Today Emperor, Tomorrow Beggar …

Archaeological Examinations of the World War II Sølund Camp in Denmark

Julie de Vos

In 1944, the German Luftwaffe established a regional headquarters in occupied Denmark, located in the forest area of Dyrehaven, Skanderborg. The Wehrmacht cleared the Sølund Psychiatric Institution and constructed bunkers, barracks, trenches, weapons depots and vehicle sites. After Germany's surrender in 1945, these barracks were repurposed as a refugee camp for German civilians – mainly women and children – fleeing the collapsing Reich. While the German occupation has long attracted scholarly attention, the postwar refugees have largely fallen into oblivion. Whether this is because they were defeated, poor, women, children, or considered to be 'victims', their history has only recently begun to resurface. In parallel to historical research, archaeological investigations now aim to recover this hidden narrative of German postwar refugees in Denmark. This article presents the 2022 archaeological excavations at the former Sølund camp, assessing the potential of observing the change of power behind the barbed wire of the camp through an exploration of materiality. Since the physical traces of the soldiers are far more prominent than those of the refugees – and given the lack of 'uncontaminated' contexts or structures used by refugees only – this research argues for a reflexive archaeological approach in order to access the experiences of the displaced inhabitants who lived at Sølund camp.

Keywords: contemporary archaeology, World War II, the German Luftwaffe, concentrations camps, internment, refugee camps, conflict

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Introduction

> April 28, 1946
> On the opposite side, the forest is reserved for the German refugees. We could see their wooden barracks, and along the barbed wire fence, the refugees wandered, young and old, with children by the hand. They looked at us indifferently. Some of the men still wore their uniforms, a last remnant of the German Wehrmacht's heyday. They probably hadn't dreamed that they would end up here behind their own barbed wire. I had to laugh inwardly, how strange it is that everything can be turned upside down: Today Emperor, tomorrow Beggar … (From the diary of the local barber Aage Danielsen (Danielsen n.d.), vol.2, February 1945–September 1946 [author's translation]).

While the wider public is generally well informed about the horrors of the Nazi extermination camps, many other types of concentration camps in Nazi Germany and beyond remain largely unknown (e.g. Banks 2011:113; de Vos 2020; González Ruibal 2020:320–321). This has long been the case for the refugee camps that held German civilians in Denmark. Once seen as temporary solutions to a crisis, they have faded from public memory. Yet, as I argue in this article, they can reveal unsettling truths about the normalization of 'states of exception' in state governance.

In the aftermath of the Second World War's genocide and mass destruction, refugee camps that hosted German civilians on the 'Whipped Cream Frontline' ('die Sahnefront' in German) may have seemed unimportant. 'Die Sahnefront' was a term used by German soldiers not only to denote the relative abundance of dairy products in Denmark, but more generally as a sarcastic reference to the easy life on a frontline without armed conflict and with many comforts, including ample food and drink and access to services and goods (DR 2005 ep. 2; Poulsen 1991). The camps were a pragmatic solution, used to feed and host the great masses of refugees, who could not be sent back to Germany, following orders by the SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) (Harder 2020:138–140). Denmark was part of the British occupation zone, and all negotiations and policy decisions regarding the refugees were made by and through the British military authorities.

The fact that the refugees have escaped general and academic attention (but for exceptions see Gammelgaard 1993, 2005; Harder 2020; Jensen 2020; Lyloff 2006) may be symptomatic of what Giorgio Agamben describes as the permanent state of exception, specifically 'the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics' by which the 'camp' becomes normalized as part of the 'biopolitical paradigm of the modern' (1998:117, 2005). Though Agamben treats the camp as a metaphorical space 'that is opened

when the state of exception begins to become the rule' (1998:168–169), as an archaeologist I am equally interested in the physical and social space of the camp. To me, the concept of the camp is more than a metaphor of the 'bare lives' that the state of exception creates; it is a material fact, produced by the biopolitics of modernity. The post WWII refugee camps in Denmark can help to foreground this transition into a permanent state of exception, recycled from totalitarian regimes into liberal democracies, where the camp, as a material manifestation of biopolitical control, remains disturbingly relevant in the context of the unwanted and refugees today.

The complex construction of (camp) space is well explained by Lefebvre (1991): the production of space is based on the triadic relationship between conceptually developed spaces named *the perceived space* (physical and material spatial practice), *the conceived space* (representations of space: conceptualized space linked to the underlying power structures and repressive laws, ordering and control of space), and finally *the lived space* (representational space: shaped by the interns and their encounter with space). Space is therefore not a fixed physical entity, but a cultural production embedded in physical, mental and social relations that are inseparable (see also Bernbeck & Pollock 2018:455). The Sølund refugee camp in Denmark, which forms the focus of this article, was formerly *Sølund Psychiatric Institution* and then a Luftwaffe headquarters, showing how the perceived space can remain intact, while both the conceived and lived space change radically.

In what follows, I present the background and key insights from the archaeological investigations of the former Sølund camp. By examining the material traces left behind and adopting a reflexive approach, the analysis explores the shifting power dynamics enclosed within the barbed wire.

When history failed Nazi Germany

Towards the end of World War II, during the winter of 1944–45, hundreds of thousands of East Prussians had to flee their homes, most of them by foot or horse and cart, due to the Soviet offensive on the Eastern Front (Gammelgaard 1993:9–16). Great parts of the North-Eastern corner of Germany, mainly East Prussia, were sieged by the Soviet troops between February and April of 1945. The railroads were either destroyed or used to move war material and soldiers, meaning that one of the few options for escaping the Soviet army was to cross the Baltic Sea from the ports of the sieged cities. On the 4th of February 1945, the German Führer ordered the civilians from these areas to be transferred to Denmark (Gammelgaard 2005:17; Harder 2020:55), where the civilians could be fed and taken care of by the German Wehrmacht. The passage though the Baltic Sea was dangerous; the ships

Figure 1. German refugees arriving in Denmark before the end of World War II. Photo by: Christoffersen, Fyens Stiftidende, Odense. Source: The Museum of Danish Resistance, photo archive reference FHM-215345. No Known Restrictions.

were critically overcrowded and constantly threatened by sea mines and Soviet submarines. The refugees were transported to the Western areas of what was then called the German Reich. Around 250,000 refugees ended up in Denmark during the winter and spring of 1945 (Harder 2020:13).

