

A map of WWII historical sites in Reyðarfjörður included.



THE ICELANDIC WII MUSEUM

FJARDABYGGÐ



Mjóifjörður • Norðfjörður •
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„When you visit the The Icelandic World War II Museum you become a little more aware of the history, pain and death of a time that in itself isn't that far away. You also become more aware of the sacrifices made as well as the solidarity and heroism of ordinary people involved in a perilous war.“

- Sigurður Ingólfsson, poet and writer

THE OCCUPATION

Eight months had passed since the beginning of the war when the British Army occupied Iceland on the eve of May 10th 1940. The German Army had been doing well and had already occupied Poland, Denmark and Norway. Everyone knew that invasion of other countries in Europe was imminent and on the same day the British took Iceland the Germans invaded Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg.

The British occupation was to prevent Iceland from falling under German control but the country had been shown considerable interest because of its military importance in connection with shipping routes in the North Atlantic Ocean.

The British Army that occupied Iceland in 1940 consisted of 2000 soldiers. A year later they were 25 000 scattered at armybases throughout the country.



THE ICELANDIC WORLD WAR II MUSEUM

The years of World War II are a colourful period in Iceland's culture and the purpose of the museum is to make it possible to travel to the days of the occupation. The main theme is the life at wartime and the influences of the occupation for Icelanders. The museum exhibits this in an interesting and lively way and visitors are able to enter a replica of a barrack and cinema hall and see artefacts from the war.



Hospital Camp at Hæðargerði, 730 Reyðarfirði
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THE WORLD WAR II IN REYÐARFJÖRÐUR

During WWII there were almost 4000 soldiers at Reyðarfjörður. They were British, Canadian, Norwegian and American. Even though there were more soldiers in other places in Iceland, the proportion was overwhelming there because the population of the town was only 300. Nissen huts were widespread in the area, both in the village and around it. The biggest houses were overtaken and rented for the officers. Everywhere you looked soldiers were either working or entertaining themselves. The people of Reyðarfjörður disappeared in the crowd.



THE VILLAGE "UNDER SIEGE" British warships in Reyðarfjörður on July 1st 1940.

Even though the war was a "blessing" for the inhabitants, it also casted its shadow over Reyðarfjörður. Anti-aircraft guns and cannons became necessary because German aeroplanes often flew espionage missions over Reyðarfjörður. The air raid sirens started and red danger flags were flagged as soon as the guns of the alliance forces started shooting at the uninvited guests. Then the people of Reyðarfjörður fled to the air-raid shelters that were all around the village, some of which can still be seen around town (see map).



ON GUARD A soldier from Norway on guard. It wasn't unusual that German spy planes flew over Reyðarfjörður on espionage missions.

In one moment Reyðarfjörður changed from a small quiet village characterized by poverty and unemployment to a lively place with no shortage of anything. There is then no wonder that the locals sometimes talked about the „blessed war“. Suddenly there was plenty of work for everyone and people came from other fjords looking for work in Reyðarfjörður. The culture became more dynamic and the people who once were happy with their „þorrablót“ and Christmas dancing got used to cinemas, cafés, restaurants, dancing, theatres and other gatherings. In one full swoop Reyðarfjörður was thrown into the 20th century and it never became the same again.



WORKING FOR THE BRITISH Young men from Reyðarfjörður sought to work for the army.

CHOCOLATE AND GUNS

The British soldiers and the children from Reyðarfjörður were on good terms with each other during the war and the games the children played were under foreign influence, as most things in Reyðarfjörður during the war. The soldiers played football with them, went skiing and even allowed the children to shoot their guns. The children also benefited from the soldier's generosity, who gave them fruits and candy at any given opportunity.



FEELING HOMESICK The soldiers saw their own kids in the faces of the Icelandic children.

SYMBOLS ON MAP

-  Barracks
-  Occupied houses (still exist)
-  Occupied houses (no longer exist)
-  Air-raid shelters (still exist)
-  Air-raid shelters (no longer exist)
-  Gun post
-  Flag posted on air-raid alert



At Geithúsá, further west from the village, stood the barracks of the American and British Army. The British also stayed in barracks further out the fjord, near Njörvadalsá and Kollaleira.

Kvíagil
Residential Barracks
of the British Army

Hjallbali
Residential Barracks
of the Canadian Army

Hotel

Barracks
Norwegian
workshop

Residential
and recreation-
al barracks

Primary School

Gröf - café

Eyrarkaffi
café

Valhöll
Telephone Station

The Cinema Barrack

Warehouse

Grímsstaðir
The facilities of
British Officers

About 2 km east of the village, by Hagi, stood barracks for American troops and further east, about 4 km from the village, near Framnes, were barracks for the British.

HEROISM & TRAGEDY

One sunny day in January 1942 British troops went from Reyðarfjörður to the mountains. The soldiers got lost and were not prepared for the storm and the rain they got into. Late in the evening the farmer at Veturhús in Eskifjörður happened to notice a soldier who was crawling towards the farm.

From his gestures he understood that there were more soldiers needing help up in the mountain. The people at Veturhús saved dozens of people but a few men died and eight of them rest in the cemetery of Reyðarfjörður at Búdarmelur. With them rests a Canadian soldier who was shot accidentally the year before.



THE WEATHER WAS THE WORST ENEMY The photo shows a military training in Reyðarfjörður but is not in direct relation to the tragedy.



VETURHÚS The tragedy was the subject of a film made in 2012 which among other things showed family members of one of the soldiers visiting the cemetery.

HOSPITAL CAMP



The American army built many barracks here in 1943, dozens connected by tunnels. Construction created a lot of work for many Icelanders and people came to Reyðarfjörður to work for the allied forces there. It was difficult for many people to understand the purpose of this system, since at that time it was thought very unlikely that the Germans would attack the country. Later it appeared that the hospital camp was planned for the wounded in case of an attack on Norway.

FISH & CHIPS



In this old fisherman's hut was one of many restaurants that the inhabitants of Reyðarfjörður opened in the war time. They served tea and coffee and at some places they served beer. At most of the places were served hot meals and the most popular one was the national dish of the British, fish and chips. The guests in restaurants and cafés were mostly soldiers, but young Icelanders who worked for the allied forces also went there and liked this innovation.