

It is widely known that the church records between 1850-1865 for Einedal were lost during the Second World War. Most people, however, do not know the details surrounding the events that lead to the destruction of the records. The following information regarding the assault on Bruflat was obtained in June 2007 when Per Odd Smelhus interviewed his cousin Ole A. Robøle, who was an eyewitness to the events. Other sources of information were taken from the website <http://hem.fyrstorg.com/robertm/norge/>

Assault on Bruflat

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WAR

The war came to Norway, not because of the political views of the Norwegians, but rather the geographical position of the country. Both the Germans and the allies had planned to invade Norway at the same time. The Germans needed Norway because of its deep fjords that surround the country. The Fjords would make an excellent place to hide the German Navy, which was used to protect cargo shipments of iron ore taken from Sweden. In order to hamper the German Navy and cripple the iron ore shipments to Germany the British planned to mine the Norwegian waters. The Allies' policy towards Norway was confusing and unclear with no real goals. Both Germany and the Allies launched operations at the same time. On April 8th British destroyers mined the sea approach to Narvik, while landing troops waited in port, loaded on their transports. The German invasion force was already making its way towards Norway.

THE INVASION

The German invasion force targeted six coastal cities namely Oslo, Kristiansand, Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim and Narvik. After the invasion force landed and the area was secure, the Germans decided to link up with the other German forces in Trondheim. It was also important to the Germans to have control on all the roads from the Westcoast, so that allied troops would not be able to enter the interior of Norway.

WAR IN VALDRES

The German troops headed towards

Valdres on two fronts, through Hadeland – Lands along Lake Randsfjorden, and through Ådalen and Begnadalen along Lake Sperillen. The first battle took place in Bagn, Sør Aurdal the 18th and 19th of April. (See Map 1). This was a very hard fought battle.

The troops that came along Randsfjorden intended to occupy Etnedal and continue over Tonsåsen and further to Fagernes and the rest of Valdres.

The first battle in Etnedal took place the 23rd of April by Høljarast Bridge on the southern end of the valley. The Norwegian troops were prepared for a battle. It was very important to stop the enemy from crossing the bridge as this was the gateway into the Valdres. Dynamite was placed underneath the bridge and was to be detonated during the time the Germans advanced. The Norwegian soldiers took up position under the cover of the hillside. As soon as the Germans stepped foot onto the bridge the Norwegians opened fire driving the German troops back. The Germans retreated a couple of miles and settled down for the night. Later, before 10:00 pm the Norwegians detonated the bridge.

The following morning the Germans launched a fierce attack on the Norwegian forces, who had to retreat up towards Tonsåsen. The Germans then repaired the bridge and were able to move on. During this skirmish a young Norwegian soldier from Opstryn was killed. His name was Johan A. Berge.

The next battle took place at Tonsåsen near the Sanatorium between the 24th and 27th of April. The battle that took place on the 25th is characterized as the hardest fought battles in the Valdres area. Two Norwegians were killed and several others were wounded. A Norwegian ski-patrol tried to attack the Germans from the back, but failed. During the battle the Germans requested air support from their planes. The falling bombs forced the Norwegians to retreat towards Aurdal. After the battle, the Germans burned the Tonsåsen Sanatorium to the ground.



German soldiers crossing Lunde Bridge

ASSAULT ON BRUFLAT

The Norwegian troops predicted that the Germans would also follow the Etna River up to Bruflat on their way to Tonsåsen. Two companies, waited in different positions to prevent this, one led by Major Hermansen, took position at Robøle, and the other lead by Capitan Seim and Capitan Ula took position by Bruflat. Seims group was divided into two, one of them took position at Prestegården – where the church minister lived. From there they had good view down at Bruflat.

On April 24, 1940 the German army was advancing on Bruflat from the south. Fearing that the church records would be lost during the upcoming confrontation, the church administration decided to move the church records to safety. The three ministers of the Bruflat church, Ludvig Riise, Ole Hernes and Sigurd Bergene from Slidre, decided to have the records taken from the church and moved up the hill to the Kirkebakken farm where they would remain safe. In an attempt to hinder the German advance, the Norwegian army tried to detonate the Lunde Bridge, but to no avail. It seems that the one hundred and twelve-year-old bridge made of nothing but stone, took only minimal damage, in spite of

70 kilos of dynamite, and remained intact for the German army.