At this period in time, Denmark was still occupied by Nazi Germany (the German state between the years of 1933 and 1945); an occupation that lasted from April 1940 to May 1945. The German Wehrmacht had to find space for the many German civilians, the majority of whom arrived through the port of Copenhagen. Schools, sport centres and other public buildings all over the country were seized to host the refugees. The process was slow and the state of the civilians, who arrived after journeys of several weeks or even months, was poor. They suffered from malnutrition and – as a consequence of the former – intestinal diseases that massively increased the mortality of infants (Harder 2020:161–163). The agglomeration of people also stimulated the spread of diseases such as typhus, scarlet fever, measles and respiratory diseases. Mortality was generally high among the refugees during the first months of internment, only beginning to decrease in the autumn of 1945 (Harder 2020:161–163).

After the surrender of the German Wehrmacht in Denmark in May 1945, most of the common German soldiers were sent back to Germany, while high ranking commanders were captured. Overcrowding and devastation at the end of the war led to a British ruling that the many civilian refugees

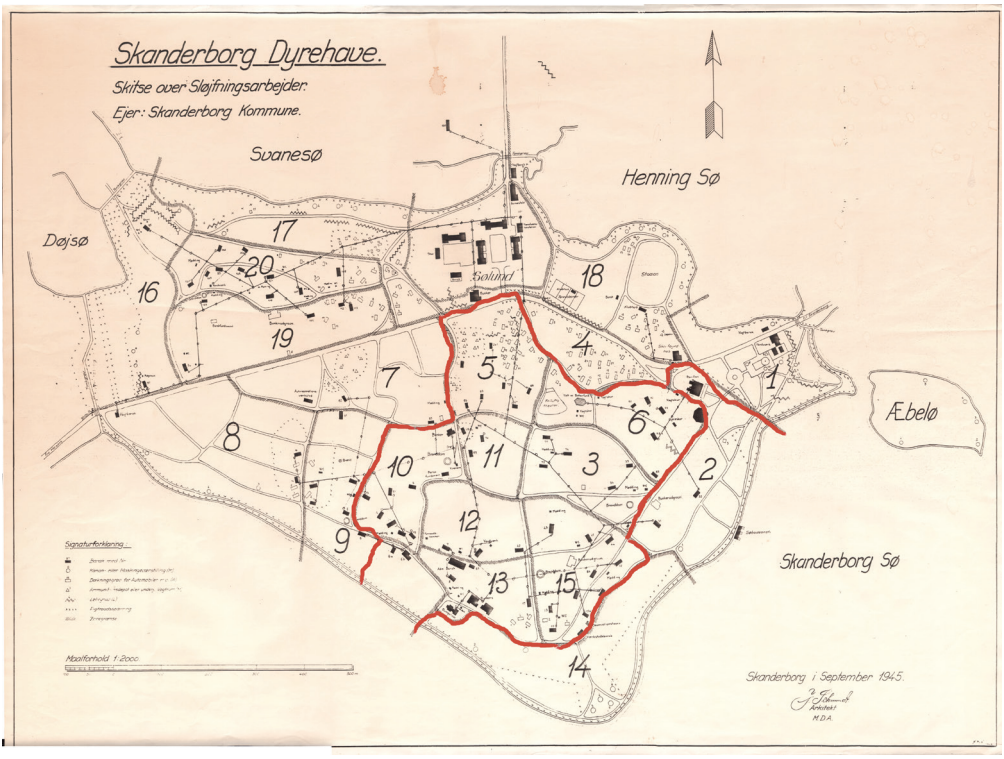

Figure 2. Map by the architect Johan Schmidt of the decommissioning work of the original Luftwaffe camp. The refugee camp was limited to the area within the red line from the autumn of 1945 and to the final dismantlement of the camp during the summer of 1946. Courtesy of the Historical Archive of Skanderborg.

in Denmark could not return to Germany, leaving them stranded indefinitely. What, in May 1945, appeared to be a question of weeks or months of waiting was gradually prolonged (e.g. Harder 2020:138–139), with the last refugees leaving Denmark as late as 1949.

As German military installations all over Denmark were abandoned by the armed forces, they were instead used for the internment of refugees. From 1946, some of these camps grew to a capacity of between 10,000 and 30,000, with the biggest camp, Oksbøl, becoming the 5th biggest 'town' in Denmark (Jensen 2020:43). This growth occurred as refugees were transferred from the smaller camps and gathered in the bigger camps, in order to streamline logistics and administration.

For multiple reasons, refugees were not allowed to leave the camps, and no Danish civilians were allowed inside. Key reasons included the prevention of integration of the Germans within Danish society, avoidance of fraternization, and control of both the refugee population and the transfer

of disease. While these orders were put in place by the British, the Danish authorities agreed with these conditions (Harder 2020:130–132). In this context, it is important to keep in mind the enormous hatred and desire for revenge that had flourished against the Germans during their occupation of Denmark. In this sense, keeping the refugees behind barbed wire was also for their own protection, especially during the first months after the German surrender.

While a Danish camp leader was formally in charge, the camps were primarily organized by the refugees themselves. They became societies in miniature, with kindergartens, infirmaries, cinemas, schools, and diverse workshops – similar to structures known from other internment settings, especially in POW (prisoner of war) camps (Banks 2011:123; Carr 2011:142).

Sølund, the Luftwaffe headquarters in Denmark and the refugee camp

The camp where the fieldwork of this research project was conducted (de Vos 2024a, 2024b, 2025a), was the German Luftwaffe headquarters in Denmark, located outside of the town of Skanderborg. This military facility consisted of 87 wooden barracks, four finished bunkers (another three in development), weapon depots, camouflaged vehicle sites, trenches, fire ponds, middens, latrines etc. (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:48–49). The former recreational area and the Sølund Psychiatric Institution (after which the camp was named) were confiscated by the German Wehrmacht in February 1944 (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:41), at which point work commenced on its transformation into Luftwaffe headquarters. In January 1945, the headquarters consisted of 44 officers, 23 officials, and 354 non-commissioned officers and enlisted men (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:88). After the occupation ended, some of the Luftwaffe soldiers were kept at Sølund – not as POWs, but as 'disarmed Germans' (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:48) – until the autumn of 1945, in order to teach the British military authorities (in charge since the surrender/liberation) about the secrets of the site and its machinery (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:116–118). Simultaneously, the rest of the camp was transformed into a refugee camp for the civilians. The barracks, and the barbed wire, from the northern side of the road, were moved to the southern side in order to reopen the road for traffic and begin to normalize the situation (Mølgaard & de Vos 2024:38). This small camp lasted for only one year from the summer of 1945, accommodating about 700 refugees (Mølgaard & de Vos 2024:39). In July 1946, the refugees and most of the barracks were moved to the one of the larger camps named for its geographical proximity to the village of Gl. Rye ('Old Rye' in English), while the area around

Figure 3. Left: A small barrack, target of excavation. May 2022. Photo by author. Right: Crew barracks in the Luftwaffe headquarters. Winter of 1944–45. Courtesy of the Historical Archive of Skanderborg.

