

From Imports to Local Goods: Material Culture of the Luftwaffe Airfield in Pori, Finland

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The Feldluftpark Pori project (2019–2021), coordinated by the University of Turku and the Satakunta Museum, represents the first systematic conflict archaeological study of the German Luftwaffe airfield in Pori, Finland. During the Continuation War (1941–1944), the airfield served as a key logistical hub for northern operations, with extensive barracks and technical facilities constructed by German forces. Excavations at the Pinomäki Hill barracks area revealed over 2,800 artefacts, including ceramics, food containers, hygiene products, and personal items. The assemblage shows that German provisioning was based primarily on standardized German imports, supplemented especially by Finnish industrial and agricultural products. Comparison with archival sources shows how archaeology provides insights into everyday practices such as diet, hygiene, and consumption that remain absent from written records. These findings contribute to broader discussions of German wartime presence in Finland and the adaptive strategies of military provisioning.

Tuontitavaroista paikallisiin tuotteisiin: Luftwaffen Porin lentokentän materiaallinen kulttuuri

Feldluftpark Pori -tutkimushanke (2019–2021), jota koordinoivat Turun yliopisto ja Satakunnan Museo, oli ensimmäinen konfliktiarkeologinen tutkimushanke Saksan ilmavoimien käyttämällä lentokentällä Porissa. Jatkosodan (1941–1944) aikana lentokenttä toimi tärkeänä logistisena solmukohtana pohjoisia operaatioita varten, ja saksalaiset rakensivat alueelle laajat kasarmi- ja huoltotilat. Pinomäen kasarmialueella suoritettujen kaivauksien tulokset toivat esiin yli 2800 löytöä, kuten keramiikkaa, ruokapakkauksia, hygieniatuotteita ja henkilökohtaisia tavaroita. Aineisto osoittaa, että saksalaisten huolto perustui pääosin saksalaisiin standardoituihin tuontituotteisiin, joita täydennettiin etenkin suomalaisilla teollisuus- ja maataloustuotteilla. Vertailu arkistolähteisiin osoittaa, kuinka arkeologia tarjoaa näkökulmia sota-ajan arkielämän käytäntöihin, kuten ruokavalioon, hygieniaan ja kulutukseen, jotka jäävät kirjallisista lähteistä puuttumaan. Tutkimuksen tulokset täydentävät laajempaa keskustelua Saksan sodanaikaisesta toiminnasta Suomessa ja huollon mukauttamisstrategioista.

Introduction

During the Continuation War in 1941–1944, the Finns offered airfields to their German co-belligerents. One such airfield was located in Pori, where the Germans established a field air depot, which was responsible for providing spare parts, major repairs, and aircraft replenishment for the air units stationed in northern Norway and northern Finland. To achieve this objective, the Germans launched a large-scale project at the airfield, where an extensive barracks complex was constructed in the surrounding area. In addition to this, the Germans established smaller barrack sites elsewhere in Pori and rented schools, hotels, and private accommodations in the city center.

When Finland signed an armistice with the Soviet Union in September 1944, German troops evacuated, demolishing much of their infrastructure. Although Finnish forces succeeded in defusing some of the timed charges, a substantial part of the airfield's structures was nevertheless destroyed or damaged. While the runway and certain surviving buildings were later reused by the Finnish Air Force, most of the German-built facilities soon disappeared, and the site's wartime past gradually faded from public consciousness.

Despite its strategic importance in maintaining air operations in northern Finland and Norway, the German presence in Pori has received relatively little scholarly attention compared to the German barrack sites and prisoner-of-war camps in Lapland and Hanko, which have been extensively researched in the past years (Banks et al. 2018; Fast & Väisänen 2020; Fast 2024). The *Feldluftpark Pori* project (2019–2021), coordinated by the University of Turku and the Satakunta Museum, represents the first systematic conflict archaeological investigation of this Luftwaffe base (Väisänen 2020). Combining excavation, archival research, and public engagement, the project explored the material culture of the German presence in Pori, with particular focus on the Pinomäki Hill barracks area.

In this article, we ask how the archaeological finds from Pinomäki Hill (Fig. 1) can illuminate the everyday practices and provisioning strategies of German personnel at the base and how this material evidence complements or challenges the picture presented in contemporary archival sources.



