

Kollaa and Simo Häyhä -museum, short intro

The museum was found by veterans of Rautjärvi who fought at the Kollaa front during the Winter War. The idea was to preserve the heritage of those men to generations to come.

In its current form the museum was opened in summer of 2017. The exhibitions have been divided in three parts. Two rooms is dedicated to the battle history of Kollaa front and one room to the men of Rautjärvi and Simpele. These exhibitions contain a number of original small items, several wartime photos and maps give visitors a good description of units, conditions and battles of Kollaa. Also couple of important weapons (Suomi submachine gun, Lahti-Saloranta and Dektarjev light machine guns etc) used by Finnish and Soviet armies are part of exhibition. More weapons are in the separate exhibition hall (open thu-sat): machine guns, mortar, artillery etc).

One room dedicated to Simo Häyhä who was born in Rautjärvi and lived here until 1944. Exhibition describes life of Simo before the war (f.ex Rautjärvi Civil Guard) , during the Winter War, wounding and recovering from it and of course life after the war. All three important parts of his life are included in the exhibition; farmer, hunter and sniper.

Simo became famous already during the Winter War, newspapers spread news about Simo as a sniper although he was a humble man and he didn't want to brag his achievements. Many articles were made by Erkki Palolampi who was the information officer of Kollaa front division (12. D) and Antti J. Rantamaa, priest and member of Finnish Parliament. Also Simo's company (6./JR34) commander Lt Aarne Juutilainen ('Marokon kauhu'/'Terror of Morocco') was made famous in those articles. Juutilainen had served 5 years in the French Foreign Legion (Légion étrangère), the other famous officers at the Kollaa front were commander of JR34 (Infantry Regiment 34) Wilhelm Teittinen ('Sota-Ville'/'War-Ville') and commander of second battallion (II/JR34) ratsumestari (cavalry captain) Carl von Haartman. He had served in the Franco's army during the Spanish civil war.

During the war Simo used ordinary Finnish M28-30 rifle without telescope and was able to hit the target at the distance of over 400 meters.

Simo was wounded 6th of March 1940 from the explosive bullet shot by Soviet soldier during the battle of Ulismaiden (south of Kollaa river, see maps upstairs for more details). During that battle Simo was not a sniper but a squad leader. Rumours of his dead were published in the newspapers but he survived, more than 25 operations were needed into his face. After the winter war Simo was promoted to from the rank of lance corporal straight to rank of 'vänrikki' (Sub-lieutenant, french sous-lieutenant).

He was not accepted to army service during the Continuation war (1941-1944) and after the second world war he moved to Ruokolahti where he lived in his brother's (Juhana Häyhä) farm until he retired. Last year he lived in Hamina in the nursing home for war veterans.

Simo Häyhä died 1st of March 2002.

Briefly about Winter War at Kollaa front

Some of the most significant battles of the Winter War took place north of Lake Ladoga in the area of municipality of Suistamo, Kollaa. Or as it was also known Kollaajoki, Kollasjoki etc. The beloved child had many names. The Winter War began when the Soviet Union attacked Finland on November 30, 1939 without declaring war. The first battles that the visitors have to fight in Kollaa started immediately after the war started, after the enemy attacked through the so-called Hirsylä bend towards the Suvilahti settlement, where there was, for example, a wood processing industry.

The men of Rautjärvi and Simpele (then still their own municipality) had been invited to an extra exercise (YH) which was a cover for launching a movement. Most of the men from Rautjärvi were assigned to Infantry Regiment 34 (JR 34) and the men from Simpele to Field Artillery Regiment 12 (KTR 12). These units belonged to the 12th Division, which together with the 13th Division and some separate units formed the IV Army Corps responsible for the defense of the northern side of Lake Ladoga.

The men of Rautjärvi formed the core unit of 6/JR34, the commander of the company was the famous reserve lieutenant Aarne Juutilainen, the Terror of Morocco. Some of the men were placed in other companies of the second battalion, II/JR 34, and in the column. Company of Juutilainen therefore participated in the battles right from the first day.

However, during the first week, the Finns had to retreat some twenty kilometers all the way to Kollaajoki, where the front was established. It is said that the commander of the army corps, Major General Hägglund, had asked Juutilainen: 'Will Kollaa last?' The Juutilainen had answered: 'Yes, it will last unless you tell us to run away'. JR34 fought in Kollaa until February 18, 1940, when it was rested and responsibility of frontline was transferred to JR 69. The rest shift consisted of building new stations and practicing. However, this was soon interrupted when JR34, along with the others, was ordered to repel an enemy attacking from the south of Kollaa through Ulismainen. The Finns' counterattack began on March 6, 1940, when Simo Häyhä, among others, acted as a group leader, being badly wounded in this attack. On March 9, 1940, the Finns had to withdraw to better positions in the terrain of Korpijärvi, where they then fought until the end of the war, on March 13, 1940.

At the same time as the Ulismainen battles, JR69, which had taken responsibility of frontline, fought at Kollaajoki, but in the end the coming of peace saved the regiment from complete destruction.