishing of Festung Norwegen—giant fortifications along the Norwegian coast as part of the Atlantic Wall, as well as other substantial German investments including the Arctic Railway in Northern Norway; the main Norwegian motorway from the South to the high North (Rv 50, today's E-6) and increasing the electrical power and aluminium production needed by the Luftwaffe, all demanded a huge and constant supply of manpower and labour. The results of archaeological surveys of Atlantic Wall fortifications and prisoner camps in the region of Romsdal Peninsula in Central Norway highlight issues of preservation, interpretation and the role of such remains in collective memory.

## Introduction

World War II is a special phenomenon in Norwegian history in three particular ways: as a traumatic historical experience, as a contemporary political issue in the still ongoing process of forging a Norwegian national identity, and as an interdisciplinary research topic where archaeology has increasingly gained a role. Norway is often perceived as a peripheral arena of World War II theatre, without major battle fields and with a relatively low number of military and civilian casualties. The only two internationally known aspects of World War II in Norway are the Battle of Narvik in 1940 where Norwegian and allied forces managed to stop, at least for a while, German progress in Northern Norway, and the name of Vidkun Quisling that

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became a European synonym of national betrayal and collaboration with the German Nazi regime. However, the little-known history of foreign PoWs and slave workers in Norway during 1940–1945 reveals another side of Norway's importance during the war and the war's consequences for Norwegian national identity.

During World War II, Norway was accorded a special status within Hitler's strategy. Norway, invaded in April 1940, could become the "destiny area" of World War II and the place of allied invasion. As a consequence, a relatively large number of Nazi troops, weaponry, naval vessels, and other military resources were stationed there. A large and constant supply of manpower was essential to construct many major engineering projects, including not only the giant fortifications of the *Festung Norwegen*, as the northernmost section of the Atlantic Wall, but also transport infrastructure like the Arctic Railway in Northern Norway and the main Norwegian motorway from the south to the high North (then the Rv 50, now the E-6), as well as production of aluminium required by the Luftwaffe which also required increasing the electricity generation (Soleim 2004; Jasinski and Stenvik 2010; Jasinski et al., forthcoming).

One of the consequences of these developments was that Norway experienced the biggest number of German troops and foreign PoWs in relation to its own population. Up to 400,000 German troops were stationed there and around 140,000 foreign PoWs and slave labourers from at least 16 European nations were transported to Norway during that period. The largest national groups were from republics of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Poland. At least 500 permanent or temporary camps for PoWs, slave labourers, political and criminal prisoners, and Norwegian Jews were established in Norway during the war. These camps were administrated by the Wermacht (in cooperation with Organization Todt, led until 1942 by Fritz Todt and later by Albert Speer) and by the SS in the period 1940–1944, and since 1944 exclusively by the SS (Soleim 2004). Approximately 20,000 prisoners and slave workers were either executed, tortured to death, or died for other reasons on Norwegian soil prior to the liberation in May 1945 (Soleim 2004; Jasinski and Stenvik 2010:205–209; Jasinski et al., forthcoming).

Collaborators from the *National Samling* and from the State Norwegian Police often actively cooperated with the occupiers and arrested Norwegian resistance fighters and other civilians (about 44,000 people) and deported Norwegian Jews to extermination camps in occupied Poland. Members of the *National Samling*'s paramilitary organisation *Hird* were in several cases used as guards in camps for Yugoslav PoWs in Norway, and in many cases showed extreme brutality and cruelty in relation to prisoners. Collaboration with the German occupying forces also had other forms. A number of Norwegian state-owned and private companies obtained contracts for construction projects of all sizes, and PoWs and slave labourers were exploited for these.

Archaeological research of modern and contemporary warfare and conflict is a relatively new but vibrant trend within material culture studies. During the last decade, the number of new research projects and publications has grown rapidly (e.g. Kola 2000; Schofield et al. 2002; Kola 2005; Logan and Reeves 2009; Skriebeleit 2009; Carr 2010; Theune 2011). There are several reasons for this, but

the most important is the acknowledgement that material culture is an independent source of research data regardless of chronology (e.g. Buchli and Lucas 2001; Burström 2007; Jasinski 1997). As the warring parties have often attempted to cover traces of their war crimes by destroying crime scenes and burning archives, in many cases only archaeological investigations can reveal these hidden practices.

## Concepts of Cultural Landscape and Collective Memory

Archaeology acknowledges that new generations both erase some of older elements and bring their own contributions to cultural landscapes (Jasinski and Stenvik 2010: 205–209; Jasinski et al. 2011). Elements disappear due to forces of nature, modern agriculture, industrial development, or other human activities, and also due to lack of recognition or acknowledgement of certain heritage categories within national, regional, and local cultural management systems. A related factor can be that particular elements can be considered painful or unwanted and become intentionally or unintentionally neglected or removed from the collective memory both by heritage management systems and society at large (Jasinski et al. forthcoming). Forgetting is often an active choice, with practical and symbolic consequences (Wertsch 2002). When places receive historic significance in a narrative tradition, collective memories are sorted, selected, and idealised, being tailored to contemporary purposes such as identity reinforcement or legitimation of political power and authority (Shore 1996:11;Lowenthal 1997; Jasinski and Stenvik 2010:205–209; Jasinski et al., forthcoming).