Sølund camp was cleaned up and rehabilitated as the recreational area for the town of Skanderborg (Mølgaard & de Vos 2024:106–111).

The recreational area of Dyrehaven in Skanderborg was chosen as an administrative headquarters for the Luftwaffe, since it was located on an easily defendable peninsula, camouflaged by forest, and surrounded by lakes, should it be attacked (see Figure 2). It was a comfortable distance from the west coast of Denmark, which carried the risk of becoming the frontline of an allied attack, but not as far away as Copenhagen (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:19). Moreover, Skanderborg was close to sites that provided optimal conditions for signal transmission and reception and radar stations, such as Hemstok and Ejer Bavnehøj, and was near to the Gl. Rye airfield (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:26). Gl. Rye airfield was, just like Sølund, an important Luftwaffe site that was turned into one of the biggest refugee camps in the aftermath of the war. Skanderborg was also strategically located close to other key military sites, including the Wehrmacht Headquarters in Silkeborg (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:38).

Unlike the typical layout of internment camps – characterized by long sightlines, spatial efficiency, and tightly packed barracks to facilitate surveillance and control (Banks 2011:123) – Sølund presents a markedly different configuration. Originally constructed for the German Luftwaffe, the camp's barracks were designed to blend into the natural landscape, being dispersed among the slopes and concealed by the trees of the beech forest.

The fact that the Sølund barracks were originally constructed for the German military offered distinct advantages, particularly in terms of quality. Designed for long-term use, the barracks were well-insulated for win-

ter conditions and equipped with at least one stove per unit. This stood in stark contrast to many of the refugee camps hastily built elsewhere in Denmark, where insulation was poor and construction rudimentary (Harder 2020:189, 228), since it had not been determined that the refugees would remain in the camps through the winter.

Comparing the few known testimonies from the refugees, it appears that Sølund was one of the better camps. The Danish camp leader was sympathetic with the refugees, meeting their needs and even small requirements, as Anna Lietzau remembers in her diary (see Mølgaard & de Vos 2024:69). She also describes how the organisation of the camp diminished the feeling of being imprisoned or confined:

> On July 16, we too were among the last to move into the beautiful forest, where the scattered small barracks truly made the stay bearable and, to a large extent, erased the sense of being confined. In this way, everyone was able to create a "home" according to their own preferences and means. Clever female hands can, after all, conjure something cozy out of almost nothing, and necessity breeds invention. Thus, in the seclusion of the Sølund forest, a small community emerged—doing its best to overcome the long wait for repatriation (Mølgaard & de Vos 2024:44, 67).

Food was prepared by the refugees themselves in a community kitchen in the camp, while the meals were consumed in the barracks. Portions, or daily amounts of calories, were established by the guidelines of the SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) (Harder 2020:137), with children receiving less calories but, together with pregnant women and refugees at the infirmaries, they were allowed to receive 0.5 l. of whole milk a day.

In the immediate post-war period, and in the light of the known conditions of the German concentration camps, the treatment of the populations in the camps had to be carefully measured: the idea was to appear more generous internationally, but at the same time not to exasperate the Danes who also lived scarcely in the post-war years. The food was repetitive and unexciting, but it was adequate. Margarete Endres, one of the few refugees from Sølund for whom we have a personal written testimony based on her diary, (available in: Mølgaard & de Vos (2024)) wrote about the camp of Sølund, describing how they made use of the forest to supplement their diet, for instance collecting honey fungi that were cooked on the stoves in the evening (Mølgaard & de Vos 2024:78).

In Denmark, the Second World War has always been a topic of interest for both professionals and the broader public. Especially favoured are the heroic tales of an otherwise neutral and occupied country: the important clandestine fight of the resistance movement – viewed as delinquents dur-

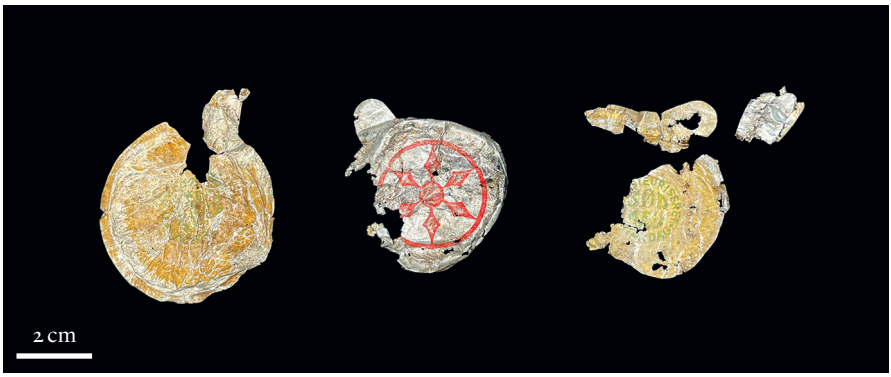

Figure 4. Foil tops from milk bottles. Photo by author.

ing the war but post-war heroes – and their evacuation of the Danish Jews to safety in Sweden in October 1943. Interest in such events appears to be part of the tendancy towards 'remembering the "big men" of politics and warfare' (McAtackney 2020:99). This is in stark contrast to the stories about the refugees, which have, on the one hand, been largely neglected, and on the other, constitute stories that did not fit very well with Danish self-perception. Perhaps this was the case because of these stories' ambiguous character, involving both charity and punishment. This kind of selective remembrance has been examined in similar contexts (Burström 2009; Jasinski 2018:647), suggesting a prioritizing of masculine war stories over those of women, children, the defeated, powerless and poor. These same reasons might have had an influence on why these stories apparently did not, until recently, appeal to historians, despite the fact that archives containing a great deal of relevant information have existed and been both available and accessible to researchers.

This article remedies these short-comings by focussing on the change from powerful to powerless – from dominant soldiers to dominated women, children and old men, whose stories and great sufferings have fallen into obscurity. While the stories of German soldiers have traditionally been the focus of attention, the day-by-day stories of the German civilians in the post-war period have not enjoyed the same intense degree of interest.

