

## ONLY THE PRINTS OF ALPINE BOOTS REMAINED

### **The Winter War: bombing raids and deaths at the front**

The men of Rovaniemi left for the extra military manoeuvres announced in October 1939 in the same way as did those living elsewhere in Finland. Most of the local men fought on the Salla front when war broke out, and 162 lost their lives during the Winter War.

Their home area did not escape damage, either, for enemy aircraft could easily bomb the population centres of Northern Finland on account of the inadequacies of the region's anti-aircraft defence. About 1600 bombs in all were dropped on the Rovaniemi area from 21st December 1939 onwards, killing 25 civilians, wounding about 60 and damaging more than 70 buildings, including the hospital. The total damage in-

flicted during the Winter War was thus fairly minor.

Voluntary Swedish pilots flying Swedish air force fighters carrying Finnish insignia made their base at Olkkajärvi on 9.1.1940, and were able to protect both Rovaniemi and other population centres from there.

Some of the inhabitants moved into the countryside to escape the bombing, and some 6000 persons from Petsamo, Kemijärvi and Posio were also evacuated to the rural district of Rovaniemi.

### **Lively times between the wars**

The period of peace that followed the Winter War, before the outbreak of the Continuation War, underlined the position of Rovaniemi as an increasingly busy junction on essential transport routes. The war hav-

ing closed all the harbours in Western Europe except for those of Lisbon and Liinahamari, most of Finland's foreign trade from April 1940 onwards took place via Rovaniemi, from which the goods were transported to the latter harbour on the Arctic Ocean. As Sweden also used the same route for much of its foreign trade, a host of new haulage stations and forwarding agencies were established in Rovaniemi.

Although some of the damage caused during the Winter War had already been repaired, there was a constant serious lack of accommodation as the num-

*The hospital was among the buildings badly damaged in the bombing during the Winter War of 1939–40.*



*Members of the Lotta Svärd organization contributed to the war effort in many ways. Here two members from Rovaniemi are seen on air raid warning duty.*



ber of jobs and the population increased at a rapid pace. The situation was soon also hampered by the activities of the Germans in Rovaniemi.

The first German troops passed through Finland on 22th September 1940 on their way from Germany to northern Norway, causing a transit command to be set up in Rovaniemi. Work began 6 months later, i.e. on February 1941, to expand this into the main supply centre for the German Mountain Troops. The massive build-up of German troops in Lapland began in June 1941, a couple of weeks before the German offensive against the Soviet Union on 22.6.1941.

### **A German Army base during the Continuation War**

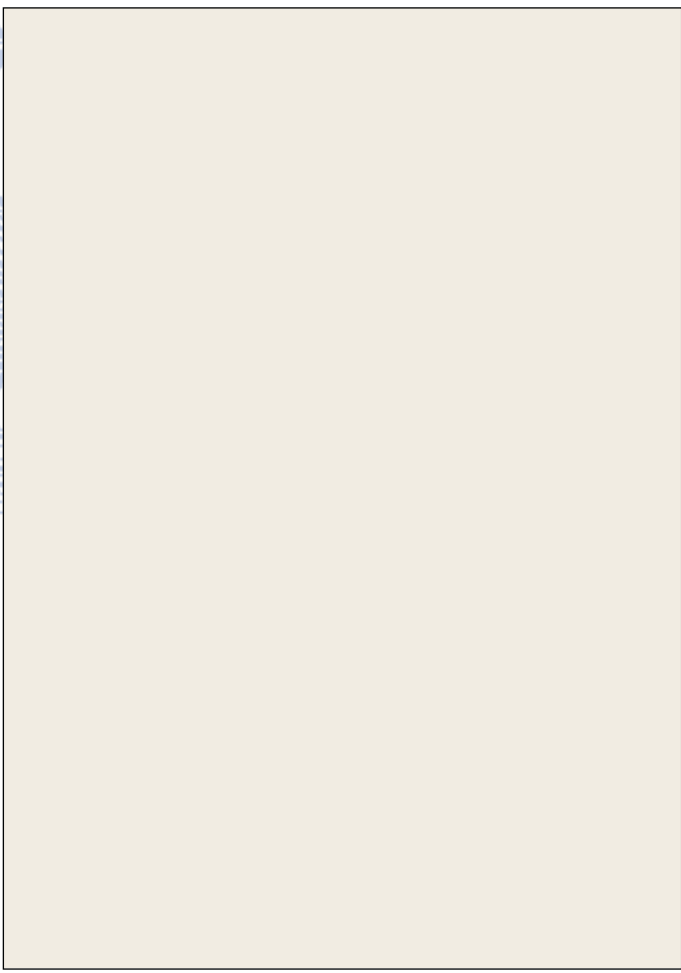
German operations in Finland expanded further upon the outbreak of the Continuation War, to the extent that there were already as many as 64 command stations of different rank in Rovaniemi in January 1942, employing over 3000 people, mainly Germans. It is estimated that some 6000 German soldiers were stationed in the town at that time, plus the Austrians, Dutch, Estonians