As Logan and Reeves (2009:1) have stated:

> Most societies have their scars of history resulting from involvement in war and civil unrest or adherence to belief system based on intolerance, racial discrimination or ethnic hostilities. A range of places, sites and institutions represent the legacy of these painful periods: massacre and genocide sites, places related to PoWs, civil and political prisons, and places of `benevolent' internment such as leper colonies and lunatic asylums. These sites bring shame upon us now for the cruelty and ultimate futility of the events that occurred within them and the ideologies they represented. Increasingly, however, they are now being regarded as `heritage sites', a far cry from the view of heritage that prevailed a generation ago when we were almost entirely concerned with protecting the great and beautiful creations of the past, reflections of the creative genius of humanity rather than the reverse—the destructive and cruel side of history.

There has been a radical and relatively rapid shift in understanding what heritage is and what sites should be considered relevant. This shift was inevitable, at least in Europe, after the experiences of both World Wars, with their tremendous loss of lives. However, since the pain of one group or nation can be the shame of another, the inclusion or exclusion of particular aspects or sequences of the past can often be complex and controversial for both national and international heritage management. In Europe each nation shows an almost instinctive need to create its own modern identity, collective memory, national ethos, myths, and collective understanding of its own heritage and legacy connected to wars and conflicts of the last

century. This process is still continuing despite the integration processes created by the institutions of the European Union.

Traumatic, painful, and shameful issues of the past are often the most complex and disturbing elements within national identities as constructed today. Major changes in national and international politics, including the fall of ideological systems and changes in political alliances, often lead to national opinions of past conflicts being adjusted to new situations. These processes happen gradually but can be observed over decades; alter the priorities of national and international research funding, with some themes gaining positive responses while others are neglected, at least for a time. The painful or shameful aspects of the past, and their related national legacies, are the most difficult to handle; not all skeletons want to stay in the closet while the closet is being rebuilt to suit a new situation. The gaps between the collected (individual) and the constructed collective memories (Young 1993) can in many cases become too large for an easy change of paradigm in the national consciousness.

Current research on foreign PoWs being carried out in Norway illustrates the processes of national adjustment at both research and political levels. Up to the early 2000s, Norwegian historiography was dominated on one hand by studies of Norwegian national resistance to the Nazi regime, and on the other studies of Norwegian collaboration by the *Nasjonal Samling* Party and its leader Vidkun Quisling. The general picture "painted" by this research gave the perception of a glorious resistance by the Norwegian nation against the Nazi occupants and relatively limited collaboration by a narrow circle of Norwegian nationalists who had no real support within the rest of the nation. The issue of approximately 140,000 foreign PoWs and slave workers was seldom considered in the professional literature.

## Pan-European Slavery 1939–1945

During the relatively short period between September 1939 and May 1945 (with epilogues lasting in the Soviet Union and East Germany up to 1960s), Europe experienced modern slavery which in numbers of slaves can only be compared with transatlantic African slavery (Segal 1995). In both cases the number of enslaved (in one way or another) was approximately 12 million. During World War II, this number included people who, because of lack of other means to survive, voluntarily joined the German Organisation Todd's labour forces and were subsequently sent as slave labour to Germany or other occupied areas of Europe (Herbert 1985:163–187). In August 1944, there were 7,615,970 foreign workers officially registered in the territory of the "Greater German Reich"; 1.9 million of them were PoWs, and 5.7 million civilian workers including 2.8 million Soviet citizens, 1.7 million Poles, 1.3 million French, 590,000 Italians, and 250,000 Belgians (Herbert 1985:1).

## The Painful Heritage Project

In 2008 the Research Council of Norway granted the Norwegian University of Science and Technology funding for a research project entitled *Painful Heritage—Cultural landscapes of the Second World War in Norway. Phenomenology, Lessons and Management System*, directed by the author and conducted in cooperation with the Falstad Centre and with close contact with research institutions in Russia, Poland, Austria, Finland, Great Britain, and Germany. Research consists of three sub-projects considering the Landscape of Evil: Nazi construction plants and PoW/slave labour camps in Norway; the Memory, management and use of East European war graves and monuments in Northern Europe; and Battlefields: Conflicts of memory and landscape (Jasinski et al., forthcoming). Here the first of these is considered through the case study of the Romsdal Peninsula in Central Norway.

## The Atlantic Wall

The Atlantic Wall, a giant system of Nazi Germany coastal defence structures at the northern coasts of occupied Europe, stretched from Bay of Biscay in France through Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, and along the entire coastline of Norway. It was probably the greatest single construction project undertaken in the world during the twentieth century and consisted of several thousand monumental structures built mainly in reinforced concrete and steel that were armed with artillery, machine gun positions, mine fields, and protected by barbed wire (Forty 2002; Kaufman and Kaufman 2003; Zaloga 2009). The establishment of the Atlantic Wall in occupied Europe is usually linked to Hitler's famous *Küstenverteidigung* (Coastal Defence) Directive Number 40 issued by Führer's Headquarters in March 1942 (Forty 2002:12). According to Forty (2002) the main reasons why Hitler issued this Directive were to secure the North European coasts from Allied invasion while the main German military forces were engaged on the Eastern Front in the Soviet Union (Forty 2002:11).