Fig. 1. Pinomäki hill stands out in the photograph from the 1950s as a tree-less clearing in the middle of the forest (visible on the right side of the image). Several German-built barracks can still be seen in the photo. On the left side of the image is the former German technical area, where a single German aircraft hangar from the war period remains. Source: Finnish Defence Forces' Photograph Archive.

Feldluftpark Pori: Conflict archaeology project in Pori, Finland

The *Feldluftpark Pori* project combined archaeological excavation, archival research, and oral interviews in order to explore the material culture and wartime history of the site. Public outreach was an integral part of the research. Archaeological excavations were carried out together with high school students and youth groups, complemented by lectures, guided tours, and exhibition planning (Fig. 2). These activities introduced participants to archaeological methods and provided opportunities to discuss the sensitive legacy of Finland's wartime involvement with Nazi Germany (Väisänen et al. 2021).

This outreach dimension was particularly significant given the contested place of the Continuation War in Finnish historical consciousness. For decades, Finnish historiography portrayed the conflict as a separate war into which Finland was drawn unwillingly, a narrative

that distanced the country from Nazi Germany's war crimes and muted questions of complicity (Palonen 1975). School textbooks long silenced or softened this relationship, and although more recent curricula address the topic more critically, public presentation of Finland's cooperation with Germany still provokes emotional debate and resistance (Hakoköngäs & Sakki 2024). At the same time, popular culture has normalized Nazi imagery through films, video games, and internet memes, shaping how younger generations encounter the subject for the first time (Kallioniemi & Kärki 2019).

By situating archaeological fieldwork within this complex terrain of memory, the *Feldluftpark Pori* project used material culture as a neutral but tangible starting point for dialogue. Everyday artefacts, from ceramics to toothpaste tubes, offered accessible entry points for participants to reflect on collaboration, exchange, and the lived realities of wartime. In this way, the project demonstrated how conflict archaeology can operate simultaneously as scholarship and as a tool for mediating difficult heritage.



Fig. 2. The 2021 excavation was carried out as part of a youth archaeology camp, during which the participants conducted their own excavation and curated an exhibition presenting the finds. Photo: Mikael Leppäniemi, Satakunta Museum.

Excavations at Pinomäki Hill

Archaeological fieldwork for the *Feldluftpark Pori* project focused on Pinomäki Hill, a forested area southwest of the main airfield runways. According to wartime maps and a post-war aerial photograph by the National Land Survey of Finland, this area contained a residential complex of eight barracks, two warehouses, and ancillary buildings (Fig. 3). Rising above surrounding wetlands, the hill offered a dry and practical location for accommodation. Since the area did not contain buildings of major military significance, such as aircraft hangars or large repair facilities, it was largely spared from German demolitions at the end of the Continuation War. Many of the structures remained in use by the Finnish Air Force into the 1960s, after which they were gradually dismantled.

In 2020, excavations carried out by high school students and participants from the Pori Adult Education Center focused on two excavation areas. The first area (13.5 m²) targeted the remains of a small storage and accommodation building at the edge of the base. Postwar Finnish inven-



Fig. 3. Excavation areas on the Pinomäki hill marked on an aerial photograph from 1946, in which most of the area's German-built structures are still visible. Aerial photo: National Land Survey of Finland. Edits: T. Väisänen.

tories describe it as a timber structure with seven rooms furnished with stoves, beds, and cabinets (National Archive of Finland, T-17944/40). Briefly reused by Finns as a technical warehouse, it was dismantled by the late 1950s, leaving only rubble and a single *Porin Matti* heating stove visible on the surface when excavations began.

A second 2020 excavation area (12 m²) focused on a refuse pit near another German storage building that later served as a mess hall. This structure was dismantled in the early 1950s, and no visible traces were observed during field inspection. However, a refuse pit in its immediate vicinity preserved discarded artefacts linked to both food consumption and personal care.

In 2021, a youth archaeology camp excavated a further refuse pit (8.5 m²) adjacent to a barrack, which, based on ambiguous markings on a German map from 1943, may have been used to accommodate civilian workers. No postwar reuse of this building is recorded, and it too was dismantled by 1952. The associated pit contained material that complements the assemblage from 2020, including ceramics, drinking vessels, and personal effects.