Archaeological explorations at Sølund

Over the months of March, May and June 2022, and as a part of the two research projects, called *Dis/place* and *Fortrængt* ('Erased' in English), archaeologists from Museum Skanderborg excavated in three different localities of Dyrehaven, and made an examination of the Lake of Skander-

Figure 5. Left: The administration barrack seen from the South-Western corner, winter of 1944–45. Courtesy of the Historical Archive of Skanderborg. Right: 2022, before excavation, seen from the North-Eastern corner. Photo by author.

borg, the lake that almost surrounds the peninsula of Dyrehaven. The discussion here will focus on the excavation of the small barrack at Sølund (Figure 3). The excavations at Sølund Camp faced a problem in terms of identifying traces of the refugees' occupation of the space. Being one of the smaller camps, it was reduced rather than expanded; as a result, there are no uncontaminated refugee contexts at the site.

As already noted, the Germans (in this case Luftwaffe) left more than destruction and suffering: they left behind an enormous amounts of things: 'The industrialized German war machine caused unprecedented destruction but was also supported by an enormous extraction, transformation, transportation, and deposition of things […]' (Farstadvoll 2022:88). The volume of accumulated material at Sølund added to the process of rearranging and cleaning up the site: the German soldiers had two weeks to clean up before the Allies definitively took over on May 19 (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:119–122) and the retreat was therefore less of a rush than can be seen in other locations. All the same, the German soldiers drew their understanding of 'cleaning' from their established 'scorched ground' tactics. The camp was not literally set ablaze in the dramatic fashion known from other contexts (see Farstadvoll et al. 2022:36–37; Seitsonen et al. 2017:14–16), but the intent to destroy was unmistakable. Paperwork and some equipment were deliberately burned, while furniture and tableware were thrown out of the windows of the Sølund building (the former psychiatric institution). Additional items were dumped in a nearby peat pit (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:122), while electronic equipment, including radio devices, were discarded in the lake. In the 1970s, private collectors recovered several of these objects, and

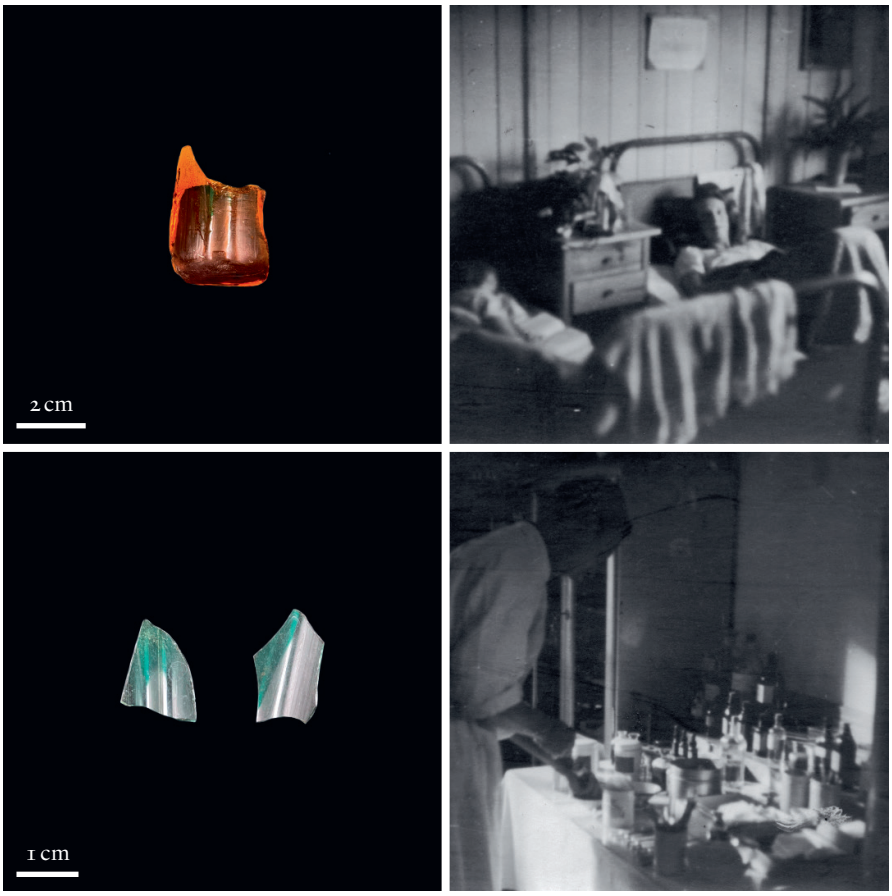

Figure 6. Left: Pieces of medical bottles and tubes. Photos by author. Right: From the infirmary barrack. Photos by Kurt Henke, courtesy of the Historical Archive of Skanderborg.

at least a couple of radios were later documented and registered by the local museum. Refuse was also dumped in pits in certain areas of the camp and this practice was probably also employed during the dismantling of the headquarters, as seen elsewhere (Seitsonen & Herva 2011:184).

Archaeological excavations at Sølund were supplemented by a collaboration with maritime archaeologists from the Museum of Moesgaard, who examined the lake via a 'sidescan', followed by diving examinations of the areas highlighted by the scan (Larsen 2022). Unfortunately, the highlighted areas turned out to be shells, meaning that any other objects have either been absorbed by the big layers of muddy lake sediments or swallowed by the earth, and are no longer accessible.

The administration barrack was the largest barrack at Sølund camp, measuring 27m 12,60×28,80m (de Vos 2024b). Built for administrative

purposes, when the camp was used by the Luftwaffe, the interior of the structure was divided in small subdivisions. This barrack was reused as an infirmary for the refugees. A number of discoveries point towards both periods of usage, including a fragment of a telephone receiver and fragments of medical bottles and test tubes.

The foundations of this barrack had not been blown up (see below for a discussion of the use of explosives at the site of the smaller barrack); they consisted of bricks and cement, and gravel/sand. Few artefacts were found within the foundations. This could suggest a more thorough cleaning process and careful use on behalf of the soldiers, indicating clear differences between the usage of this barrack and the small barrack investigated by the excavation team. The use of the large barrack as an administration building, with a bureaucratic use, managing sensitive information and being used only for work, probably encourage better maintenance and prevented people from throwing rubbish out of the window. The small barrack had a more domestic character to it, and the behaviour relating to this structure was quite distinct.

The small barrack

This crew barrack was fully excavated, with the exception of an area obstructed by a large tree that could not be removed (de Vos 2025a). The foundations measured approximately 12.5×5.0 meters, corresponding to the so-called Type A barrack (cf. Mølgaard & de Vos 2024:49). This type of barrack usually features an entrance with three doors leading into two main rooms (left and right), separated by a smaller central space. Both main rooms at Sølund were equipped with chimneys constructed from bricks. During the excavation, concentrations of heat-resistant bricks were found among normal bricks, indicating the area of the stove, while a fragment of a similar stove was identified elsewhere using a metal detector.