and Swedes who were working for them. The town officially had 8200 Finnish inhabitants, many of whom were at the front. Almost every village in the rural district had German depots or other types of German military activity.

The prominent presence of the Germans in Rovaniemi had a considerable impact on the local economy, reflected in the form of a continuous shortage of labour, a doubling in wage levels compared with other parts of the country, despite the contin-

ued rationing, and a lack of accommodation, which similarly caused rents to double. The Germans, for their part, sold liquor to the local people, which is one reason why Rovaniemi had the worst crime statistics in

*A signpost showing the Arctic Circle had been set up on the Arctic Road before the war, and the German troops would often stop at it for other purposes than patching their tyres.*



the country, including breaches of rationing regulations and drunkenness as well as thefts and other crimes.

Although the behaviour and customs of the Germans departed from what the local people had been accustomed to, daily interaction established close personal relations not only between the military and civil

*The centre of Rovaniemi after the Germans had left. On the right, the chimneys of the Borough Hall, and in the centre, the offices of the Cooperative Bank, which were renovated after the war. The walls of the Rovaniemi Cooperative Stores are similarly still in existence today.*

leaders, but also at other levels. The population was in general well disposed towards these alien troops. Many of the local people would have learnt at least the rudiments of German, and some far more. Although most of the local women were unenthusiastic about the Germans and the German military leaders specifically forbade marriage with the Finns, some Finno-German offspring saw the light of day.

When the Germans took over responsibility for the northern front, the local men were transferred to the main Finnish forces on the Karelian Isthmus and other fronts, where a total of 377 of them eventually perished in action.



*When the evacuation began in September 1944, people tried to take all their most valuable possessions with them, as no one knew, whether they would ever be able to return. In spite of the official restrictions, enormous numbers of packages accumulated at the railway station, a surprisingly high proportion of which eventually found their way back to Rovaniemi, although some were inevitably lost in transit.*

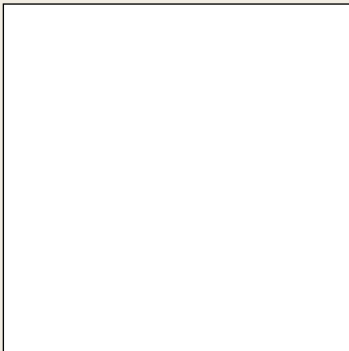
## Evacuation and destruction

When Finland signed an armistice with the Soviet Union, problems were immediately expected with regard to the withdrawal of the German troops from the country. With this in mind, orders were given on 7.9.1944 for the whole of Lapland to be evacuated. Transportations from Rovaniemi began on 16.9. and were completed on 22.9. Since people from the rest of Lapland were also passing southwards through Rovaniemi and the Germans were moving northwards at the same time, all roads and railway lines were unbelievably congested. In the course of one week a total of 20 000 people moved from Rovaniemi to northern Sweden and 4500 to Ostrobothnia. They usually took their horses and cows with them, but slaughtered most of the sheep and pigs before leaving. Only a few men remained encamped in the woods to see how things would turn out.

The largest armed engagement between the Germans and the Finns in the Rovaniemi area was at Taipaleenkylä on 12.-14.10., when the latter failed in their attempt to intercept the rear of the German forces and 60 Finns were killed in the operation.

