

Norwegian camps: Beisfjord near Narvik, 1942-1945

Yugoslav prisoners and Soviet prisoners of war

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Beisfjord is a small village situated 12 kilometres south-east of Narvik. Less than a hundred inhabitants lived there during the war. In June 1942, the SS set up a prison camp in the centre of Beisfjord to house 600 Yugoslavian prisoners. An additional camp was built to house the camp guards. In October 1942, the inmates were moved out and the Wehrmacht took over the camp, after which Soviet prisoners of war began arriving, and the camp was used to hold them until peace came in May 1945. The number of Soviet prisoners rose from 600 in 1942 to more than 1,500 by the end of 1944.

The Yugoslav prisoners

On 24 June 1942, the Narvik plain sailed into the port of Narvik. A total of 800 prisoners were disembarked on Fagernes quay. They set out on the 12-kilometre-long march to Beisfjord, where a newly built prison camp awaited them. Prisoners who collapsed from exhaustion along the way were beaten with truncheons or stabbed with bayonets by the guards. Five prisoners were beaten to death on the march, and one of them - Vojko Vojvut from Serbia - was shot and killed. He was ill, and was shot as his brother Miroslav attempted to protect him from the guards. Norwegian guards also patrolled alongside the marching prisoners and beat them. Thus, the nightmare for the Yugoslavs began.

A total of 4049 Yugoslavs were imprisoned in Norway from June 1942 until the war ended. During that time, approximately 2,400 of these men either died from disease and malnutrition or were killed. The Yugoslav prisoners who came to Norway had been captured as partisans or sympathisers during the fighting in Yugoslavia, and were due to be executed. Instead the SS sent them to Norway to work in 25 camps in Trøndelag, Nordland and Finnmark. The largest number of prisoners died in the Beisfjord camp: 748 of 800 prisoners died in the space of four months. The treatment the prisoners received in the five SS-run camps was particularly brutal during the first nine months of operation, between June 1942 and March 1943. When the Wehrmacht took over the prison camps and the Yugoslavs were officially classified as prisoners of war, conditions improved markedly.