Norway was among the very first countries to experience the construction of the Nazi coastal fortifications. Work started in 1940, 2 years before Hitler's Directive Number 40, and 1 year earlier than the OKW Directive on Neue Westwall in December 1941. According to Steven Zaloga (2009) the early start in Norway was due to several factors, including the strategic importance of iron ore mines in Northern Norway and Sweden, as well as the need to disrupt the British Arctic Convoys supplying the Red Army through Murmansk (Zaloga 2009: 35), and to prevent any Allied counterattack on Norway.

In total over 280 major fortifications were constructed along the Norwegian coast, as well as thousands of smaller defence lines and positions built in reinforced concrete and steel on or into the solid rock (Forty 2002: 91). Because of its strategic position at the intersection between the open Atlantic coast and a complex system of straits and fjords leading to interior of the country, noted during the invasion in spring 1940, the region of Møre and Romsdal County in Central Norway, including the Romsdal Peninsula, were among the areas where construction of the fortifications started early in the occupation (Fig. 9.1).


**Fig. 9.1** Main map: The Romsdal Peninsula and Gossen Island study area. Inset: Location of the study area in Norway

## The Atlantic Wall and the Lufftwaffe in Møre and Romsdal County

Romsdal Peninsula (nor. *Romsdalshalvøya*) is a 1,560 km$^2$ (600 mile$^2$) peninsula located in the Romsdal district of Møre and Romsdal county in Norway. The peninsula encompasses the western Norwegian municipalities of Molde, Gjemnes, Fraena, Eide, and the northern part of Nesset. About 42,000 people now live there, with another 5,000 on adjacent islands. The survey examined the western and northern part of the peninsula, from Molde (the capital of Møre and Romsdal County) in the south to the Municipalities of Fraena and Eide in the North and included Gossen Island in Aukra Municipality. This part of Norwegian coast was recognised as very important by both the *Werhmacht* and by the *Kriegsmarine* even in the early stages of German occupation. The strategic position almost in the middle of the Norwegian coast, allowing a possible Allied rapid landing here to divide occupied Norway in two and cut German supply lines to the Arctic region, was the main reasons for establishing four coastal artillery groups in the County: *Art. Gr. Aalesund, Art. Gr.*

*Kristiansund, Art. Gr. Romsdal, and Art. Gr. Möre* (Fjørtoft 1982). Each consisted of coastal batteries, mostly in form of fort-like fortifications and in some cases with groups of smaller bunkers and guns placed between the main fortifications.

## Archaeological Surveys on the Romsdal Peninsula

The historiography of foreign PoW and slave workers in Norway during World War II (e.g. Lundemo 2010; Soleim 2004; Stokke 2008) provides much important information, but contains little on the sites' detailed geographical locations and their present state of preservation, apart from *SS- Strafgefangenenlager Falstad* in the North-Trøndelag County (Jasinski and Stenvik 2010; Reitan 1999; Sem 2009). Research on the Nazi constructions that these PoWs and slave workers built in Norway is also limited, so the main aims of archaeological surveys were: to investigate the state of preservation of Nazi construction plants and prisoners' camps as cultural heritage in Norwegian landscapes, and to analyse the present status of the Nazi prisoner camps and construction plants within the Norwegian cultural heritage management system. This research will thus allow greater understanding of these sites as material structures within Norwegian landscapes, their typology and state of preservation, and will raise awareness of their potential as a research source and their place within Norwegian and international public understanding. From this, efficient models for their future management can be developed, and future research can be formulated based on the survey results.

An important aspect of the archaeological survey of the Romsdal Peninsula was to detect relevant sites within the present cultural landscapes and carry out the precise GPS-based mapping as well as photographic documentation. This is a relatively easy task for most Atlantic Wall sites, though not for the PoW and slave workers camps. The starting point for the archaeological surveys was existing historical written sources and historiography, particularly Soleim's (2004) and Stokke's (2009) lists of PoW camps in Norway. The first surveys on The Romsdal Peninsula were carried out in Fraena Municipality as the villages of Bud and Farstad were among the first places in the region where the Germans started construction of coastal fortifications in Central Norway (see Fig. 9.1). Moreover, a great deal of information, including direct witness observations regarding both the German coastal fortifications and PoWs in Fraena, had already been collected by local historians and published in the Yearbook "Old from Fraena" published by Fraena Municipality, particularly in the 1995 issue (Hestad 1995).

## Reinforced Concrete and Steel

The Atlantic Wall in the Romsdal region consists of forts in Vevang, Bud, Gossen-Süd, Gossen—Mitte and Gossen Nord, Jul, Artillery *Stützpunkt* in Farstad, and torpedo battery in Julholmen. In addition, a system of control posts and bunkers was

established in Malme Valley along the mountain passage and main road from Fraena to city of Molde on the opposite side of the peninsula. The city of Molde, with important German military headquarters and bases, was fortified by bunkers and defence positions, and one of the largest German military airports in occupied Norway was established on Gossen Island (see Fig. 9.1). The archaeological survey demonstrated that with very few minor exceptions, such as one of the small bunkers in Malme Valley, all the structures listed above still exist. Their state of preservation varies, with some monumental concrete and steel structures resisting natural and human degradation while other sites are much more vulnerable. Sites' preservation and their role in local landscapes can be divided into four main categories:

## *Category 1: Restored Sites Arranged for the Public and Managed by Professional Institutions*

The Ergan Fort in Bud, Fraena Municipality is managed by local institutions and is in a very good state of preservation (Fig. 9.2). In the early 1990s, the fort was restored and partly rebuilt, and adapted to be a local war museum (Harnes and Sundsbø 2007:51–63). It is now managed by the Museum of Romsdal and receives 5,000—10,000 visitors a year from Norway and abroad during the summer season. This cooperation between the Romsdal Museum and Fraena Municipality on the restoration and management of the fort as local war museum, and the experiences and reactions of Norwegian and foreign visitors, became an important case study regarding the role such sites play in the management and dissemination of the cultural heritage of World War II (Fig. 9.2, top).

Another example of managed Atlantic Wall heritage is the huge Jul Fort at Julneset in the vicinity of Molde City. As the Julneset area is a popular place to visit and relax for the inhabitants of Molde, the local community authorities have placed information signs describing the area and the fort structures. The site is, however, in a worse state of preservation than Ergan Fort due to erosion, vegetation cover, and some damage by visitors. The cultural heritage authorities of the Møre og Romsdal County are currently planning preservation actions for the site.

## *Category 2: Unmanaged Sites Overgrown with Vegetation*

Close to Jul Fort lies the Julholmen Torpedo Battery, a massive and monumental sight, especially when viewed from the sea-side (Fig. 9.2, bottom). Together with the sister torpedo battery on Otter Island (Otterøy) on the opposite side of the strait, the batteries defended the entrance into the Romsdalfjord and Molde city. As the Julholmen Torpedo Battery is not easily accessible from the shore it is still in a relatively good state of preservation and still dominates the Julholmen landscape. A fortification in Farstad, Fraena Municipality, located in between the Ergan and the Vevang forts can also be included to this category. The site lies at a distance from

**Fig. 9.2** *Top*: Ergan Fort in Bud. *Bottom*: Torpedo Battery at Julholmen

local roads, is not little known by the public, except local historians, and is heavily overgrown by vegetation (Fig. 9.3, top).

## *Category 3: Sites Used Today for Other Purposes*

Vevang Fort in Eide Municipality is not well known to the general public and is not maintained by the local authorities (Fig. 9.3, bottom). The only user of the area is a local Paint Ball Club and in this way war-like activities still continue at the site. The club added some extra features to the fort, including wooden walls, camouflage nets, and ladders to make the game even more exciting. Nevertheless, preservation is still good, though the area has become overgrown by vegetation and has suffered some natural and human degradation.

A fortification at Tangen on Gossen Island (*Gossen Süd*) has the roof of its main bunker used by a telecommunication company as base for a large mast and a small

**Fig. 9.3** *Top*: Part of a bunker complex at Falstadberget. *Bottom*: Commando bunker at Vevang Fort

wooden workshop. The area surrounding the bunker has rich grass vegetation and is grazed by a local farmer's cattle and is today defined by an electric fence. Despite these new elements, the fortifications are in a good state of preservation (Fig. 9.4, top left). The other two main fortification complexes on Gossen Island, *Gossen Mitte* at Falkhytten in the centre of the island and *Gossen Nord* at Rishaugane, are also well preserved. In contrast, there is little surviving of the massive military airport on Gossen Island built by Luftwaffe in cooperation with Organisation Todt and with significant use of slave workers, though it is still used as a recreational airport for small planes.

Monumental coastal grave cairns built of stone and dating to the Bronze and Iron Ages in Aukratangen at the southwest part of the island were used, and partly destroyed, by German troops for deployment of flak guns to protect the area from air attacks by British Air Forces (Ringstad 2007:97).

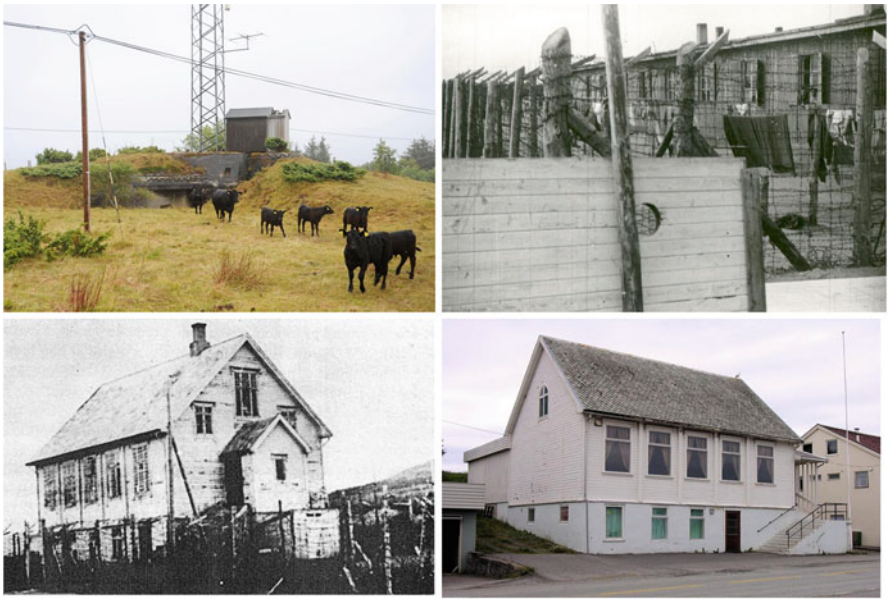

**Fig. 9.4** *Top left*: Fortifications at Tangen og Gossen Island. *Top right*: POW camp in Riksfjord, Gossen Island just after liberation (Courtesy Archive of Aukra Municipality). *Bottom left*: Camp for Soviet POWs in local Prayer House in Bud (Courtesy Archive of Fraena Municipality). *Bottom right*: The Prayer House in Bod today

