

Postscript

This is a war story, but first and foremost it is a story of human charity and courage: the charity and courage of a group of Norwegian patriots who risked torture and their lives, in an attempt to save our crew from capture by the Germans after we had crashed in their midst during World War II.

Immediately after our plane had crashed, the Germans advised the populace that anyone found helping or sheltering us would be shot. Living under a captor that knew no mercy and who ruled by terror and reprisal, and having been forewarned of the consequences, these Norwegians nonetheless undertook the perilous task of rescuing us from certain capture by our common enemy. They defied the invader of their homeland at every opportunity with fierce determination to thwart him in his efforts to apprehend us.

Our success in evading capture and eventually being able to return safely to Britain was due entirely to this magnificent group of courageous and unselfish Norwegian patriots who were our "helpers". We owe a great debt of gratitude to these wonderful people who were so ready to share their food and clothing and give so much of their time, in order to help us. Above all they were ready to lay down their lives for six total strangers.

In writing this account of the events during our fateful trip in September 1944 and our subsequent escape from Norway, for our family records, I have endeavoured to indicate the reasons for my undiminished gratitude to all those who helped our crew in our time of need. I hope that all who read this will be able to appreciate the heroic efforts of this wonderful group of people.

On three occasions since the war Dorothy and I have returned to Norway and have had the good fortune to meet and to renew our acquaintances with most of those who helped our crew. We have tried in

many ways to show them our appreciation for what they did, but as one they insist that it is they who are thankful to us for helping them in their fight to liberate Norway from the enemy that had invaded their homeland.

Many years have passed since the events I have written about, but I have never forgotten, nor shall I ever forget the ready hand of friendship extended to us at that time. I know that I am echoing the thoughts of each member of our crew when I say, we can never repay the enormous debt we owe to those living and dead, who by their unselfish, heroic actions aided us in our hour of need.

1966 Return to Norway to thank the Helpers



Crash Site - (l to r) Maurice Neil, Kjell Harmens, Harvey Firestone (front), Helen Mowinckel Nilsen, Magnus Askvik



Aboard 'Snogg'

1966 R.A.F.E.S. Certificate Presented to Helpers

ROYAL AIR FORCES ESCAPING SOCIETY

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MARSHAL OF THE R.A.F.
THE VISCOUNT PORTAL OF HUNGERFORD,
K.G., G.C.B., O.M., D.S.O., M.C.

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OLIVER PHILPOT, Esq.
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THE ROYAL AIR FORCES ESCAPING SOCIETY (CANADIAN BRANCH)

WISHES TO RECORD THE HELP GIVEN BY THE PEOPLE OF OS, NORWAY

AND DISTRICT, TO THE CREW OF A WELLINGTON ANTI-SUBMARINE

AIRCRAFT WHICH CRASHED NEAR OS ON THE 26TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1944.

AS A RESULT OF THE HELP GIVEN, ALL SIX MEMBERS OF THE CREW

EVADED CAPTURE AND ESCAPED TO ENGLAND.

THIS SCROLL IS GRATEFULLY PRESENTED TO THE PEOPLE OF

OS, NORWAY, ON THE OCCASION OF A RETURN VISIT TO THE

VILLAGE BY MAURICE NEIL AND HARVEY FIRESTONE, MAY 1966.

THE CREW WHO WERE HELPED:

G. BIDDLE - CAPTAIN

G. F. DEETH

K. GRAHAM

H. FIRESTONE

G. GRANDY

M. NEIL

The Honorable J. Angus MacLean, D.F.C.
President, Ottawa, Canada.

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1977 Helpers Visit Crew in Canada



**September 1977 - Clockwise from left:
Helen Mowinkel Nilsen, Einar Evensen, George Deeth, Magnus Hauge, Gord Biddle, Harvey
Firestone**



**September 1977 - from left:
Magnus Hauge, Gord Biddle, Helen Mowinckel Nilsen, Maurice Neil, Harvey Firestone,
Einar Evensen**

1979 Return to Visit to Norway



EPILOGUE

There are a number of individuals who are not named in this version of the events that took place, who in their own way, greatly contributed to our success in staying out of the hands of the Germans.

