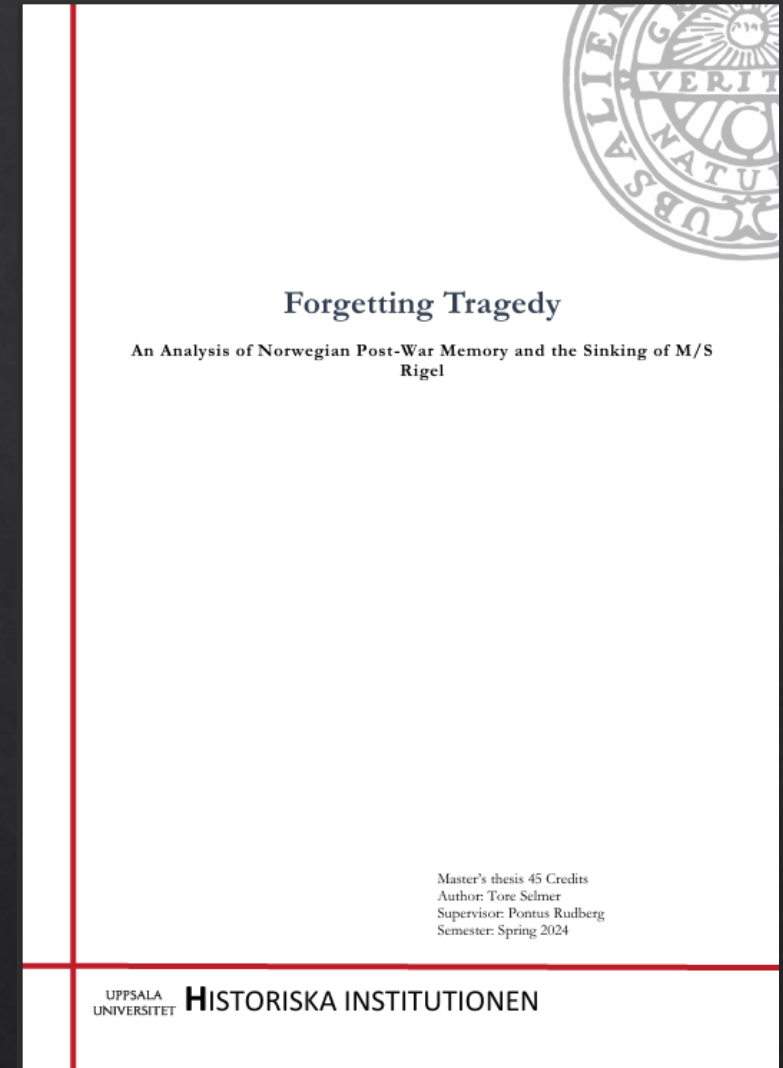


The Forgotten Sinking of M/S Rigel

Political Suppression and Memory in Post-War Norway

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- ◆ Master's programme in Modern History
- ◆ Bachelor in History from NTNU Trondheim (2022) Operation Asphalt
- ◆ Research interest: collective memory, politics of memory, and historical narratives.



M/S Rigel

- ◊ Transportship built in 1924
- ◊ Det Bergenske Dampskibsselskap (BDS)
- ◊ Transporting goods under Den Norske Syd-Amerika Linje (SAL)
- ◊ Seized *in anspruch* in 1940 while docked in Oslo
- ◊ Used for transporting troops, vehicles, and military material
- ◊ Tasked with transporting POWs in 1944
- ◊ Bombed as part of «Operation Provident» the 27th of November 1944





M/S Rigel

- ◇ German belief in the safety of Norwegian colors

Allied bombing policy:

1. All ships sailing south of Stavanger could be attacked, whether alone or in convoy.
2. All ships sailing north of Stavanger over 1500 gross tonnage may be attacked.
3. All ships sailing north of Stavanger smaller than 1500 gross tonnage may be attacked, depending on if they are hostile or in a convoy