## The Slaves

The total number of PoW and slave labour camps in Møre and Romsdal County that existed during World War II is still uncertain, though between 15 and 23 PoW camps of varying size, spread across at least 13 of today's municipalities, are known from documentary sources and oral tradition. It is not clear when the first PoWs and slave workers arrived in the county; local history publications mention December 1941 and early 1942 for the arrival of first groups to Gossen Island in Aukra Community, where German troops and subscribed Norwegian workers were already engaged in building one of the biggest military airports in Norway, and the defence line of strong fortifications (Rød 1995; Dreyer and Ringstad 2006: 261—263; Ringstad 2007:1941).

Before the invasion in April 1940, Gossen Island had a total population of around 2,000 inhabitants. The first German troops arrived in 1941 based on the decision to build a large military airport on the island, after which the island was rapidly transformed into a fortress with over 5,000 inhabitants. A quarter of the locals were forced to leave but the remaining 1,500 got new neighbours: 2,000 German soldiers, around 1,000 foreign PoWs, and about 600 civilian foreign forced workers (Rød 1995:141; Ringstad 2007:326). The first location used for Soviet PoWs was the old whaling

station at Nyhavna, where the existing kitchen and crew barracks were surrounded by barbed wire fences. German guards used the station's office building as accommodation. Some oral sources suggested that there were approximately 60—70 prisoners at the whaling station, though in 1942 they were moved to a newly built PoW camp in Riksfjord in the central part of the island. Timber whaling stations buildings were also moved, including the "*Spisemessa*- eating barrack" relocated to Løvik. Today this is the only building from the Nyhamna PoW camp still surviving in the Gossen cultural landscape. The last physical traces of the camp itself were erased in 2004 when the Ormen Lange Gas Plant was constructed in Nyhamna by Norsk Hydro ASA.

The Riksfjord PoW camp on Gossen Island was the largest in the region. According to archive sources by June 1942 there were 681 PoWs, decreasing to 289 by April 1945 (Stokke 2009). British aerial photographs of September 1943 and photographs taken just after the liberation in May 1945 show that the camp contained standard barracks, some barracks with oval roofs, tents, possible rectangular cottages built probably of plywood, and few workshops, all surrounded by double barbed wire fences with at least one main gate (Fig. 9.4, top right). The camp was administered by the Luftwaffe in cooperation with Organisation Todt, and prisoners were used mainly to build the airport and as labour force at the local docks.

In addition to the main camp there were at least three small auxiliary camps on the island—in Småge with 22 prisoners in April 1945, Tangeskogen with 26 prisoners, and Myrstad with 12 or 13 prisoners placed in a barn which still survives today (Myrstad 2009, personal communication). Prisoners from these camps were employed mostly to build the Festung Gossen fortifications and defence positions spread around on the island.

Despite major publications (Soleim 2004), articles by local historians and by Fraena`s inhabitants in the yearbook *Old from Fraena* (Hestad 1995), oral information from local witnesses indicates that some smaller camps have yet to be described. A typical example is the Malme Valley where it turned out that the Soviet PoWs were in two different periods placed in wooden barracks surrounded by fences on a local farm taken over by Werchmaht (Eidem, August 2010: personal communication). Another small camp was established in Malmekleiva just off the Malme Valley in 1942, where prisoners were placed in Kock House. Oral testimony collected by Anne Holen Helseth (September 2010: personal communication) from local elderly inhabitants indicates there were about ten Soviet prisoners kept there, enclosed by barbed wire. According to the eyewitnesses, these prisoners had very poor clothing and no shoes. Other PoW and slave labour camps existed in Fraena Community in Bud and in Farstad (Sanden). A group of 30 Soviet PoWs arrived at Bud in August 1942 and were placed just north of the Ergan Fort in a temporary camp of a few small modular rectangular plywood cabins fenced by barbed wire. According to a report given by 14 of these prisoners to Norwegian Intelligence in June 1945 their living conditions were extremely difficult with freezing, starvation, and violence as every day experiences (Anon 1945). After 2 months the prisoners were moved to the village Prayer House once it was made secure with barbed wire fences (Fig. 9.4, bottom left, bottom right), though the very bad treatment of the prisoners continued.

During the fall of 1942, Bud received 110 Polish PoWs. According to Åsmund Engelsberg, a local witness, they were at first placed in the local elementary school in the centre of the village, and in late 1944 or early 1945 moved to large barracks near a local quarry at the foot of Ergan Hill (Engelsberg, 2009–2010: personal communications). The Polish PoWs were moved away before May 1945. Both Soviet and Polish prisoners were engaged in building of the Ergan Fort, but they were working in separate areas of the site without daily contact with each other.