They are the many men, women and children who were terrorized, beaten, and arrested in the German attempt to get information concerning our whereabouts. All without success.

Also not mentioned are two sets of brothers Henrik and Torbjorn Lyssand; Alf, John and Fredrik Heggland; Edvard Lonningdal; Anna and Nils Rolvsvag; Christina Bjornen; the family members of our helpers; who all gave unselfishly with little or no concern for their fate should they be caught. Each was willing to give of themselves in order to help the strangers, who they felt were helping them in their cause.

There very well may be others unknown to me who helped our crew and to them I sincerely apologize for my ignorance.

Pernille Evensen, Einar's Mother, was arrested by the Germans and sent to prison in Oslo where she suffered greatly at the hands of the Gestapo. Einar was more fortunate than his mother. He was wanted by the Germans but was able to avoid being captured. He spent the balance of the war hiding in the mountains and being a particularly aggressive saboteur.

Magnus Hauge, who is mentioned, was arrested and tortured for his activities in the Milorg. He was kept in prison and released when Norway was liberated.

Not mentioned is a very strange encounter I had in 1979 on the day my wife and I were to leave for Norway, to visit with some of the people who had helped our crew. As I was very restless on that particular day, I left work shortly after noon although we were not scheduled to depart until ten thirty in the evening. In order to help pass time, I went to exercise at a

gymnasium. I encountered a friend in the locker room, and we discussed my pending trip. When my acquaintance heard that I was going to Norway he wanted to know why I had decided to go there. I explained some of the details re our crash there.

As we spoke a stranger appeared from the shower room, and seemed to take in every word we said. After my friend departed the stranger came over to me and said that he too had been in Norway. He also told me that he had been in the Bergen area at the time of our crash. My curiosity had peaked because the man spoke with what was obviously a German accent. When I asked him what he was doing in Norway at that time, he looked me straight in the eye, and pointing a finger in my face said, "looking for you".

He went on to explain that he had been in the German Army attached to the quartermaster corps in Bergen. His usual occupation was to buy produce and fish from the local fishermen and farmers. He was very familiar with the events when we crashed. He had been taken from his usual work to help in the search for us. He said that he had spent a miserable time for four days, combing the area before other regular troops who had been brought from the north to be staged in the Bergen area, relieved those who had augmented the local garrisons. He informed me that there had been over four thousand soldiers in the area looking for us and that the search was the main focus of all the German garrisons in the greater Bergen area for some time. He claimed that he and most of his compatriots could not help but admire the Norwegians for their intense national pride, and the fierce defiance they outwardly showed to the German occupiers of their country.

Kjell and Merete Harmens visited with us during the early part of October, 1989, and I asked Kjell to read my version of our experiences in Norway. He was very impressed with the accuracy and detail of what I had written. He did feel, however, that I should have mentioned that there were, to the best of his memory, at least 57 children killed when a bomb fell on an

air-raid shelter during the R.C.A.F. raid of Oct. 4th. 1944, on the U-boat pens in the Bergen area. This was the raid that we had watched when we were at "Little Canada".

Another item Kjell discussed was the success the Gestapo had in decimating the group that had helped us. It was a very few days after we had left Norway when the dreaded SS swept down on them, arresting many who had helped and searching for others. They, as mentioned previously, took Magnus Hauge and Pernille Evensen and mounted a very intensive search for the rest of the group who took to the mountains to avoid capture. Einar Evensen was with the group in the mountains and Kjell hid in the false wall of a room with some people who he calls his adoptive parents.

Another surprising development is the revelation by Kjell that a few days after we departed "Little Canada", the Gestapo, having in some way found out that we had been hiding there, burned it to the ground. The original cabin, built by the Ovredal family, was owned by Jacob Hjelle. An exact replica of the cabin was rebuilt shortly after the war on the original spot by the Ovredal family.

