Six Sacks of Potatoes

Harvey "Red" Firestone

To all the men and women in the occupied countries of World War II who helped Allied airmen escape or evade capture. Otherwise ordinary people responded to oppression and evil by risking capture, torture, and death to save strangers cast among them by the fortunes of war. They were 'Helpers'. They were, and are, heroes.

This work is particularly dedicated to the many brave Norwegians of Os and of Bergen who saved 6 young Canadians in September 1944. Thank you.

26 September 1944

5 to 8 a.m.

A large fireball gushed out of the exhaust of our starboard engine and the aircraft shook violently. I had just settled in to the turret and had completed my checks on the equipment after changing watches with Ken Graham, another of the three wireless air gunners in our crew. Ken had been in the rear turret and I had been on the radar set. We were on an anti-submarine patrol over the North Sea off the coast of Norway in our Vickers Wellington Mk XIV early in the morning of September 26th 1944. A hasty glance at the flames engulfing the engine confirmed my sudden fears that the plane was on fire.

Pilot Gord Biddle's voice on the intercom advising the crew of the problem and then directing me to hurry forward to help get rid of all items that we could do without, gave me little time for thought other than to get to the task at hand. It was absolutely vital to reduce the weight carried in order to maintain height and not put excess strain on the remaining engine.

I scrambled out of the turret and hurried forward to find George Deeth, our co-pilot, and Maurice Neil, our navigator, busily throwing the batteries that powered the Leigh-light out of the forward hatch. Graham was in the process of dismantling and throwing out the radar equipment. Biddle immediately had turned for home and jettisoned the depth charges, nonetheless we were still losing altitude at an alarming rate.

At the first hint of trouble George Grandy, the third wireless air gunner, at the wireless set, was told to break radio silence telling Group (our Coastal Command control) of our predicament. We never used our radios for transmission purposes when we were in enemy territory other than in emergency situations. The reason being that the enemy could track our signals and locate our position. Grandy immediately sent out a QDM-5 signal in Morse code. QDM is the equivalent of International Morse Code S-0-S. It has different levels of priority, however, a QDM signal is always

followed by a numeric of 1 to 5 with 1 having the highest level of priority and indicating the greatest emergency and 5 the least.

Radio reception fortunately was good but the news that Group had for us was not. They informed us that there was no change due in the weather, the headwind we faced was not expected to abate but rather increase. They suggested that we do not head for home but that we should try to reach the Shetland Islands, the nearest point of friendly land. They also told us to continue sending signals to them so that they could plot our course and attempt to monitor our position.

Everything that we could possibly do without was thrown out of the aircraft. As mentioned before the batteries, the Gee box (a navigational aid), radar, flares, even the Leigh-light went, which proved to be quite a problem for Graham and me. We did, after quite a struggle, manage to free it from its mountings and it plunged into the dark waters below. Our next concern was the many rounds of ammunition that we carried for our four guns in the turret. I suggested that I go back to the turret and fire the guns off, but Biddle vetoed that idea. He felt that movement at the back of the aircraft would make it much too hard for him to control the aircraft and he did not want to chance losing any more altitude. Graham and I therefore had to dispose of them through the opening where the Leigh-light had been.

After we had thrown out all of the ammunition, I spotted our parachutes and, after checking with the others in the crew, we concluded that it would not be possible to use them in the situation we were in. We believed that we could not survive if we parachuted into the raging seas below us. The water was too cold and we could not possibly endure for more than just a couple of minutes. We concluded that we had to stay with the plane in order to survive, so out went the chutes. Some minutes later our appraisal of the situation was confirmed by Group.

Neil and Deeth were hard at work ridding the aircraft of all excess

items in the nose of the aircraft. They tossed out the ammunition for the single gun that we carried in the nose and all other items that were not needed for our survival. Graham and I did likewise, throwing out any item, no matter how small. We steadily continued to lose altitude however, and we had descended below the 1000 foot level. It was absolutely imperative that we further reduce the weight load.

Biddle decided, after consulting with Neil and Deeth, that as we had about 5000 pounds of petrol still in the wing tanks, we could jettison about three quarters of this fuel and still reach the Shetland coast. The jettison valve was opened for roughly twenty seconds, then closed. The fuel gauges were closely checked as the petrol gushed out from the wing outlets. Graham watched from the astrodome, and to our apprehension reported that he could still see petrol gushing from the wing outlet, even though Biddle had closed the jettison valve when the gauges showed that we still had enough petrol remaining in the tank to reach land.

Biddle re-opened the fuel jettison valve and then immediately shut it off again. When it was shut off the flow slowed to a trickle, then gushed out again. Both Biddle and Deeth operated the valve several times in an attempt to stem the flow of petrol but the valve acted the same each time. No matter what was tried they couldn't succeed in making the jettison valve close. We were little cheered by their reports over the intercom that the meter was continuing to drop until it finally showed that there was no petrol left in the wing tanks. The flames that continued to engulf the engine were forgotten. Our concerns were entirely taken up by our new predicament.