A minor camp for Soviet prisoners in Farstad was established at a local farm at Sanden in the Village of Farstad. Sverre Farstadvoll, a Fraena inhabitant, mentions Russian PoWs in his article published in *Gammalt Frå Fraena* 1995 (Farstadvoll 1995: 129–130, and map on page 135). According to Soleim (2004: database 5), there were ten prisoners stationed at this camp while a local eyewitness Andreas Skotheim remembers a rather higher number—approximately 20 prisoners (August 2010: personal communication). According to Skotheim, the prisoners were lodged in a red-painted turf-roofed building 10 m long on the farm surrounded by barbed wire fences and close to the barn, while the German guards stayed in the main farm house close by.

Written sources do not mention any foreign PoWs or slave workers in Vevang, Eide Municipality where the substantial Vevang Fort was built. However, local inhabitants still remember that Soviet prisoners were used by the Werchmacht to build the fort. According to Edvin Sivertsen (2010: personal communication) the prisoners were at first placed in the local Loge House and later on moved to a wooden barrack several hundred metres away.

Archive information regarding five different camps related to Soviet and Polish prisoners and Todt workers survives for Molde city, the capital of Møre and Romsdal County. Michael Stokke (2009) listed following camps in Molde with Soviet prisoners based on written sources: Langmyra, Cecilienfryd/Bolsøy, Fjaerlijordet, Moldegård, and Jul Fort in the vicinity of Molde. To find the detailed locations for these camps in what is now Molde's urban landscape would not be possible without direct help of Andreas Mauseth, an inhabitant of Molde and eyewitness of many episodes connected with PoW and slave workers (personal communications under surveys in July 2010). According to Mauseth the Langmyra Camp (today 10–12 Schneider Street) was the largest in Molde, and as early as February 1941 about 80 Polish PoWs were placed in a huge wooden barrack. After the Polish prisoners were moved from Molde to Åndalsnes, a group of around 120 Soviet prisoners arrived. As the wooden barrack could not house so many prisoners the nearby hen house was incorporated into the camp as additional accommodation. The Cecilienfryd Camp (now the school area of Bekkenvoll) comprised one wooden barrack with around 15 Soviet prisoners and a large horse stable, according to Mauseth (July 2010: personal communication). The Fjaerlijordet Camp (now 38–40 Bjørnstjerne Bjørnsonsvei) consisted of one wooden barrack with about 15 Soviet prisoners placed near a large wooden house accommodating German officers (Mauseth, July 2010: personal communication). Andreas Mauseth could not recall any camp at the Molde Gård area, but did remember very clearly a camp at Kviltrop in Molde which consisted of a large building (still standing) for German soldiers, a stable at the present camping site and a wooden barrack for Soviet prisoners at what is now 2 and 4a Komet Street.

## A Typology of PoW and Slave Labour Camps

Based on the historiography and archaeological surveys it can be assumed that at least six types of camps for PoWs and slave labourers were used in Norway.

1. Relatively large camps, for several hundreds of prisoners, built from scratch and consisting of one or more types of wooden barracks, wooden cabins, and sometimes tents, all surrounded by barbed wire fences, watch towers, and control posts.
2. Medium size camps consisting of one or more wooden barracks.
3. Medium or small camps where existing buildings (local schools, prayer houses, farm buildings) were used to accommodate prisoners.
4. Auxiliary camps with a few small, mostly rectangular, prefabricated cottages for prisoners.
5. Camps where prisoners were placed in earth/stone built huts partly dug into the ground (quite a common category in camps established in northernmost regions of Norway).
6. In some cases, there existed a mixture of above arrangements.

The guards had their own barracks either inside or just outside the camps, or in some cases were stationed in requisitioned Norwegian houses. The first four categories are represented on the Romsdal Peninsula.

## Living Conditions and the Treatment of Prisoners

Several documents describe PoW and slave worker living conditions in their camps on Romsdal Peninsula. In the report given by 14 Soviet prisoners from Bud to Norwegian Intelligence in June 1945 in Molde regarding their living conditions and treatment (Anon 1945), the prisoners describe starvation, freezing, and violence as every day experiences. They recount the fate of two Soviet prisoners who escaped in 1942 from Bud (both were captured and shot death after few days) and the bestiality of a German guard during the execution of the third Soviet prisoner who escaped from Bud in February 1943.

Several local witnesses verify the treatment that at least the Soviet PoWs and slave workers received. Those who lived in the vicinity of the Nyhamna Camp on Gossen Island remember the screams of beaten and tortured prisoners, and some also remember how prisoners were brutally pressed into the freezing seawater by German guards in the vicinity of Nyhamna Camp as a substitute of washing and delousing (Ringstad 2007:330–331). The Norwegian oral tradition stresses the appalling living conditions for Soviet prisoners, with very poor clothing, frequent starvation, and brutal treatment by guards.