Due to the barrack's location on a slope, the site displayed a complex stratigraphy. The foundations had been dug into the terrain and, after the structure's removal, natural erosion had gradually covered the remaining features and traces of post-war clearance. The barrack structure was removed in the summer of 1946 and sent to the bigger camp in Gl. Rye, where up to 10,000 refugees were gathered from the autumn of 1946. The scarcity of building materials for the larger camp led to a communication to the contractor giving them permission to move, reuse and repair any suitable materials from Sølund.

Excavation showed that the foundation of the small barrack had been intentionally destroyed, with bricks and concrete fragments scattered across

Figure 7. East side profile of the small barrack, showing the fundament and the cut into the slope with all the following layers covering that part of the barrack. Photo by author.

the area. Only few bricks were found in situ, with a carefully arranged brickwork, hiding an empty bottle in the foundation, defying destruction (see also de Vos forthcoming 2025b). A crater in the structure confirmed the use of explosives in the dismantling of the barrack. Over the foundation remains, a layer of discarded building materials – such as roofing felt, rock wool, broken bricks, wooden debris, nails, window glass, electric cables and Eternit (fiber cement) – marked the final stage of dismantling the structure. The presence of concrete foundations is testament to the quality of these barracks.

The inhabitants of the barracks appear to have used the windows facing the slope for discarding waste, leading to refuse layers rich in artefacts. Erosion subsequently displaced these materials further downslope, creating better preservation conditions on the eastern side. In contrast, few traces of the barrack survived on the western side. The southern room (assuming the entrance with three doorways was on the northern side) yielded the most artefacts. It is likely that the two rooms were functionally divided into working and living spaces. Overall, the distribution of finds reflects more about the dismantling process than the everyday use of the barrack building.

In contrast to the administration barrack, the excavation team had no prior knowledge of the usage of this barrack, but the results indicated a mixed domestic and workspace, with quite a lot of 'office supplies' found at the site.

Rubbish out of the window

The excavations at Sølund revealed what had been lost, hidden or deemed worthless by the Germans when leaving the camp, as well as what was without value for the searchers of scrap metal after the abandonment or by the metal detectorists and collectors who have searched the area for decades. The great majority of finds belong to the category of building materials and unidentified pieces of industrial *matériel* – which could be described as a de-humanised collection of things. By de-humanised, in this context, I refer to materials 'detached from humanness or the human connection' though produced by humans, they do not awaken empathy, nor do they show any kind of association to persons, collectives nor do they reveal uses. Though it can be argued that the military identity is also standardised (Herva 2015:306) or 'mass produced' and is often associated to certain anonymous practices, there is still a strong human and civilian connection between soldiers and things, as the findings also show.

Through excavation, it was not possible to separate traces of the soldiers' activities from those of the refugees, since the occupation was continued for a total of only two years and the main layers reveal the moment of dismantling and the posterior erosion of the slope. Stratigraphically, it is therefore uncertain which objects belonged to the soldiers and which ones to the refugees, which is quite normal given the circumstances (Jasinski 2018 for a similar case). Some finds might, perhaps, indicate female or child use, or on the other hand male or military use, or be more likely to belong to a context of 'emperors' or 'beggars'. Naturally, these kinds of interpretations are rooted in biased assumptions, and need to be approached carefully. In similar contexts (though not the same), it has been suggested that the strongest indication of POW presence are the improvised home-made items made to substitute lacking essentials in the camp (Seitsonen et al. 2017:25). At Sølund, an example can be found in the transformation of iron wire into fishhooks – a kind of trench art, defined by Saunders (2000:45) as: 'any item made by soldiers, prisoners of war, and civilians, from war materiel directly, or any other material, as long as it and they are associated temporally and/or spatially with armed conflict or its consequences'. Most trench art is therefore also categorised as 'Recyclia' (Saunders 2003:183–186) that is, material of another purpose reused for making new things. Whether one is a POW, a soldier biding time in the trenches or a refugee isolated from the outside world, the manufacturing of these objects is a process that could be interpreted as therapeutical; supplying momentary occupation for the mind to keep their sanity (Carr 2011:140), and even give a sense of freedom by controlling time and space (Moshenska & Myers 2011:10). Endres testimony from the camp describes how bicycle spokes were repurposed as

Figure 8. Office supplies mosaic. Photos by author.

knitting needles to knit a jacket from unraveled old clothes (Mølgaard & de Vos 2024:79). In fact, an example of such improvised needles has been recovered from the Gl. Rye camp (Figure 10). Beyond their practical function of producing warm clothing for winter, these objects took on a profound symbolic and emotional significance, representing loss – of freedom, home, and dignity (Dusselier 2008). They have often been interpreted as carriers of memory (eg. Carr 2011), embodying the internees' struggles with loss and suffering (Dusselier 2008).

The small barrack did present a great variety of objects, including alcoholic beverages and personal hygiene objects, indicating both an office-like purpose and a domestic use of the space. This could indicate a barrack of mixed usage and does not necessarily say anything about a change of usage over time. Some distinct military-related artefacts were also recovered, for instance a Luftwaffe cargo identification tag and a clasp linked to day fighter

squadrons. While the ID tag was recovered from the excavation context, the clasp was discovered as a stray surface find during a metal detector survey.

Among the office related materials (Figure 8) are the remains of 5 yellow pencils, one of them spelling '1561 WEIC(H)' and a logo in golden letters corresponding to a Koh-I-Noor 1561 soft pencil, from which the wooden part is partially preserved. The other pencil remains consist of parts of the yellow wax coating, while a couple of graphite sticks belonging to the pencils were also recovered. The wooden part of most pencils had generally rotten away. Colourful plastic heads of pins, the metal rings from three ring binders, the lower part of a round paper clip bin with three clips preserved at the bottom, and the leftovers of a red stamp pad (a surface finding), all show a certain activity of paperwork in the barrack, feasibly carried out by the soldiers. This does not mean that the refugees did not reuse these leftover materials, making the distinction between phases of use even harder (see also Jasinski 2018). An ink bottle must be added to this category, since it has a professional use, but also reaches into the private sphere of homesickness and communication. The ink bottle is, perhaps, one of the most emblematic symbols of displacement in archaeological excavations of mid 20th century war contexts; meaningful because it makes home communication possible and is therefore and often found object in camps and war trenches. The ink bottles are the traces and reminders of the millions of letters written by soldiers; letters that are now been lost (González-Ruibal 2020:152).