The Germans began to raze the town to the ground on 10.10., first destroying the

*A total of 603 soldiers killed in the Winter War, the Continuation War and the Lapland War are buried in the Memorial Cemetery in Rovaniemi.*



*The Germans usually left the churches untouched when ravaging the villages of Lapland, but in Rovaniemi the last thing they did before they left was to set fire to the church and its belfry. The stone walls of the hospital remained intact, but the interior was gutted entirely.*

manor house of Konttinen and finally burning down the church on 16.10. A regiment led by Lieutenant Colonel Wolf H. Halsti tried to intercept the Germans north of Korkalovaara on 16th October, but was too late. Within a couple of days they had also left the area of the rural district, at which point the first demobilised Finns from the front began to drift back to the ruins of their home villages.

## Reconstruction

The Germans destroyed 548 dwelling houses, 96 private commercial buildings and nine public buildings in Rovaniemi, an estimated 90 % of the total property. Slightly over a hundred buildings escaped total de-





*The people who returned immediately after the war had to live for some time in cellars and temporary huts and pre-fabricated buildings. This hut was in use in 1946–47.*

struction, although many of these were damaged. The figures for the rural district were 804 houses, 47 commercial buildings and 32 public buildings, including almost all the schools. The outbuildings were also destroyed, as were most of the road and bridges. The overall proportion of destruction was not more than 60%, however, as most of the villages on the lower reaches of the River Kemijoki below the borough survived.

The first civilians returned in spring 1945, the granting of return permits having been delayed until the area had been cleared of land mines and other explosives. The borough of Rovaniemi was declared safe by the end of June and the rural district by the end of July, although explosives were still



found in a number of places in the following years. All the local people had arrived back by the end of September, apart from 279 who had died in the

course of the arduous journey into exile.

It was decided in March 1945 that the town plan should be completely renewed, a task

*As all the bridges over the River Kemijoki had been destroyed, a temporary trestle bridge was built over the rapids of Ounaskoski at the point where the Lumberjack's Candle bridge now stands. The bridge had to be built anew each spring, however, once the river was free of ice. For a number of winters the trains to Kemijärvi crossed the river on tracks laid on the ice.*





*Rovaniemi church, designed by the architect Bertel Liljequist, and completed in 1950.*

that was assigned to the celebrated architect Alvar Aalto. As questions of land ownership were slowing down this urgent rebuilding process, parliament passed a special law, Lex Rovaniemi, permitting the borough council to acquire privately owned land summarily and pass it over to builders. The government also granted loans to the council for the acquisition of land.

Among the first new buildings were premises for the provincial administration, dwelling houses and a number of schools. The new church, built partly with assistance from Lutherans in America, was inaugurated on 20.8.1950, but the Ounaskoski and Suutarinkorva bridges, which were important for traffic passing through Rovaniemi, were only completed in 1951. This finally freed the people from having to rely on ice roads, ferries and the trestle bridge that had to be rebuilt

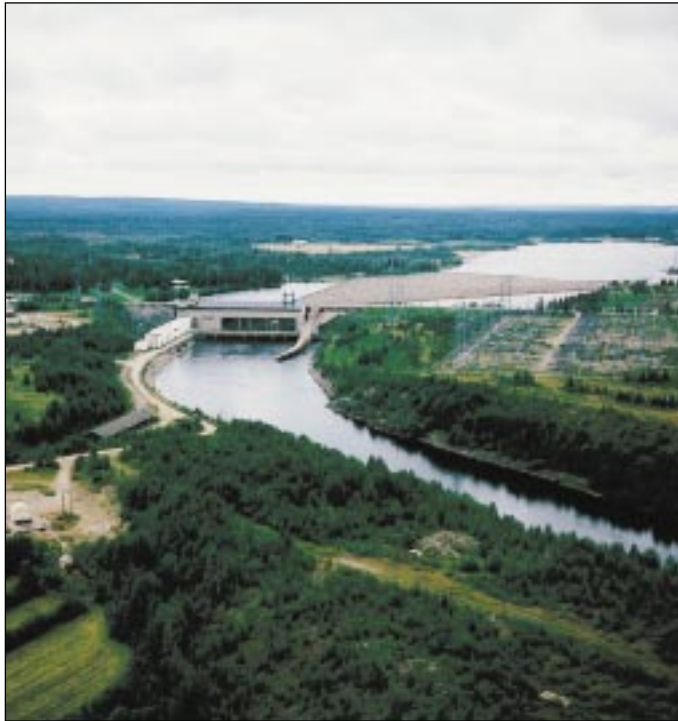
every spring at the head of Ounaskoski, where the Lumberjack's Candle bridge now stands. Even the trains ran on tracks laid on the frozen River Ounasjoki for two winters.