The mortality rate of Soviet prisoners on Romsdal Peninsula and Gossen Island is uncertain. There are 30 graves of Soviet prisoners at the Aukra Graveyard on Gossen Island; most if not all died between September 1942 and June 1943, during

the occupation of Nyhamna Camp (Ringstad 2007:331–332). One grave (of the prisoner from Bud who escaped in 1943) is still known and cared for by inhabitants of Bud at the local graveyard at the outskirts of the village. There are also other known Soviet graves in Molde, but oral tradition from the Romsdal Peninsula implies that an unknown number of prisoners who either died or were killed never received burial in local cemeteries but were either dumped in the sea or buried in woods or remote locations. According to Andreas Mauthset (2010: personal communication), German Guards at Langmyra Camp in Molde City ordered Soviet prisoners to dump the body of one of their deceased comrades into the camp latrine.

Nothing is known regarding mortality rates for foreign workers of Organisation Todt on Romsdal Peninsula. The existing oral tradition suggests that because of better treatment and food, and more reasonable living and working conditions, the death rate among these forced workers was much lower than that was the case with Soviet prisoners.

## Present State of Preservation of the Camps

Today, very few physical traces of Nazi camps at Romsdal Peninsula are still visible. Exceptions are three buildings that existed prior to the war and were used as lodges for PoWs and slave workers, and traces of concrete foundations of prisoner's barracks at three other sites. The "Spisemessa" from Nyhamna Camp at Gossen Island subsequently moved to Løvika where it still stands on a local farm; the local "Prayer House" in Bud, located close to the Ergan Fort lodged Soviet PoWs in the period 1942–1945 (Fig. 9.4, bottom right); and the local Loge House in Vevang that lodged Soviet PoWs during the construction of Vevang Fort (Fig. 9.5, top right). None of these three buildings is marked with any sign recognising that PoWs lived in them during World War II.

Foundations of prisoners' barracks in the region exist at three locations: the Malme Valley site in Fraena Municipality, at Julneset in the vicinity of Molde City (Fig. 9.5, bottom left), and at Tangen on Gossen Island. It is uncertain, however, if the last of these are traces of a prisoner's barrack or of a barrack for German guards. The undisputable traces connected to the prisoners' story that still exist at this site are remnants of barbed wires which partly lie on the surfaces of the site and partly grown into surrounding trees (Fig. 9.5, right).

## Methodological Lessons to be Drawn from the Project

The archaeological survey of the Romsdal Peninsula carried out in 2009–2011 brought to light a relatively wide spectrum of experiences and new data, but have also created new research questions, as well as some dilemmas.

**Fig. 9.5** *Top left*: Loge House in Vevang today. *Bottom left*: Foundations of Soviet POW Camp barrack at Julneset. *Right*: Bribed wire—traces of POW Camp at Tangen, Gossen Island

One observation is that the field search for particular camps can be time consuming and complicated, taking days, weeks, months, and in some cases even years. As the archive sources seldom give geographical coordinates for camps, finding the sites is often dependent on oral information from surviving local Norwegian witnesses, an urgent process due to the age of those with first-hand observations. Another problem is the state of the memory of these witnesses, and the extent to which their individual memories have with time been reworked within the national consensus, and the impact of collective memories upon their personal memories. Still another problem is that local place names can become confusing during the search for camp sites. Documentary sources and local witnesses often use different names for particular camps, creating the initial impression that there were more sites than was the case.

One more significant problem with local memory of the foreign PoWs and slave labourers was the issue of prisoner nationality (Fig. 9.6). Informants usually distinguished only two or three groups—Russians and Todt workers, or Russians, Poles, and Todt workers. It is clear that the term *Russians* comprises all nationalities from the Soviet Union—both from European and Asiatic republics. Polish PoWs are in some cases also remembered as Russian prisoners. These two nationalities are perceived as PoWs (*Nor. krigsfanger*), though in reality many were civilian slave workers. The Todt workers in local memory are other nationalities, especially from


**Fig. 9.6** *Top*: Soviet PoWs at work on Gossen Island (Courtesy Archive of Romsdalsmuseet, Molde). *Bottom*: Polish PoWs at Ergan Fort, Bud (Courtesy Archive of Fraena Municipality)

Western Europe, although in fact many were of Eastern European origin, including forced workers from Poland. Local memories from 1940 to 1945 were subsequently aligned to the later political division of Europe during the Cold War. It must be stressed here that terms used by German Nazi authorities with regard to PoWs and slave workers were also complicated and it seems that the complex and unclear divisions of competences between different institutions (including the Werhmacht, the SS, Organisation Todt) created a mosaic of terms now hard to comprehend (Herbert 1985; Soleim 2004).

One of the larger Todt camps established during World War II in Central Norway is that on Gossen Island (Fig. 9.6, top). According to Johan Julnes (1995:120) the Organisation Todt's troops at the island comprised "404 Germans, 198 foreigners, 206

Norwegians, 44 prisoners (*sic*), 110 German civilians, and 40 Luftwaffe soldiers." This list raises two major questions regarding perceptions of different groups of foreign workers, both by the Nazi German authorities as well as by Norwegians. Who were the above mentioned 198 foreigners, and what was the difference between them and the 44 prisoners? Julnes (1995:120) also provides another list that gives different picture of the Todt's troops at the island: "550 men, Dutch, Belgians, and Poles, together with 60 Germans and 110 Norwegians", and mentions that it is not possible to explain the differences between the two lists. The issue of Todt's workers, and the differences between them and the PoWs and slave workers in terms of their officially authorised status, living conditions, mortality, is still unclear and demands further research.