Table 1: Number of people and casualties during the sinking of Rigel 27.10.1944

Total	Who	Survivors	Dead
2248	Soviet POW's	155	2093
384	German guards	62	322
95	German convicts	6	89
8	Norwegian prisoners	1	7
37	German guards for the convicts	5	32
29	German crew	13	16
24	German Anti-Air crew	20	4
3	German field cooks	0	3
5	German soldiers on leave from Bodø	5	0
2	German soldiers on a service trip	0	2
2	German maritime pilot	2	0
1	Norwegian maritime pilot	0	1
2838		269	2569

Source: Number of people and casualties during the sinking of *Rigel* November 27th 1944. Tragedien Rigel, Bergen 2022, p. 178²²



Burial

- ◇ Tjøtta International War Cemetery
- ◇ Founded in 1970
- ◇ Granite cross added in 1977
- ◇ Originally intended to be placed in Vefsn
- ◇ Ceremonies starting in 1984 last one being in 2019



Research Question

Main points of interest

- What caused *Rigel* to remain forgotten for 25 years?
- How did politics affect the memory of *Rigel*?

Additional subquestions

- What happened in the years leading up to the «*discovery*» of Rigel?
- How was the memory of *Rigel* dealt with?
- How is Rigel remembered today?

Method and Sources

Methodological approach: Narrative Analysis

- ◊ Narrative analysis is used to uncover underlying ideologies, ideas, and knowledge at the time of writing the sources.

Primary Sources

- ◊ Governmental Records: Krigsgravtjenesten
- ◊ Newspapers: Helgeland Arbeiderblad, Helgelands Blad & Rana Blad

Periods of Analysis

- ◊ Post-War Years (1945-1968)
- ◊ “Skull-Case” (1968)
- ◊ “Operation Rigel” (1969)
- ◊ Completion (1970-1977)

Theoretical Framework

The use of history

- History not just as a reconstruction of the past but something subject to interpretation

Memory

- Collective memory and the creation of a common national identity
- Les Lieux de Memoire*
- Distinction between memory and history, memory as the recollection of an event and history being a reconstruction of the past
- Memory is subject to change and reinterpretation

Table 5: The different types of crises and reactions

Type of Crisis	Reaction
Normal	Application of established patterns of interpretation
Critical	Change of established patterns of interpretations
Catastrophic	Destruction of established patterns of interpretations

Source: Bridging the Divide Between the Humanities and Social Sciences. Uppsala 2017, p. 29

Theoretical Framework

Historical Narratives

- ◊ The role of the historian
- ◊ Function of narratives
- ◊ Evolving narratives and memory

Norway's Historical Narrative

- ◊ Creation of the resistance narrative (post-1945)
- ◊ Criticism of the Master Narrative (1970s)
- ◊ Historical Revision and new narratives (1990s)
- ◊ Mythification of history





Norway During the Cold War

Three Layers of Amnesia:

Foreign Policy

- ◊ From Neutrality to NATO
- ◊ Skepticism towards the Soviet Union

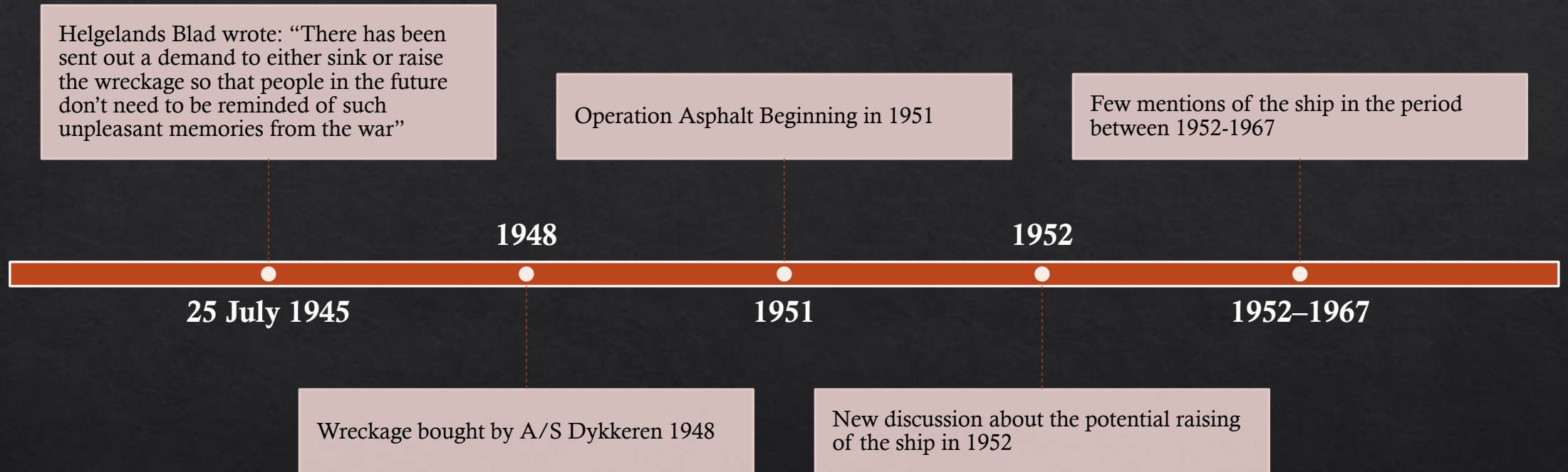
Security Policy

- ◊ «Operation Asphalt»

The War Sailors and the Home Fleet

- ◊ Legacy of the Home Fleet

Post-War Years (1945-1968)





The Skull-Case (1968)

- ◊ The Lovund Diving Camp established
- ◊ The Skull-Case
- ◊ Media and Government Reaction
- ◊ Criticism and Skepticism
- ◊ International Attention
- ◊ Operation Rigel

Operation Rigel (1969)

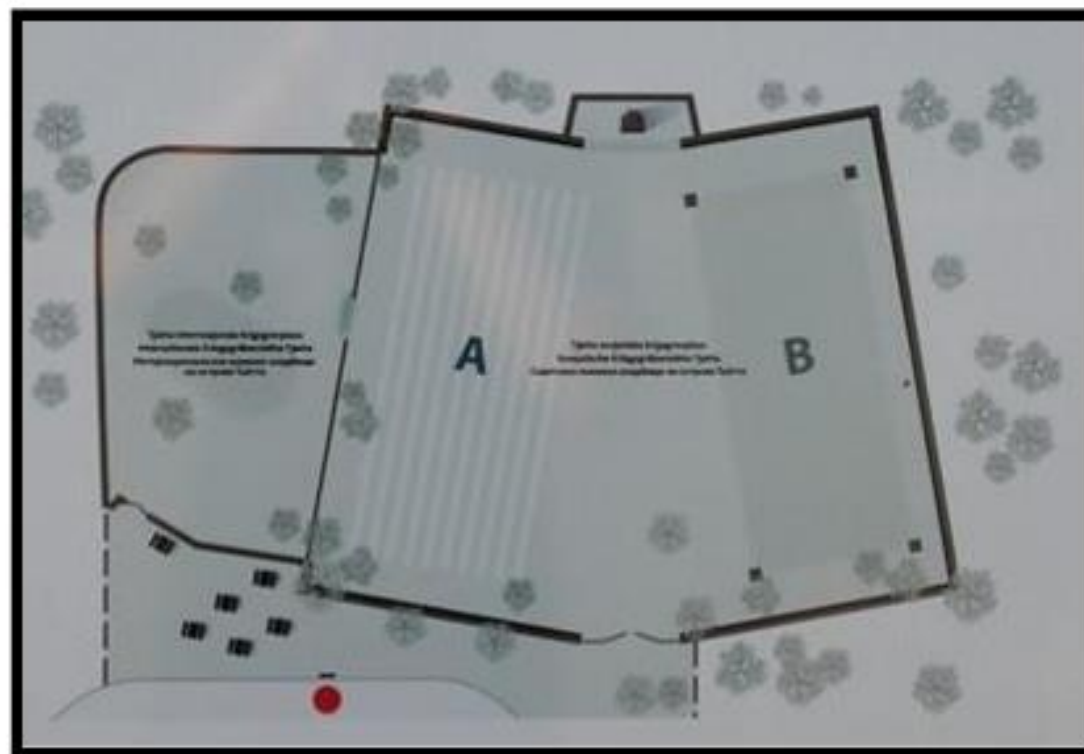
- ◇ Initial Response and Allocation of Government Funds
- ◇ Executing the Operation and International Involvement
- ◇ Media Coverage and Increased Criticism
- ◇ The Captains Report
- ◇ Completing the Operation and Construction of the Cemetery

- ◇ Completion of the Cemetery (1970)
- ◇ Literary Interest and Publication
- ◇ First Commemoration and New Monument (1977)
- ◇ Normalization of relations between East and West

Completion
(1970-1977)

Figure 3: Overview of the two cemeteries on the information board outside of the entrance, showing the Tjøtta Russian War Cemetery on the right, and Tjøtta International War Cemetery on the left.