The reconstruction era also marked the beginning of systematic electrification in the rural district of Rovaniemi. The newly founded electricity company Rovakairan Sähkö began to construct a supply network in the rural district. Reconstruction in the countryside was greatly promoted by the Land Acquisition Act, which allowed for the creation of farms on which servicemen and refugees could be settled. This law had led to the establishment of 112 farms, 22 houses with arable land and 31 housing plots in the district by 1960, and 133

housing plots with or without arable land in the borough of Rovaniemi.

The pace of reconstruction was such that the number of buildings in both the borough and the rural district already exceeded the pre-war figure by 1953.

*The harnessing of the River Kemijoki for hydroelectric power began with the construction of the Petäjäskoski power station, a project that employed as many as 3000 people at its height in the mid-1950's. All the exploitable stretches of rapids in Rovaniemi had power stations on them by 1972.*



## Tourism in Rovaniemi

Tourism had already established a firm position for itself in Rovaniemi before the war. The extension of the railway line to that point around 1910 provided people from Southern Finland with an easy opportunity to admire the midnight sun, while the Ounasvaara Winter Games, organised since 1927, were a major highlight of the late winter. Tourism was most of all enhanced by the completion of the Arctic Road from Rovaniemi to Petsamo in 1932, on which the Hotel Pohjanhovi served for a long time as the "last outpost of civilization". As many as twenty thousand tourists would travel to the shores of the Arctic Ocean each year.

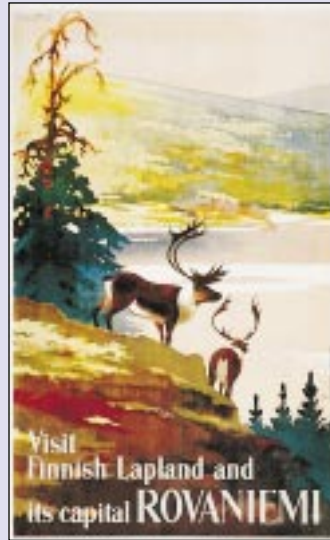
The war destroyed practically all of this, including the whole destination of the Arctic Road. Pohjanhovi was one of the first buildings to be reconstructed, however, for although Petsamo was no longer accessible from Finland, a new road connection with the Arctic Ocean was soon opened up through Karigasniemi and northern Norway. Since then Nordkapp has been the main attraction bringing people to Rovaniemi.

Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the President of the United States, visited Lapland on 11th June 1950 to witness the reconstruction work in person, and in honour of the occasion, the governor, Uno Hannula, and the mayor, Lauri Kaijalainen, assisted by Jarl Sundqvist, Forest Manager of the Kemi Company, had a log cabin erected at the place where the Arctic Road crossed the Arctic Circle. This can be regarded as having laid the foundation for post-war tourism in Rovaniemi.

Eleanor Roosevelt marked the beginning of a succession of leading political figures who have made Rovaniemi known to the world, including the Yugoslavian president Josip Broz Tito, the Vice-President of the United States Lyndon B. Johnson, the Shah of Iran Reza Pahlevi, the Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev, the Israeli prime minister Golda Meir and many others.