Excavation methods followed a grid system with successive 10 cm spits, sieving of all soil, and unit-level recording of finds. These methods, selected partly for their pedagogical value, ensured systematic recovery of material while allowing student and youth participants to learn archaeological techniques. Metal-detecting surveys supplemented the work by identifying stray finds, though their interpretive value was limited due to postwar disturbances.

Traces of everyday life in the German base

Excavations at Pinomäki Hill produced 2,836 artefacts, complemented by additional metal-detected finds. The largest assemblages consist of ceramics (1,048 items) and construction debris (987), followed by beverage and drinking vessels (488). Food containers (134) and osteological remains (59) add further insight into provisioning practices. Smaller numbers of hygiene products (27), personal effects (19), miscellaneous items (11), and unidentified fragments (63) complete the assemblage (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Finds from the three excavation areas are arranged by category. The upper chart shows the number of objects, the lower chart their weight. The weight chart does not include the *Porin Matti* stove or the fire bricks found inside it.

Ceramics represent the single largest category in terms of quantity. Most derive from tableware produced by the Finnish Arabia factory, including stamps for diamond-pattern faience used between 1925 and 1953, as well as the tunnel kiln mark used between 1932 and 1949 (Kovanen 2009). Soviet-manufactured ceramics were also present, with stamps identifying several factories under the People's Commissariat of Local Industry, located in Volkhov, Chudovo, Proletariy, and Konakovo. Interestingly, one stamp found in the rubbish pit originates from the

Kuznetsov factory in Tver, dating to the period before the Russian Revolution (Müller & Tarna 1979). In comparison, only three German ceramics stamped with the Wehrmacht eagle were recovered.

Construction debris consists largely of nails, window glass, and bitumen felt. Bricks were abundant in the excavation area and its surroundings, many stamped by the Finnish company Arabia, while a locally manufactured *Porin Matti* stove was preserved beneath vegetation in a German storage building. Two inscribed plaques, one stamped *Leo Ross Berlin W9* and another bearing operating instructions for a boiler (Fig. 5), provide evidence of imported German technical equipment at the site.

Food-related finds included heavily corroded cans, one identifiable as a sardine tin, together with wrappers from *Tilsiter Bona* and *Ada* processed cheese. A lid stamped *Alete*, a German manufacturer of infant foods that also supplied Wehrmacht rations (Pool & Boack 2010), was recovered from the refuse pit, as were fragments of a red Bakelite salt shaker reconstructed nearly to completeness. Osteological remains



Fig. 5. German operating instructions for a boiler were discovered in the second trench in 2020, together with a considerable number of ceramic vessel fragments. Photo: Kaisa Lindewall, Satakunta Museum.

comprised mainly cattle, with additional sheep, cod, and pheasant bones (Nurminen 2021).

Beverage and drinking vessels are dominated by fragments of wine, beer, and soft drink bottles, together with military canteen cups and a porcelain stopper from the Pori Brewery. The majority of the bottles had no markings indicating their contents. Only one bottle was labeled *Landser 1744 Wein Beck*.

Finds relating to medicine and hygiene most often consisted of products attributable to specific manufacturers or brands. *Tschamba Fii* sunscreen and several tubes of *Frostschuttsalbe* anti-frostbite ointment reflect adaptation to both sunny and cold weather, while French *Grains d'Évian* and German *Spalt* medicine containers and a Bakelite container of *Losantin* decontamination tablets indicate the presence of other imported pharmaceutical products. Three glass syringe caps further suggest medical use.

Toothpaste tubes were the most numerous hygiene artefacts, most of which represented a variety of German brands (*Dontoklar*, *Blendax*, *Nivea*, *Chlorodon*, and *Leo-Werke*). In addition, a single Dutch *Claudine* toothpaste tube was recovered. Other hygiene products included *Rasiquick* shaving foam, toothbrushes, and comb fragments. In addition, six small bottles of varying appearance were recovered from the rubbish pits, some still fitted with Bakelite caps. Some of the bottles, based on their appearance, contained *Eau de Cologne* or other men's perfumes. However, these were not necessarily used for hygiene purposes, as such perfumes were also consumed as an alcohol surrogate during the war (Grabowski 2014: 17).