The Norwegian army was already in place when the Germans marched into Bruflat and they fired on the Germans as they advanced into town. As the shots rang out, the townspeople panicked and fled to the hills seeking refuge at Klatstølen and Byfuglibygda. The Germans entered town a little later, and while a small unit of German soldiers passed by the church, a group of Norwegian soldiers, who had taken position on a stone range called Bruflatberget, by the Etna river, opened up on them.



German soldiers crossing Lunde Bridge

There was an exchange of gunfire that lasted only moments. The small unit of German soldiers took many casualties, but the remaining survivors crawled back to a safer position to reorganize and fetch a cannon that they had left by Lybekk's store. The Germans brought the cannon forward to a new position by the Bruflat store.

Just after the skirmish at the Bruflat Church, two elderly looking women were seen walking from Lybekk's store towards the Bruflat farm. Shortly afterwards smoke and then flames were seen coming from the barn. No one knows for sure, but the theory is that the two elderly ladies were in reality two German soldiers dressed like women, who must have felt that the Norwegians would not shoot at them. Their plan was to provide a cover of smoke over the area so that it would be hard to recognize them when they attacked the Norwegian positions. The German



German soldiers "visiting" Bruflat.

troops advanced forward and started shooting the cannon randomly in all directions and hit the tower of the church and some of the gravestones. Fortunately there was only minimal damage done to the church and churchyard. The Kirkebakken farm, however, was not so lucky, as shrapnel from one of the shots that hit the church hit the house at Kirkebakken..

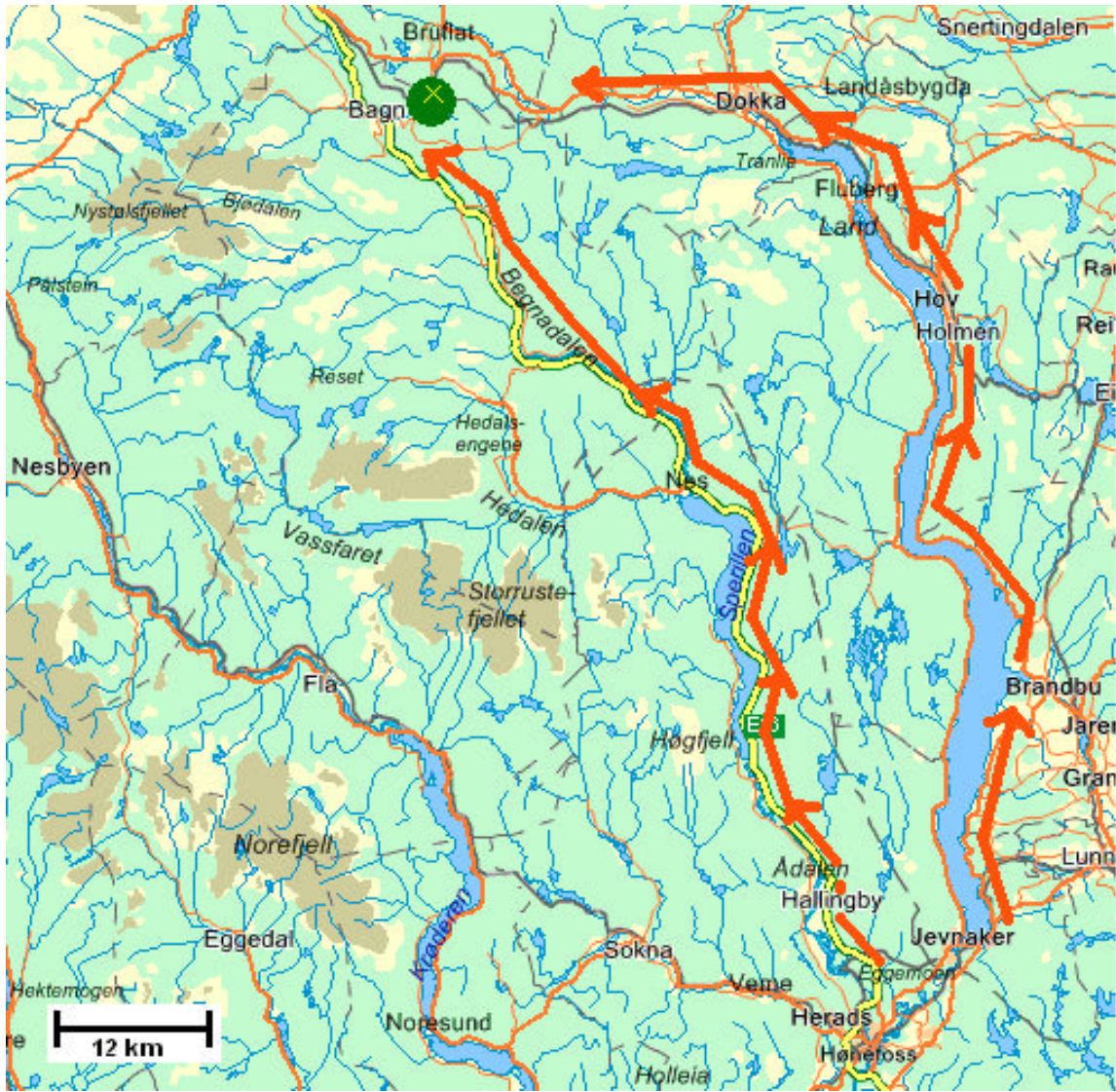
The Kirkebakken house was not the only house destroyed on that day. The cannon did a lot of damage in this area. A house at the Rødningen farm, another house at Thorshaugen and also Øygarden were all hit by shrapnel and set on fire. The doctor's house and the Klattstølen farm burned down as well. As all this was taking place a very curious fourteen-year-old Ole A. Robøle, who lived at the Klattstølen farm, was following the battle down in the valley with a telescope. He saw the shrapnel from the shell that hit the church strike the house at Kirkebakken, where the church records were hidden. Most of the records came out unscathed by the fire, however the editions 1850 – 1865 were totally lost. Once the farm caught fire he and his family fled to the Byfuglien farm.