Among the most important post-war tourist attractions in Rovaniemi were the Midsummer's Eve celebrations at Ounasvaara and the log floating competition at Ounaskoski on Midsummer's Day. The latter had to be discontinued, however, when the current was reduced by the damming of Valajaskoski. Tourists have been transported on the river by motor boat ever since. The attractions favoured by tourists in the 1960's included exhibitions by the textile designer Elsa Montell-Saario and the photographer Matti Saario at Oikarainen.

Santa Claus became a natural part of the marketing of tourism in Rovaniemi and Lapland when the

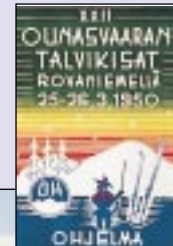


Rovaniemi has made unrestrained and highly successful use of the Lapland image in its tourism marketing, and the provincial library and museum have both focused on recording and displaying the culture of the region.



The Ounasvaara Winter Games have been a major event in the Finnish sports calendar since 1927, and increasing numbers of winter sports professionals have been coming to Rovaniemi in the 1990's to begin their autumn training on natural snow.

Tourism in Rovaniemi may be said to have begun with the building of the Arctic Road and the Pohjanhovi Hotel. The most popular spot since the war has been the Arctic Circle, where the first cabin was built in honour of the visit of Eleanor Roosevelt and has now been joined by a whole Santa Claus Village.







*The airport was completed in the time between the Winter War and the Continuation War and handled flights to both Helsinki and Petsamo in 1940–41. Aero Oy (later Finnair) began regular services with its DC-3 aircraft in May 1948. The airport building of that time had its name board fashioned out of reindeer antlers. Nowadays Rovaniemi airport has the sophisticated equipment necessary to ensure that all aircraft can land and take off safely even in the worst possible weather conditions. The supersonic Concorde has been bringing visitors to the land of Santa Claus every Christmas and Midsummer since the 1980's.*



Finnish post office began to deliver all the letters sent to him by children around the world to the Arctic Circle Cottage. This meant that he could personally answer all the hundreds of thousands of letters for which return addresses were known.

The work of building a Santa Claus Land was begun in the late 1960's in response to an idea originally voiced by a radio reporter, Niilo Tarvajärvi. The idea caught on quickly, and soon there were so many people wanting to have a share in the project that claims had to be settled in court from time to time. In 1984 Rovaniemi Town Council and the Rural District Council together had a Santa Claus Village built at the Arctic Circle to house various companies marketing products with a Christmas theme.

Local museums have also contributed to the attractions available for tourists. A local heritage museum was opened at Pöykkölä in 1959, a forest museum nearby in 1966, the provincial museum in 1975, the Rovaniemi Art Gallery in 1986 and the Arcticum building to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Finnish independence on 6.12.1992.

Architecture enthusiasts have also found their way to Rovaniemi, attracted by Alvar Aalto's town plan and the buildings designed by him. The new church also attracted much interest immediately after the reconstruction period, not only for its architecture but also on account of its enormous altar fresco by Lennart Segerströle. Attractions that have emerged later include the Arcticum building, designed by the Danish architects Claus Bønderup, Sören Birch, Ellen Waade and Torsten Thorup, the new airport terminal, designed by Markku Komonen and Mikko Heikkinen, and the new Art Gallery, designed by Professor Juhani Pallasmaa.

Although most of the tourists visiting Rovaniemi immediately after the war came by train, it was not to be long before the era of mass air travel dawned. It has been common since 1984 for direct Christmas flights to be arranged from London and elsewhere abroad, some in the supersonic Concorde aircraft.

The popularity of winter tourism has been enhanced by the increase in tourist activities amidst the snow and frost of the cold, dark season of the year, including snowmobile safaris setting out directly from the town centre, and reindeer and dog sleigh rides arranged in the rural district.

The hotel and catering college that has been operating in Rovaniemi since 1971 has ensured sufficient levels of skill among the staff responsible for looking after visitors to the area. Young people studying at the Niivavaara Secondary School and the Ounasvaara Upper Secondary School can even choose subjects connected with the tourist industry and continue their studies at the local polytechnic. The highest official recognition of the status of tourism as an object of study was the creation of a professorship in it at the University of Lapland in 1994. The post is currently held by Dr. Seppo Aho, whose closest international contacts are with colleagues in Germany and England.