Source: Tore Selmer 2023



Why Was Rigel Forgotten?

Ideological Use of History

Resistance Narrative

Political and Ideological Suppression

Change in Attitude Post-1975

Consequences of Silencing

Commemoration and Remembrance

- ◆ Recurring Ceremonies since 1984
- ◆ Commemorations increasing in scale until 2014
- ◆ Contemporary issues concerning new geopolitical realities

Figure 1: Information on Rigel provided by the information board outside the cemeteries in Norwegian, Russian, and German.
Source: Tore Selmer 2023

Tjøtta internasjonale krigsgravplass	Интернациональное военное кладбище на острове ТЮТТА	Internationale Kriegsgräberstätte Tjøtta
Tjøtta internasjonale krigsgravplass er anlagt til minne om norske, sovjetiske og tyrkiske statsborgere som mistet livet ved senkingen av M.S. "Rigel". Det tyske lasteskipet M.S. "Rigel", fulllastet med fanger, var på vei sydover langs kysten da det 27. november 1944 ble angrepet og senket av allierte fly ved Rosjøya, vest for Tjøtta. I følge skipshverens rapport omkom 2 456 mennesker som følge av angrepet. Vraket av "Rigel" ble i første omgang betraktet som skipsgrav, men etter hvert ble det funnet nødvendig å bringe de omkomne i land. Skipspapirene for M.S. "Rigel" forsvant under angrepet på skipet. De omkomne er derfor grødet som sjøende.	Интернациональное военное кладбище на острове ТЮТТА было основано в честь памяти морских, советских и немецких граждан, погибших в результате уничтожения транспортного судна «Ригель». 27 ноября 1944 года немецкое транспортное судно «Ригель» с военнопленными везло курсом на юг, ближе к берегу, подверглось бомбардировке с самолётов союзников и затонуло у острова Русёйа к западу от Тютты. Согласно отчёту капитана судна, в результате авианалёта погибло 2 456 человек. Первоначально судно «Ригель» считалось морской могилкой, однако через некоторое время было принято решение поднять останки тех погибших и предать их земле. Так как судовые документы «Ригеля» были уничтожены во время авианалёта, погибшие были похоронены как неизвестные.	Die internationale Kriegsgräberstätte Tjøtta wurde in Gedenken an norwegische, sowjetische und deutsche Staatsangehörige errichtet, die bei der Versenkung der MS „Rigel“ ums Leben gekommen waren. Das deutsche Frachtschiff MS „Rigel“ war voll beladen mit Gefangenen, als es am 27. November 1944 von alliierten Flugzeugen angegriffen und vor der Insel Rosjøya, westlich von Tjøtta, versenkt wurde. Nach Aussage des Kapitäns verloren bei dem Angriff 2 456 Menschen ihr Leben. Das Wrack des Schiffes wurde zunächst als Kriegsgrab betrachtet, später wurde es jedoch notwendig, die Ungekommenen an Land zu bringen. Da die Schiffsdokumente der MS „Rigel“ während des Angriffes verloren gingen, sind die Verstorbenen als Unbekannte begraben.

Summary and Conclusion

- ◆ Theory: Use of History and Memory
- ◆ Key Methodology: Narrative Analysis
- ◆ Rediscovery and Commemoration
- ◆ Continued Suppression
- ◆ Future Implications



“I look with sadness upon how nations don’t seem to learn from the atrocities war causes, but that new wars are constantly reemerging. Only those who have experienced the horrors up close know what it means to lose someone. There are people that die, who all have someone who loves them. A mother, a brother, a sister or a child. Therefore, I hope that God in heaven remembers those who perished here, no matter which nation they were from”