The following is an extract from "The Bomber Command War Diaries" dated Oct.4th 1945. that came to light due to Kjell's visit when I was looking among my documents.

Bergen was one of several Norwegian ports now being used as the forward operating bases for the U- boats. The pens at Bergen were being enlarged, with an influx of German technicians and a large labour force. 93 Halifaxes and 47 Lancasters of 6 and 8 Groups were dispatched to attack Bergen, most of the aircraft being allocated to the pens but 14 Halifaxes and 6 Lancasters were ordered to bomb individual U-boats known to be moored in the harbour. 12 Mosquitoes of 100 Group acted as a long- range fighter escort.

The raid appeared to be successful and only 1 Lancaster was lost. A

detailed report from the city of Bergen supplies the actual results. 7 bombs hit the U-boat pens, causing little structural damage because of the thickness of the concrete roof, but the electrical-wiring system in the pens was completely put out of action. Nearby ship-repair yards were seriously damaged. 3 U-boats were damaged by the bombing but they did not sink. 3 other small ships were hit; two of them sank and the third, the German auxiliary Schwabenland, had to be put in dry dock for repair.

But, as so often in raids on targets in Occupied Countries, the bombing spread to civilian areas. The local report continues: "As regards civilian casualties and damage, the raid is still remembered with horror. Bergen suffered little damage in comparison with other occupied towns and cities in Europe but the raid of 4th October was the worst of the war for us." 60 houses were destroyed or so badly damaged that they had to be demolished; 600 people lost their homes. Civilian casualties are recorded at only 2 places but they were tragic. A school, opened only that day after a break, received a direct hit in the basement where 2 classes were sheltering; 60 children, 2 teachers and 17 air-raid workers in the same shelter were killed. Another shelter, at a nearby factory, was also hit and a further 34 people were killed and about 100 were injured there. 7 of the dead Norwegians were members of the local Resistance Movement.

The Germans admitted the deaths of 12 of their own men.

Os Turlag

1994

I have never ceased to marvel at the intense pride the people of Norway have in their history. Particularly their pride in Norwegian war-time history.

In September 1994, I received a letter from Helen Mowinckel Nilsen outlining a three day event that had taken place. The following is an exact copy of his outline of the meetings:

OS TURLAG: A three day "Remembrance" march was arranged for club members (and friends): "LITTLE CANADA" 1994, and this tour will be a yearly tour in future to remember your escape in September, 1944.

PROGRAM

Friday, Sept. 2: Start at Sore Neset school at 17:00. Walk to the landing ground where teacher Askvik's son told about the event, as his father has told him. He did a good detailed speech.

The Canadian and Norwegian flags marked the position of the Wellington. 80 persons were present.

We then went on "your tour" to Bjornen and Martha Haugland showed your hiding place there and told about the meeting there.

Saturday, September 3, Start from a farm at 10:00 near the "oyster farm", the boathouse you occupied, and Magnus Rottingen told of your days of living there and after that we went to the top of the hill to your day hiding "tent". No sign of either tent or the house. Einar Evensen and Argot met us at the start, but Einar is in bad health, but is still able to drive his car – 60 persons were there.

Sunday, September 4. Start from a meeting place behind the farms in Ovredalen at 10:00 o'clock. Following your route up to "Little Canada",

where I and Lars Orrebakken told from this period. 138 persons started from Ovredal, 55 from Rolfsvaag (the other and easier way). It was crowded and the Mayors of Os, Tysnes and Trengereidfjord were present. The cottage is in bad condition, but is going to be repaired, and made a "Monument of Canadian Airmens' Hiding Place" as well as a goal for future tours from Os.

All the days were nice and warm sunny weather, opposite to the rainy days of your stay.