Personal effects were relatively scarce. Footwear care, a routine element of military life, was represented by Norwegian *Viking* shoe-polish containers and a shoehorn inscribed with the name of *Potthoff Schuhe* shoe store in Gütersloh. Writing was another everyday practice, reflected in three small ink bottles, including one marked *Poncet*. A small group of buttons was recovered, although none belonged to standard-issue uniforms. Only a single personal ornament, a heavily worn canteen ring, was found in the refuse pits. More direct evidence of individual soldiers comes from an identification tag belonging to Obergefreiter Kroll of an aircraft maintenance section (*Werft*), together with an unstamped blank tag mold.



Fig. 6. Examples of the finds mentioned in the article, whose origins have been successfully identified. Photos: Tomáš Pancíř.

Whereas the finds from the excavation areas could be directly associated with German activity, metal-detector surveys also produced numerous artefacts whose attribution to the Germans is more uncertain, and these have not been included in the overall find totals presented above. These include Finnish-manufactured toothpaste tubes (*Trans-Meri* and *Oxygenol*) and a military pharmacy container (F.M.M.), the face of a *Jungmans* wall clock, a yellow-anodized aircraft component of uncertain provenance, and two engagement rings recovered near a former barrack. One was inscribed with the Finnish name Taimi, which also appears in a German soldier's photograph album from Pori in the author's possession. Although the coincidence is striking, the available evidence does not allow a direct connection to be made.

Although no ammunition was recovered from the excavated areas, metal-detecting on the wider Pinomäki Hill produced 42 shell casings and eight live rounds, which were disposed of in cooperation with the Finnish Defence Forces immediately after the excavation. Most ammunition was Finnish, including many post-war types, indicating later re-use of the area for shooting practice. German material was limited to two casings, a 7.92×57 mm brass casing manufactured by HASAG and a 7.65 mm casing manufactured by Gustav & Genschow & Co., together with the eight live 7.92×57 mm rounds. A group of flare-gun propelling charges and an aluminium cartridge case could not be securely attributed to either German or Finnish origin.

Comparison with archival sources

The archaeological material from Pinomäki Hill can be directly compared with contemporary building inventories and other documentary sources created at the end of the war (National Archive of Finland, T-17944/40). Postwar Finnish records describe the German barracks at Pinomäki Hill as timber structures equipped with bitumen roofs and *Porin Matti* heating stoves. Both of these elements were also encountered archaeologically, as abundant fragments of bitumen felt were noted in the excavation areas, while one intact *Porin Matti* stove was preserved *in situ* beneath vegetation. Although archival sources do not document the extension of the German electrical network to the Pinomäki

area, artefacts such as light fittings nevertheless indicate that electricity was utilized at the site.

After the war, Pori's housing shortage was alleviated by making use of German-built barracks as well as the ruins of those that had been destroyed. According to oral history, even nails salvaged from burned barracks were reused (Pakarinen & Rajalainen 1998: 289). By the time the Pinomäki barracks were dismantled, however, the housing situation had apparently improved, since all of the excavation areas yielded abundant nails, tiles, and other building materials.

Similar cross-checks can be made in relation to food provisioning. Contemporary records mention pig and rabbit husbandry at the Pori airfield, but no references to cattle or sheep (National Archive of Finland, T-17944/40). Osteological material from the refuse pits, however, was dominated by cattle remains alongside sheep, cod, and pheasant, suggesting that German personnel supplemented their diet through trade or barter with local farms and fisheries. It is also possible that the Germans in Pori engaged in fishing and hunting themselves, or brought such catches with them from other locations. In the memoirs of Germans who served in Finland, hunting is typically mentioned, and in Lapland, moose were even hunted from aircraft (Knabe 1983; Möbius 2014).

While the building inventories compiled after the war recorded information on German structures, they reveal little about the everyday life or material culture of the Germans. Alongside the dimensions and building materials of the barracks, the contemporary inventories include quantities of furnishings, such as chairs, tables, and shelves, but they do not extend to smaller objects. The weekly reports from Mäntyluoto harbour in Pori likewise make no mention of supply consignments arriving for German personal use. Instead, they list only items such as fodder, equipment, and larger quantities of construction materials (National Archive of Finland, T-5471-1). Archaeology can therefore continue the research from the point where these historical sources end, uncovering aspects of daily practices and material culture otherwise absent from the written record.