The Norwegian troops that were located at Prestegarden had to retreat from their position and went up the hill towards Aurdal. This gave the Germans access to Tonsåsen through Fjellsbygda, which had been their plan all along. They never crossed Etna River towards Robøle where

Hermansen's company had their position and where the Norwegians had established a field hospital. Most of the townspeople had fled northward behind Hermansen's company.

The Germans made their camp at the Bruflat farm and established a camp hospital at the Lunde farm. After three days, Sverre Klevgård and another farmer drove a motorcycle down to Bruflat. They had strapped a pole to the motorcycle and hung a white flag on the pole. They then asked for permission to go back to their homes to milk the cows, which they were allowed to do.

Gradually the people returned to their homes and found that the Germans occupied some of the houses. It was obvious that the enemy had celebrated the victory, as many of the German soldiers were less than sober. Two teenage girls, Hilda and Gunhild Purkestad, hid in the forest, and observed the German's victory celebration. There was music and dancing in the house where the Tidemandsens lived and operated the Telephone Central. When Iver and his family returned, they noticed the table linen and silver had been used, but nothing had been destroyed. During the occupation the Germans plundered the stores that the shop-keepers had abandoned, and they could be seen walking around with good, warm woolen socks. The Germans also took chocolate and coffee. Long, warm underwear was obviously a popular article as well. After two or three days



Map 1 – showing the German advance on Bruflåt

of rest the soldiers moved on leaving behind officials, who took control over the administration of the area. The citizens had to adapt to this new situation, since there were a lot of changes and new regulations.

The Norwegian Government that fled to London used radios to send messages back to the Norway, this prompted the Germans to ban radios. Confiscating the radios from the people did not help much as the Etnedøler were very creative and hid radios on different farms, even in the Bruflat Church tower. Messages were taken in and brought out to the public illegally.

Soon after the war started, the Germans controlled the country and the Norwegian civilians quickly organized a resistance army. Etnedal's resistance group was a very strong and active group. Their goal was to fight nazism, both the Germans and their Norwegian sympathizers. In a community like Etnedal the situation was very tense and a lot of suspiciousness developed among the people. Those who were active members of the resistance group were afraid of being reported by a neighbor and arrested and sent to Grini, a camp outside Oslo. From there people were usually deported to camps in Germany or Poland.

At the end of the war, several camps in the forest were used as a hiding place for members of the group. In Etnedal, the camp at Breien farm, Breiesleiren, was used to hide people. Even Russian soldiers that had escaped from the Germans were hidden at Breiesleiren for awhile. Another camp was at Topptjerdalen, up in the mountains, where Odd Hodne and others had their headquarters. On June 14, 1944 the Germans decided to raid the camp. In the preparation for this raid the Germans occupied the telephone Central. No communication was allowed except that controlled by the Germans. Somehow, the Norwegians were warned and able to flee the camp shortly before the raid took place.

Fifteen years of church records fell victim to the Nazis during their occupation of Bruflat. Ironically the leaders of the Bruflat church,

fearing for the safety of the church records, moved them one of the only houses that would be destroyed during this confrontation in the Valdres.