Excavations have revealed surprisingly few sherds of broken faience plates or bowls and glasses, suggesting that food was probably prepared and ingested elsewhere, though the archives suggest that meals were ingested in the barracks. Alcoholic beverages, on the other hand, were present in the barrack, a variety of bottles and fragments were found, probably from both cognac and wine, with one example being a perfectly conserved green bottle for Danish cherry wine, produced by the J.J. Jacobsens EFTF. in Odense, Denmark[1] (Pedersen, M.R. 2022). 'Real' wine was already scarce in these northern territories since the outburst of WWII, so the popularity of wine with local ingredients, such as cherries, increased during the occupation. Cherry wine had been a valued export wine since the 19 C., but during the war, a low-quality substitution was also sold on the market and was referred to as 'Pullimut'.

Remains of other bottles and fragments suggest that drinking was habitual in this barrack, with Danish witnesses confirming that the high level of drinking and partying of the soldiers was well-known outside the camp. A

1 J.J. Jacobsens in Fåborg was sold to Odense Vin Kompagni In 1928 and the production moved to Odense in the 1930s, where this bottle was produced.

local underground newspaper documented the abundance of food and wine among the soldiers at Sølund: on a weekly basis, they had large amounts of smoked eel and salmon, fresh fruit, beer and wine (Champagne, Wine from the Rheine area and French Bourgogne), coffee and tea transported to the camp. Each day, the menu consisted of a variety of cold and warm dishes (meat included), fresh fruit, coffee, and wine (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:99). This really pained the local population, due to the very restrictive food and drink rationing system imposed during the occupation.

On the twentieth century front lines, alcohol was an essential component of the soldiers' daily rations (e.g. González-Ruibal 2020:148; Olsen & Witmore 2014:174). The consumption of alcohol was a way of keeping warm in some contexts, and also a means of coping with the extremely stressful situations of combat. Besides, as was probably the case of Sølund, alcoholic beverages also provided a way of killing time while waiting for combat. It has been noted that waiting is even a bigger part of being on the frontline than the actual time of active battle (e.g. Figenschau 2019:78; González-Ruibal 2020:143). Military life has a civilian and quotidian side to it, that has been overlooked due to the absence of the spectacular (e.g. Farstadvoll et al. 2022:32; Figenschau 2019:75). The remnants from Sølund illustrate some of the coping strategies of the soldiers; with alcohol as a means of controlling and normalising the environment either by soothing the feelings of estrangement towards the environment, the stress of being stationed away from home (Seitsonen 2018:106, 164) or by reality evasion (Figenschau 2019) entering a parallel, sensorial world through inebriation. Curiously, historical studies of concentration camps have focused on coping strategies residing in the structures imposed by the powerful (Bernbeck & Pollock 2018:455) and the coping strategies, in terms of resilience and resistance, formed by POWs. In the case of the soldiers at Sølund, the structures were imposed by themselves upon themselves; the conceived, perceived and lived space coincided. This assertion is, of course, only partially accurate, as the soldiers themselves had minimal influence over the design and construction of the camp. The point here is to underscore that, in contrast to camps built for prisoners or perceived enemies, this facility was deliberately and carefully constructed by those in power for the benefit of their own forces. The German soldiers in the military bases of Lapland created a symbolic barbed wire fence to exclude the wilderness and create an ordered world inside the camp as a way of coping with their displacement (Seitsonen et al. 2017:23). This differs from the Danish cases where the internal camp life had to be protected from the hostility of the local community.

In the camp of Sølund, there can be no doubt about the ability of the German Wehrmacht to obtain luxury products as alcohol. Alcohol was easily available to the Wehrmacht in general (Seitsonen et al. 2017:19), while it was

Figure 9. Hygiene related objects. Photos by author.

unavailable to the Danish population. The reasons for drinking might have been different from the ones that made alcohol a profoundly widespread habit in the German encampments in of the northern periphery (Figenschau 2019; Grabowski et al. 2014; Olsen & Witmore 2014; Seitsonen 2018:97), but the excavations at Sølund show that at more centred, administrative German headquarters, as the Danish Luftwaffe Headquarters, alcohol was also consumed in large quantities.

Testimonies portray the partying of the soldiers and the abundance in this camp of drinking, eating and women as common ways of biding time while waiting. They maybe also have been ways of enjoying life, while turning a blind eye to the German change of fortune; one could only have been relieved about being at the 'Whipped Cream Front' and not fighting with their compatriots on the deadly Eastern Front – certain life versus certain death. However, the whipped cream front also became fatal for a few: their

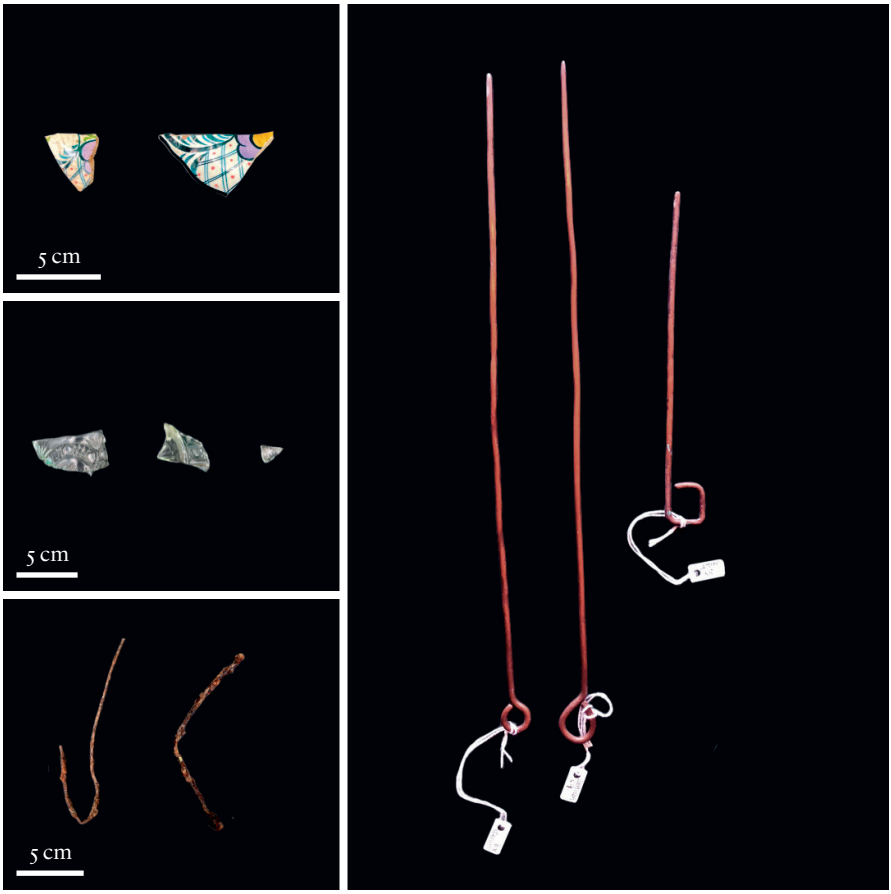

Figure 10. Possible refugee things fishhooks, faience and glass from a bowl from the Sølund camp. Knitting needles and crochet hook made from bicycle spokes or similar from the refugee camp of Gl. Rye. Photos by author.