Material provenance

A total of 85 finds have been identified to the level of product or manufacturer. On this basis, it is possible to examine the original provenance of the assemblage used by the Germans in Pori. Of the products, 43 originated in Germany, 31 in Finland, six in the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire, two in France, two in Norway, and one in the Netherlands.

German imports dominate in the categories of hygiene and pharmaceutical items. Toothpaste tubes from brands such as *Dontoklar*, *Blendax*, *Nivea*, *Chlorodon*, and *Leo-Werke*, together with *Frostschuttsalbe* ointment, *Losantin* decontamination tablets, and *Tschamba Fii* sunscreen, all point to reliance on centrally organized Luftwaffe medical and hygiene supply chains. These goods were not procured locally, and their presence in Pori mirrors similar finds from German sites in Lapland and Hanko, suggesting a standardized distribution of personal care products across Finland (Mikkonen 2017; Fast 2024). In addition to German products, there were also smaller quantities of products from territories occupied by the Germans, although these may already have circulated widely on the German market before the war.

By contrast, Finnish products are most evident in the categories of construction materials and ceramics. Stamped fire bricks and tableware came from the Arabia factory in Helsinki, while a *Porin Matti* heating stove from Rosenlew & Co. Oy and a beer bottle cap from the Pori Brewery show how local industrial and consumer goods were integrated into the German base. Faunal remains of cattle and sheep, which Luftwaffe records do not list among livestock raised on the airfield, further suggest exchange with local farms, either through direct purchase or barter. These finds support written sources stating that German soldiers obtained farm products through barter in Pori (Koivuniemi 2004: 36–37). The presence of Finnish products thus reflects both a practical reliance on local industries and the economic interactions that developed between German soldiers and civilians.

A number of finds also point to Soviet-origin ceramics, bearing the stamp of the People's Commissariat of Local Industry. Their presence at Pori cannot be explained by local Soviet occupation, and they likely arrived either as incidental war spoils or as curiosities carried by soldiers rather than as part of formal provisioning. While such pieces demon-

strate how material from the Eastern Front could circulate widely, they appear marginal in comparison with the more routine reliance on German and Finnish goods.

The assemblage from Pinomäki Hill illustrates how the Luftwaffe's provisioning system in Pori combined centrally organized German imports with locally acquired resources and war spoils redistributed from other fronts. The varied origins of products show that supply strategies were both standardized and adaptive, integrating German military infrastructure into Finnish industrial and agricultural networks while also drawing upon the circulation of captured Soviet goods.

Discussion

The artefacts from Pinomäki Hill provide a rare glimpse into the routines and practices of Luftwaffe personnel stationed in southwestern Finland. Hygiene items such as toothpaste, ointments, and sunscreen speak to the everyday concerns of soldiers maintaining health in a challenging climate, while shoe polish, combs, and shaving cream highlight the German military emphasis on appearance and discipline. These finds humanize the site, moving beyond technical descriptions of the base to reveal aspects of soldiers' lived experience.

Refuse pits in particular offer insights unavailable in archival records. Whereas contemporary inventories list only durable goods such as stoves and furniture, discarded toothpaste tubes, pharmaceutical packaging, and personal accessories reflect consumption practices otherwise invisible in written sources. However, the refuse pits at Pori airfield each provide only a limited body of evidence regarding German material culture. The small size of the refuse pits suggests that they most likely represent refuse deposited over a relatively short period of time by a small group of individuals. While the three investigated contexts share many similarities, they also display differences in the composition of the material. A broader overview of the area would therefore require the excavation of additional contexts. The challenge, however, lies in the fact that the most significant barrack areas and the associated subsurface material culture were destroyed as a result of postwar construction, and only a small part of the base has survived to be investigated archae-

Table 1. Finds for which the manufacturer or brand and origin could be identified. The number of finds has been calculated on the basis of complete objects or stamps.