The state of preservation of PoW and forced worker camps as physical structures is even worse than assumed before the survey. While the Nazi forts and other military constructions built in reinforced concrete and steel not only still exist but also dominate local cultural landscapes on Romsdal Peninsula through their monumental size and appearance, the PoW and slave labour camps are, with very few exceptions, almost completely effaced. The very few sites with either existing permanent buildings used for prisoner accommodation, or other physical traces of camps, lack any sign or other form of information telling visitors the prisoners' story. In contrast, the largest German forts in the area—Julneset Fort, outside of Molde city and Ergan Fort in Bud—are both equipped with signboards and, in case of Ergan, exhibitions inside the bunkers and guide services during summer season that primarily interpret the occupiers' story and with limited mention of PoWs and slave workers.

This situation both reflects and causes two problems. The first is a strong conflict between the present cultural landscape and the collected memories of inhabitants who have to recognise the duality of these landscapes: concrete, monumental forts of the occupants as opposed to the fate of the prisoners that were forced to build them. The second is that the very limited information on the victims of slavery often leaves a false impression on visitors and younger local generations that these impressive forts and other types of defence constructions were built by the occupation forces themselves, which can even create a fascination with the apparent power, strength, and superiority of the occupiers.

## *Politics and National Amnesia*

National consensus and a united collective remembrance of traumatic episodes are extremely important in Norwegian society. During the current Norwegian debate on immigration and terrorism that affected Norway on 22nd of July 2011, Prof. Thomas Hylland Eriksen from the University of Oslo called Norway the "Prison of Consensus" (*Nor. Konsensusfengsel*) (after Bisgaard 2011). This is, however, not a new phenomenon. As with other European countries, postwar Norway had to start to manufacture a national consensus regarding World War II and weave this into the tissue of national identity, history, and collective common sense. Manufacturing a national consent is a complex matter (Herman and Chomsky 2002), especially in democratic societies where a unified, generic meaning and mind-set regarding painful

processes and events from the past cannot be pressed upon society by law and rules, as is often the case in totalitarian regimes.

The process started with the return of the Royal Family and the exiled government in May 1945. The young Norwegian state that had regained its independence only in 1905 after five centuries of Danish and Swedish rule had some difficult problems to solve and had to find answers regarding what had happened in the country during World War II, and not least why. The most obvious problem was collaboration with Nazi Germany forces that invaded in April 1940 and occupied the country until 1945. This problem was partially solved by the effective and harsh legal process (*Nor. Oppgjøret*) against around 93,000 Norwegian citizens accused of collaboration (Dahl and Sørensen 2004; Hagen 2009). Although the *Oppgjøret* had severe legal weaknesses, it solved this problem for the Norwegian public, at least for a while.

The second problem for Norway's national consensus was the issue of the approximately 140,000 foreign PoWs and forced labourers taken to Norway by Nazi Germany, and exploited not only by Werhmacht, the SS and Organisation Todt, but also by many state-owned and private Norwegian companies. Over time the most complicated political problem was caused by the East European prisoners. The long period of the Cold War created a situation where the East European countries that up to 1945–1946 were counted as allies against Nazi Germany became the enemies of the Western World, in the confrontation between democracies and communist regimes of Eastern Europe. The relatively fresh and mostly positive memories of these prisoners soon became problematic. The Stalinist Soviet regime made it even more complex by at first totally denying that there had been Soviet PoWs in Norway. According to Stalin's ideology soldiers of the Red Army would always fight to the end and rather die than surrender, so by definition Soviet PoWs were traitors. They were repatriated back to the Soviet Union, finalised by an eager Norwegian state in 1946, despite clear warnings regarding their fate (Soleim 2004:320–360). Many Soviet PoWs would rather have stayed in Norway than return to their country; this was never a solution for Norwegian authorities, though a few managed to avoid repatriation and later became Norwegian citizens.

The Norwegian authorities and local inhabitants wished to erase all physical traces of the hated Nazi regime that they could, both the construction plants and the camps. With the Atlantic Wall this was impossible because of the scale of the fortifications built in reinforced concrete and steel. As one of informants told me during my surveys on Romsdal Peninsula *"We would need many small atomic bombs to destroy these bunkers and get rid out of them."* Camps for PoWs and slave workers were in contrast easy to remove. In Southern and Central Norway demolition started soon after the camps were emptied, as there was a shortage of building material. Some camps were burnt down because of a supposed danger from epidemic diseases, but was often the simple wish to forget the traumatic war period and move on. The process of erasing the story of East European prisoners and slave workers from the Norwegian collective memory started soon after this, with support from the political consensus described above. This resulted in a total lack of interest in the preservation of many shown by the Norwegian authorities until the July 2011 when remains of the camp at *Øvre Jernvatnet* (a camp for Yugoslavian prisoners) in Norland County were protected by Norwegian Cultural Heritage Directorate. In most other cases, only the surviving war

generations remember more or less clearly what happened under the occupation, and the postwar generations know either little or nothing. The present situation can be summarised by a young Norwegian female journalist during a radio interview with me in 2010 regarding the 140,000 foreign prisoners and slave workers in Norway: "I am young Norwegian journalist, I have attended Norwegian schools of all levels … why didn't they teach me about it at all?"

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