audacity came to an unexpected end when two reserve officers/majors died from drowning after boating while drunk (in a kayak or a small boat) on Skanderborg Lake during one of their parties in June 1944. Yet another non-commissioned officer suffered the same fate later that summer (Pedersen, L.J. 2017:98–99).

The use of material culture in war situations provided a way of domesticating and controlling a situation of stress and displacement and corporeal hygiene in extreme situations and was a way of keeping human integrity and a sense of control when the world around was in chaos (Seitsonen et al. 2017). The German soldiers were supplied with basic hygiene articles to keep up standards (Figenschau 2019:76), and they did not have problems obtaining what they needed from the grocery stores. The refugees, on the

other hand, were (after the occupation ended) not allowed outside the camp and had no means of buying goods. Their hygiene was institutionalised, with a camp depot available for the collection of toothpaste, soap and shoe cream, while the camp was also equipped with a dental clinic (Mølgaard & de Vos 2024:54–55). Emptied toothpaste tubes are a recurrent find at the site, with the tubes coming from a variety of countries like Denmark, Germany, Italy, France and Holland. The health of the soldiers was important; a soldier with a toothache was not worth much and the care for dental hygiene was of high priority.

Other hygiene products, with a luxurious touch that might point towards the German soldiers, include a perfume bottle and an elegant, green – almost victory bell shaped – bottle spelling 'IDEAL', which might have contained Fitch Ideal Hair Tonic, known for its green colour. It is hard to say for sure that these belonged to the soldiers, since some refugees managed to bring a few personal belongings from their homes all the way to Denmark. The perfume bottle was most likely Danish, and definitely not German, since one of the few letters visible on the small piece of golden etiquette left, is an 'AA', equivalent to today's letter of 'Å' (a letter used in Scandinavian countries). Nevertheless, there seems to be a much greater presence of material culture relating to the soldiers, compared to the possible material remains of the refugees. Finds of pieces of flower decorated porcelain plates and ornamented glass bowls could be interpreted as belongings of the refugees, however, these kinds of home-making objects were not uncommon in German soldier encampments (Seitsonen et al. 2017:23).

Local community and memory

This project aims for more than making knowledge based on the material evidence in and on the ground. As noted by Burström (2009:169), excavation is not just a means of looking for material evidence, 'it is also a way of evoking an interest, awakening memories and creating an arena for meeting people and for telling stories' which 'contribute to our historical understanding'. The refugees in the Sølund camp have somehow escaped the local memory and there can be many reasons for this. Bernbeck and Pollock (2007:229) state the importance of working within the locality and building links with the local community, instead of working from a distance and with no personal connection, thereby creating a distance between the locals and the research project and obstructing the aims of the latter. The largest barrack of the camp at Sølund was the focus of a one-week community dig and was only partially excavated.

Archaeology has a very special way of instigating memory processes and, in the case of the Sølund camp, the fact that there had been German refugees in the area came as a surprise to most locals, especially the younger generations. The Museum collaborated with a senior year high school class (18 to 19-year-olds) and we had the chance to ask them about their previous knowledge about this recreational area of their hometown. Some students said that they knew that there were bunkers from WWII present in the area around Sølund, but they had never heard about the refugees. The material legacy of the bunkers appears to have sustained memory, while the absence of traces of the refugees may have enhanced their erasure from local histories, whether in terms of 'unremembering' or simply forgetting (Starzmann 2016:13). Systematic surveys were not carried out within the whole community, but an impression of local knowledge of the site were gained from conversations with a group of 20 senior year primary school children (c.15-years-old) who participated in the community dig. The memory of the Luftwaffe soldiers, it appears, is consolidated in the concrete monstrosity of the bunkers and seems to indicate a tendency for the material traces of the 'emperors' to dominate those of the 'beggars'.

This suggests the need for a prolonged process of re-materializing the memory of the refugees. Future plans include the excavation of another crew barrack as well as several trash pits or 'middens', once again involving local participants in the fieldwork. The Bunker Museum is working to integrate the refugee experience into its narrative and collections, and is now offering guided walking tours that discuss the refugee camp on-site – an expansion from the previous focus solely on the Luftwaffe headquarters. The project's principal investigator (and author of this article) also aims to extend the research to explore less disturbed refugee contexts in larger camps.

Hatred against the Germans was easier when the objects of hatred were the soldiers; whereas the ambiguity of hating German civilians (as the introductory quotation indicates) might have caused uncomfortable feelings. The archives of refugee administration have always been available for researchers, but it is only in recent years that these have sparked the interest of some historians. Since those locals that actively participated in our community excavation did not seem to find this past specifically uncomfortable, I cannot help but get the impression that this part of history was unable to compete with the excitement of the male stories of war, soldiers, occupation, and resistance; those narratives that confirm national self-understanding. Little attention has ever been paid to the other side of the coin: the darker consequences of victory. There has been little interest in the (female) stories of the, mostly women and children, German civilians (towards whom public opinion at the time was very low), even though these stories were at the same time quotidian and extremely dramatic.

The Whipped Cream Front: normalizing the State of Exception

The lack of attention paid towards the refugees might also be seen in the light of the WWII events more broadly:

> If vengeance is a function of power, then true vengeance is achieved only when the power relationship between perpetrator and victim is completely inverted. The victim must become the perpetrator. The powerless must become all-powerful; and the misery inflicted must in some way be equivalent to that suffered (Lowe 2012:125).

The urge for vengeance in the postwar period was strong and was especially accentuated in the areas where Germans had lived side by side with other nationalities (Lowe 2012:126). Denmark is a lesser case than, for instance, Eastern Europe, but the same feelings of hatred and vengeance come to light in the opening quotation from the local barber. He states that he could hardly help laughing when he saw the Germans behind their own barbed wire, while other diary entries depict a kind of pity for the defeated population. In his diary he recounts how, while secretly having a beer at the station hotel on April 25, 1945, he watched a train full of evacuated German soldiers arriving: 'Nothing had they gotten to eat in three days, miserable and hopeless to look at. What on earth can they do against the Allies? Nothing, so I thought, an ordinary person who is merely a spectator in the great drama. I went quietly home, as so many times before' (Danielsen, n.d.).