A Diploma was made and given to all members of at least 2 tours. The event will be referred to in local papers, and this idea was "put in action" three days after the idea was mentioned in a club meeting so there was no "propaganda" beforehand. Next year may be of greater interest as the story now will be reproduced for the next generation. Maybe some more Veterans will be present next year, I hope. We are all growing older and I mentioned to the touring group the possibility to invite the veterans to the starting places, and presented a list of the remaining; very many is now passed away.

He also enclosed an original Diploma, that I have in my records.



Tildelt

For deltagelse i „Little Canadamarsjen“



Os Memorial

1999

In September 1999 I received the following from Os:

At the present time I am the head of Cultural Affairs in the municipality of Os, Norway.

I am happy to tell that at the 25th of September this year we will place a memorial stone with a suitable inscription at the landing place (crash site). This to honour the memory of the dramatic event and made sure that the future generation will know the story. The ceremony will be quite nice and we hope that a representative of the Canadian embassy will be present.

Karl Ole Midtbø

At the time Dorothy was ill in hospital and there was no way to go to Os for the dedication. A flurry of phone and email communication began. We contacted Veteran's Affairs, National Defence, and External Affairs. It was arranged that Col Ron Aitken, Military Attaché at the Canadian Embassy in Oslo would attend the ceremony. At the same time we contacted the Canadian Press and several newspapers to tell them about the Os memorial. As a result stories ran in newspapers across Canada. Col Aitken called to tell me of the ceremony and followed up later by sending a letter and photos.

This is the memorial stone:



The text on the plaque (translated) reads:

1944:

An aircraft from the Canadian Air Force with a crew of 6 crash landed here on the hill the 26.9.

All uninjured.

12.10 - to Shetland with KNM VIGGRA.

Rescued by people with courage and cunning, with the will to fight for freedom and peace.

Canadian Embassy



Ambassade du Canada

1325-5 (CFA)

Wergelandsveien 7
0244 Oslo
Norway

25 July 2000

Mr. Harvey Firestone
306 Whitehead Cr.
Bolton, ON L7E 3Y5

Dear Mr. Firestone,

First, my sincere apologies for having taken so long to write. I fully realize that it has been almost 11 months since we spoke last; indeed, it was right after I had been to Haugland last September. One reason, although no excuse, for my tardiness is that I have only recently completed and had developed the film that I started at Haugland.

I am enclosing a series of photos, some of which I took and some which were taken by the local residents. The first few give an idea of the guests of honour- some of the ladies who were actually involved in the rescue, then the ceremony itself including the mayor, the local band and the Home Guard presence. Most impressive to me was the number of people, of all ages, who turned out for the ceremony on a rainy Saturday afternoon. The next few photos give you feel for the locale in which the stone is laid. I wonder if you would recognize it as the crash site!

There is one close-up of the stone and plaque. I hope the plaque is legible to you. In my unofficial, but, I am confident, accurate translation, the plaque reads:

"1944:
an aircraft from the
Canadian Air Force
with a crew of 6
crash landed here on
the hill the 26.9.

All uninjured.

12.10- to Shetland
with KNM Vigra.
Rescued by people
with courage and cunning,
with the will to fight for
freedom and peace "

The last photos are from the annual "Little Canada March" which took place the next day. Evidently there were 48 participants. I am enclosing as well a "diploma" and pin that are presented to those who take part in the march. Since you were in the very first one, I figure you deserve them a lot more than I do!

There are two other enclosures: first, a program from the ceremony on the 25th. It is wrinkled because it is the one I actually used and it got a little rained on. I thought that you might appreciate an original rather than a photocopy. Finally there is a marked map showing the escape route. The folks in Haugland sent it to me with the photos.

All in all, as I mentioned to you on the phone, the ceremony itself and the whole adventure were very heart-warming. It's not often that these crash landings have a happy ending! There is no doubt that the residents of Haugland remember you and your crewmates fondly; this remembrance is being passed on to the current generation of young people.