Brand/Manufacturer	Type	Amount	Origin
Alete	Ration/Infant food	1	Germany
Arabia	Tableware	14	Finland
Arabia	Firebrick	15	Finland
Blendax	Toothpaste	4	Germany
Chlorodon	Toothpaste	2	Germany
Claudine	Toothpaste	1	Netherlands
Dontoklar	Toothpaste	6	Germany
Frostschuttsalbe	Medicine	4	Germany
Grains d'Évian	Medicine	2	France
Gustav & Genschow & Co.	Casing	1	Germany
HASAG	Casing	2	Germany
Kuznetsov	Tableware	1	Russian Empire
Landser	Wine	1	Germany
Leo Ross Berlin W9	Technical equipment	1	Germany
Leo-Werke	Toothpaste	2	Germany
Losantin	Medicine	1	Germany
Nivea	Toothpaste	3	Germany
People's Commissariat of Local Industry	Tableware	5	Soviet Union
Poncet	Ink bottle	1	Germany
Pori Brewery	Porcelain stopper	1	Finland
Porin Matti	Heating stove	1	Finland
Potthoff Schuhe	Shoehorn	1	Germany
Rasiquick	Shaving foam	1	Germany
Spalt	Medicine	1	Germany
Tilsiter Ada	Melted cheese	3	Germany
Tilsiter Bona	Melted cheese	4	Germany
Tschamba Fi	Sunscreen	1	Germany
Viking	Shoe polish	2	Norway
Wehrmacht canteen plates	Tableware	3	Germany

ologically. Metal-detecting hobbyist also visit the area frequently, and a significant number of the refuse pits show signs of digging, resulting in the contexts no longer being completely intact for research purposes.

Given the relatively small sample, it is nevertheless possible to draw some preliminary conclusions about the material culture and supply patterns of Pori airfield. As shown above, most hygiene and medical goods were imported through Luftwaffe supply chains, while construction materials and stoves were obtained locally. Ceramics and food-related finds further illustrate this hybridity, combining Finnish consumer goods with standardized German rations and occasional incidental pieces of Soviet origin. The Soviet ceramics, in particular, should be understood not as systematic provisioning but as souvenirs or curiosities, underscoring how material culture could also travel informally through networks of soldiers.

Comparisons with other German sites in Finland underline both shared practices and regional distinctions. Hygiene products such as *Dontoklar* and *Nivea* toothpaste appear across Pori, Hanko, and Rovaniemi (Mikkonen 2017; Fast 2024), indicating a standardized distribution of certain consumables. The prevalence of Arabia ceramics at multiple sites likewise demonstrates German readiness to adopt Finnish consumer goods when available (Seitsonen & Herva 2011). Yet regional variation is equally clear: zooarchaeological assemblages from Lapland are dominated by reindeer, reflecting local pastoral economies (Seitsonen et al. 2021), while Hanko has yielded strong evidence of maritime provisioning (Fast 2024). By contrast, the Pori assemblage reflects an agrarian environment.

Taken together, these strands of evidence reveal a hybrid provisioning system. Fundamentally, Pori functioned as one node within the wider Luftwaffe logistical framework, receiving standardized goods that ensured operational continuity. However, provisioning at the base was enriched, though not dependent, on local Finnish contributions and occasional items brought from other fronts. The result was a material culture that combined imported, local, and incidental elements. This blend reflects both the cohesion of German supply networks and the adaptive strategies shaped by regional conditions in southwestern Finland. This hybrid assemblage highlights the complexity of provisioning strategies in wartime Finland and the value of conflict archaeology for uncovering

aspects of daily life and interaction that remain invisible in conventional archives.

Conclusions

The *Feldluftpark Pori* project has provided the first systematic archaeological investigation of the German wartime base at Pori airfield, extending the scope of conflict archaeology in Finland beyond the better-known sites of Lapland and Hanko. Despite the relatively small sample, the excavations at Pinomäki Hill uncovered a diverse assemblage of material culture that sheds light on both the Luftwaffe's provisioning system and the everyday practices of the soldiers stationed there.

The findings published in this article serve as a comparison point for future research that may be undertaken in the area, as well as for other German bases in Finland and internationally. As conflict archaeological investigations continue at comparable sites, the increasing number of finds will help build a broader comparative dataset, which in turn may allow for more extensive insights into German supply networks, local interactions, and the daily lives of soldiers stationed abroad.

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