After five years of occupation and at a moment when the barbarities of the Nazi regime were well known and documented, the hatred against the Germans was in many ways publicly legitimate.

'Information', a newspaper that started as an underground anti-German paper during the occupation, warned on March 12, 1945, against sympathetic feelings towards refugees. It argued that the Danes should not succumb to the German refugees' presentation of themselves as subjects of pity (Harder 2020:83–84). Nevertheless, hatred was undoubtedly easier to sustain from a distance. Numerous testimonies indicate that, as individuals came into closer contact with the refugees, they began to look beyond the label of 'Nazi' and to recognize their shared humanity. In the case of the Sølund camp, some locals even chose to offer limited assistance to the refugees – despite strict prohibitions against any form of fraternization and the social risk of becoming a target of local disapproval or disgrace. Margarete Endres wrote in her diary of a rumour that a fisherman would cross the lake after sunset, bringing salt to the refugees. Her mother received some of the salt and Margarete notes in her diary how the food started tasting good again (Mølgaard & de Vos 2024:78–79).

Similarly, an older woman (born 1941), interviewed for the project in 2023, narrates how her father was forced to drive goods to the camp for the Germans during the occupation and, when the camp was turned into a refugee camp, he drove wood or peat for the camp. This woman, who was only around 5 years old at the time, sometimes went with her father and she still remembers a refugee girl of about the same age. The girl was often watching them from behind the fence and the local girl's father, who spoke German well, would speak to her. One day, the girl was gone, they asked her mother about her and discovered that she was sick. When asked what she wanted the most, the girl asked for a boiled egg. The local girl's father went to a grocery shop and bought eggs and told the merchant that it was for a young, German refugee girl, which he should not have done. After a few days, the rumour went about that the man was bringing food to the German refugees. This woman ended the interview anecdote saying: 'But they were not Germans, they were refugees'. This last comment could mean something like 'they were not Nazis, they were human beings', or they were simply refugees; nothing but a 'bare life'.

The Danish postwar refugee camps illustrate how swiftly emperors can become beggars, and how power must be continuously enacted to be maintained – underscoring the political logic of 'necessity' that justifies a state of exception, producing 'bare life' in the sense of the *homo sacer*. The Danish camps are a materialization of the idea of a permanent state of exception as a new post-World Wars social paradigm, as Agamben argues (2005). The space of the state of exception, as a space 'devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations – and above all the very distinction between public and private – are deactivated' (Agamben 2005:50), finds its most representative material expression in the internment camps in all their types and shapes, where people live outside of the law and civil rights and become what Agamben refers to as a 'bare life' (Agamben 1998). This same state of exception is closely linked to the concept of Supermodernity (González-Ruibal 2008). As González-Ruibal (2008:247) states, Supermodernity is not about the overcoming of modernity, quite the contrary; it is the excessiveness of Modernity, which in the archaeological record is characterized by industrial ruins, battle fields, mass graves and concentration camps. In Supermodernity, the characteristics of Modernity become so ubiquitous that they become normalized. After a century of genocide and mass destruction, we can no longer idealise the past, and the past has left us passive towards present atrocities: 'The view of Western modernity and its promises has darkened considerably within the West itself' (Huyssen 2000:34). Casella (2007, 2011) also emphasizes how modern states can be characterized as 'carceral societies', employing confinement as a tech-

nology of population management in order to draw boundaries between citizens and non-citizens.

Hannah Arendt (1943:265) states that, after WWII, humans lost their ability of keeping other humans safe: 'Hell is no longer a religious belief or a fantasy, but something as real as houses and stones and trees. Apparently, nobody wants to know that contemporary history has created a new kind of human beings – the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends'. The state of exception is politically presented as a necessity, a necessary solution to a problem, and we have now become so used to the state of exception that we can no longer see the bare lives that it produces. The camps have forever changed our measure of how to treat our co-human beings.

Conclusions: hopeful things – collecting for the future

The refugee camp of Sølund is an example of how conceived and lived space are not only two different things, but the lived space can change radically within the same surroundings. The conceived space of the camp was designed by the power – the Luftwaffe (though not the soldiers themselves), to hold their administrative headquarters. The soldiers created a lived space of deployed soldiers, but on a frontline that has been designated the Whipped Cream Frontline, while the refugees lived quite different lives in the same conceived space. The significance of the barbed wire changed from being a self-protecting fence designed to keep out the enemy, to being an inward facing, repressive fence. Both were ways of controlling and ordering space, by separating two radically different spaces.

The most obvious repressive feature in the Sølund camp is therefore imbedded in the fence that separated the refugees from freedom. But what freedom? Their homes were gone, and did not even belong to Germany anymore, since East Prussia became integrated into Polish territory by the end of the war. The fence becomes temporal, a separation from their former lives, that could no longer be accessed, and an inaccessible future. As highlighted above, the spatial design (with the exception of the fence) in this camp was not repressive, but the engagement with material culture is different from camp to camp, according to the conditions, availability and circumstances. We know from the testimony of Endres that the refugees used their time in the camps to prepare for their future lives, collecting and manipulating things (Mølgaard & de Vos 2024:79). Endres recounts that her father made a wooden box to store the materials they were collecting (Figure 11). They left the camps with more things than when they arrived

and, therefore, (in strong opposition to the Nazi concentration camps) there must have been at least a whiff of optimism for the uncertain future somewhere within the despair of having lost everything. As Bernbeck and Pollock (2018:456) observe, there is a marked difference in material engagement between the Nazi concentration camps and the POW camps. In the Nazi camps, the scarcity of food and the extreme conditions of constant threats of death, undermined people's (re)actions to survival, which meant that subversion also faded away (building on Löwenthal 1990:167). In contrast, within the POW camps, research has shown evidence of resistance which changes the material patterns in the camps. There is a – certain/uncertain – future for the refugees on the outside of the fence, which makes them engage differently with things. While in the Nazi camps, the few material things

Figure 11. The wooden box of Margarete Endres, Museum Skanderborg. Photo by Christel Riis Orthmann.

available become of uppermost importance for survival in the now (Myers 2011:80), the material world surrounding the German refugees become one of opportunities, of collecting, for the future and might therefore become artifacts of hope rather than artifacts of loss.

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