Canada has recently appointed an Honourary Consul General in Bergen. She is a lovely lady, a Canadian citizen named Dr. Karen Pittman. Her mother is Norwegian, her father was Canadian and a member of the RCAF. I have briefed Karen fully on Haugland, the stone and the annual march; she has also met some of the key organizers from Haugland. So, I expect that even if I can't make it back this year, she will represent Canada.

Once again, I am sorry to have taken so long to send these photos and other mementos to you. I hope that you will agree "better late than never". I also hope that this letter finds you and your wife in good health.

Yours truly,



RL (Ron) Aitken
Colonel
Canadian Forces' Attaché Oslo

Enclosures: 4

OSLO QDFAIT-MAECI. GL, CA.

Return to Os 60 Years Later

September 2004

In September 2004 I returned to Norway, to Os, and to Little Canada to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the memorable events of World War II. I was accompanied by my sons Rick and Gary, and by Rick's wife Susan, and my grandsons Matt and Elliot.

After a long flight from the west coast of North America we were met in Bergen Airport on Thursday, September 23rd by Helen Mowinckel-Nilsen, Kjell Harmens and his wife Merete. We were taken to the country house of Helen's son Tore where we were to stay. We paid a visit to the section of a Bergen Cemetery for Allied casualties of World War II then visited a MILORG museum run by Helen.

On Friday following a bit of sight-seeing we met Karl-Ole Midtbø in Os and were taken to the studio of Arne Mæland to meet the sculptor we had commissioned to produce a memorial plaque expressing our gratitude to the helpers. From the studio we all went to the crash site where we looked around while Arne fixed the plaque to the stone he had prepared.

Saturday was the day of official ceremonies in Os to mark the anniversary. The meeting place for the day was Søre Neset School where a large crowd was gathering under grey skies. There were familiar faces as some surviving helpers and some family members of helpers were there along with many others including Acting Mayor of Os Lisbeth Axelsen; the Inspector-General of the Royal Norwegian Air Force, BGen Morten Haga Lunde (whose childhood home was 400 metres from the school); and Canada's Military Attaché in Oslo, Col Rick Hardy. From the school the group walked, following lanes and paths across fields, down to a cove for a ceremony to re-christen the fish boat Snøgg that had been restored and is to be an operating memorial. Light rain began falling during the ceremony during which Arthur Lunde told the story of the Snøgg and of the extensive restoration project. This ceremony concluded with the re-christening of

Snøgg by my daughter-in-law, Susan. As we walked up from the cove to the crash site the rain continued to intensify.

We found even more people waiting at the crash-site for the unveiling of our thank-you memorial that now sits just beside the memorial put in place by Os Kommune in 1999. A guard of honour from the Norwegian Home Guard flanked the memorials as the acting mayor welcomed everyone. The ceremony included my son, Rick, telling of how the aircraft came to crash-land; Ingemar Asvik telling of the aircraft crash in his family's potato field and of the events that followed; music selections by the Os orchestra; and a few words of thanks from me to unveil the memorial.

A wonderful lunch followed at a nearby café where there were more stories and visiting. Ottar Askvik had brought the remains of the aircraft compass and the Verey pistol for me as well as George Deeth's wedge cap to bring back to his family. Ingemar brought a propeller spinner from the Wellington and told of how he had helped his father 'acquire' it from the crash site under the noses of the Germans that were chopping up the aircraft and hauling it away.

On Sunday, the anniversary of the crash, was the annual trek to Little Canada to the hut in the mountains where we had been hidden. After the group met in Os we divided into two groups. The younger and fitter would follow the steep 1944 route while I, along with many others followed a much easier route to the cabin. The communities of Os and of Samnanger, that the cabin is in, had mounted a plaque on the wall. The plaque is a bronze casting done by Arne Mæland from an original wood carving by Jakob Hjelle, a leader of the Os MILORG and a renowned wood carver. Jakob's son Mats was waiting in the cabin with a pot of hot coffee on the stove. On the window sill we found a note that George Deeth's son Doug had left when he visited the cabin in 2003. Helen told stories of MILORG's use of Little Canada before the plaque was unveiled to conclude the official part of the week-end. We had dinner with Helen, Tore and his wife Eva Lis, and Kjell

and Merete to bring a long but wonderful Sunday to a close.

We went to Norway to express our eternal gratitude to the helpers and people of Os and Norway again. We returned after a wonderful, though very wet, week-end, feeling even more grateful for the kindness and generosity that we had been met with everywhere. The meaningful ceremonies and events organized in Os have provided excellent new memories to cherish, this time by three generations.



Matt, Elliot, Harvey Firestone
in Helen Mowinckel-Nilsen's
MILORG Museum



Helen Mowinckel-Nilsen showing Matt, Susan, and Kjell Harmens the MILORG Museum



The new plaque mounted on its heart-shaped stone.



The plaque in Norwegian, English, and French: On 26.9.1944 an R.C.A.F. 407 Sqn Vickers Wellington with a flight crew of 6 crash-landed here. They contacted MILORG who kept them safe then sent them back to England on 12.10.1944



Ingemar and Ottar Askvik walking down to the dock with Harvey



Karl Ole Midtbø, acting as Master of Ceremonies, on Snøgg as the rain begins



The guard of honour from the Norwegian Home Guard flank the 2 memorial stones



Harvey and Rick with the memorial stone



Susan, Kjell, Os, Acting Mayor Lisbeth Axelsen, Harvey, Matt at lunch



Ingemar Askvik shows the propeller spinner to Harvey and Mayor Axelsen



407 Maritime Patrol Squadron
"The Demons"

19 Wing Comox
Lazo, BC V0R 2K0

1325-2 (CO)

26 August 2004

Mayor, Council & Citizens
Town of Os
Bergen, Norway

Greetings:


Mr. Harvey Firestone, whom many of you know, is visiting you on the sixtieth anniversary of the Wellington aircraft crash landing in Norway on 26 September 1944,

His old squadron, 407 Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Force was reformed after World War II in 1952 and continues to fly anti-submarine patrols up to this date, but is now known as 407 (Maritime Patrol) Squadron, Canadian Forces.

Our home base is in Comox, British Columbia, Canada, which in some ways is similar to Norway's coast. We have mountains, fiords, inlets, islands and forests. Our aircraft have changed and we now fly turbo prop 4-engine Aurora aircraft on much more varied duties which include: peacekeeping operations, illegal immigrant surveillance, drift net fishing, oil slick reconnaissance and anti drug-running patrols. Our crewmembers are somewhat older than the six young gentlemen that visited you back in 1944 due to ours being a wholly volunteer force.

Sixty years have now passed since our Wellington crew with your assistance evaded capture by the Nazis and escaped back to the Shetland Islands by way of the Norwegian ship Vigra and Captain Leif Larsen and his crew. Our eternal gratitude for the succour and assistance that the Norwegian resistance and other citizens of Norway gave to our aircrew will never be forgotten by 407 Squadron, by Harvey, his family, and the other crewmembers and their families. Warmest regards to you all.

Sincerely,


P. Ormsby
Lieutenant-Colonel
Commanding Officer

407 Squadron still flies today as a Maritime Patrol Squadron.

The Commanding Officer LCol Paul Ormsby sent this letter to be presented to Os.



The Member of Parliament for the riding in which both Harvey and Rick live, Mr Gary Lunn, lent his support to the memorial stone project. He sent this certificate to be presented to Os.



Little Canada - Time for lunch, talking, and for some, resting.



Helen tells Little Canada stories. Jon Magne Borgevik, acting mayor of Samnanger, is at left with 2 children. Merete, Jakob Hjellev's son Mats, and Eva Lis look on.



"Little Canada"
 Wood carving by Jakob Hjelle, cast in bronze by Arne Mæland.