A hasty appraisal of our position confirmed all our fears. It was evident that we could no longer hope to reach the Shetland Islands against the 50 knot head-wind we had to face. We had only 92 gallons of petrol in our reserve tanks. We were well over 125 miles away from Sumburgh, the nearest English base. If we continued on it was inevitable that we would have to ditch at sea with little hope of survival and ultimate rescue.

We knew that under ideal conditions a Wellington would float for less than sixty seconds. With the Leigh-light gone we had a large gaping hole in the belly of the aircraft; we had our doubts that the plane would stay afloat for more than thirty seconds. Notwithstanding the fact that we were proud of our prowess as the best crew in ditching procedures in all Coastal Command (we held the record for being the fastest and most efficient crew), we questioned if we could manage under the severe conditions we had to face. Grandy, at the wireless, changed our QDM priority status to QDM-3; he advised Group how our circumstances had degenerated.

There was no consolation in their reply; they warned us that we could not possibly survive for any length of time even if we were able to ditch successfully in the freezing, violent seas below. They confirmed that the waves were fifty to sixty feet in height and that we would most likely be swamped in the very small dinghy we carried aboard. They also advised us that the weather conditions would not allow for an air-sea rescue operation, and that there was no likelihood of one for many hours as the storm which was now raging furiously would not abate for some time. We also learned there were no vessels anywhere in our flight path and we were the only aircraft in the area; all other flights after we had taken-off had been cancelled.

It was essential that we make an immediate decision. We all recognized, very reluctantly, that our only chance at survival would be to turn around to take advantage of the wind, and head for Norway, which was less than 100 miles away. We speculated that if our luck held out and we did get to the Norwegian mainland, we could try to evade capture by the Germans, cross to Sweden and seek haven there. We advised Group of our conclusions and they acknowledged. They directed us to continue sending signals so that they could plot our course and wished us luck. Occupied as we were, we had little apprehension of what might be in store for us. Our immediate priority was to turn the aircraft around and to head east for the coast of Norway. Biddle, with some difficulty, managed a wide flat turn and

headed for enemy territory.

Having reduced the weight load of the aircraft we were able to maintain altitude, which by this time was roughly 800 feet. The good engine was functioning well and it was not over-heating. We had taken an emergency rope off the Leigh-light and Deeth and Neil relieved the strain on Biddle's leg by attaching the rope around the rudder and tying it in position around a brace in the nose. Grandy kept sending QDM's to Group, Graham continued to throw any item that was considered expendable from the aircraft, while I helped Deeth and Neil with the rope.

Our ground speed had picked up considerably with the strong wind at our back, and shortly after dawn, about 6:30 a.m.[1] we caught our first glimpse of the rugged coastline of Norway through the slowly clearing haze. We could see nothing but mountains with low hanging clouds obscuring their lofty peaks.

A check of our remaining petrol supply evidenced the fact that we would be exceedingly fortunate if we could be able to remain airborne until we reached land. The intercom, which had been quiet for a short spell, was turned on and we heard the subdued voice of Ken Graham softly praying as we drew ever closer to enemy occupied territory and our unknown destiny.

With visibility clearing somewhat we were able to detect some of the many islands that make up the west coast of Norway. Biddle spotted what appeared to be an entrance to a fjord and headed towards it. To add to our apprehension we sighted several large ships, and a U-boat, directly in our path. We had no choice but to fly over the convoy.

As we neared the ships, though still a fair distance away, we were met by heavy gun-fire. I happened to be forward looking out over Biddle's right shoulder at the time. At the sight of shells exploding off our starboard wing and tracer bullets heading our way I informed him that we were being fired

upon. I will never forget the look of detachment on his face as he turned to me, shrugged his shoulders and with complete indifference said, "so what?"

I hurried back to the radio position where our Very pistol was stored. I fired off the cartridge that was in the pistol in the hope that we could confuse the German gunners into thinking that we were a friendly plane. Both the Allies and the German forces used cartridges containing different coloured flares to help identify themselves. There were very many different colour combinations and the combinations of colours used was changed every few hours.

I then went forward again to see the results. The gunners had stopped firing momentarily, but started to fire again when they realized our duplicity.[2] I then went back, fired off another cartridge, but deceived no one. The shooting seemed to intensify. I plugged in my headphones to listen to what was transpiring forward; the intercom did not work. I bent down to check it, as it was located against the side of the aircraft at Grandy's left, in fact I had to move his leg to see what the trouble was. I reached out to feel for the box only to find that it had been blown away by a shell and there was a gaping hole in the side of the aircraft where it had been. Grandy was still sending QDM's back to England completely unaware of all that was going on around him.

As I straightened and turned from Grandy's side I spotted Graham trying to take in all he could of what was transpiring outside by standing on his toes and stretching to look out the astrodome. I saw tracer bullets enter just beside him, but he too was oblivious to the firing from the ships. I went forward, to discover that our good engine had been hit, and Biddle and Deeth were searching for a place to put the plane down as we had lost all power. They instructed me to tell Grandy and Graham that we were going

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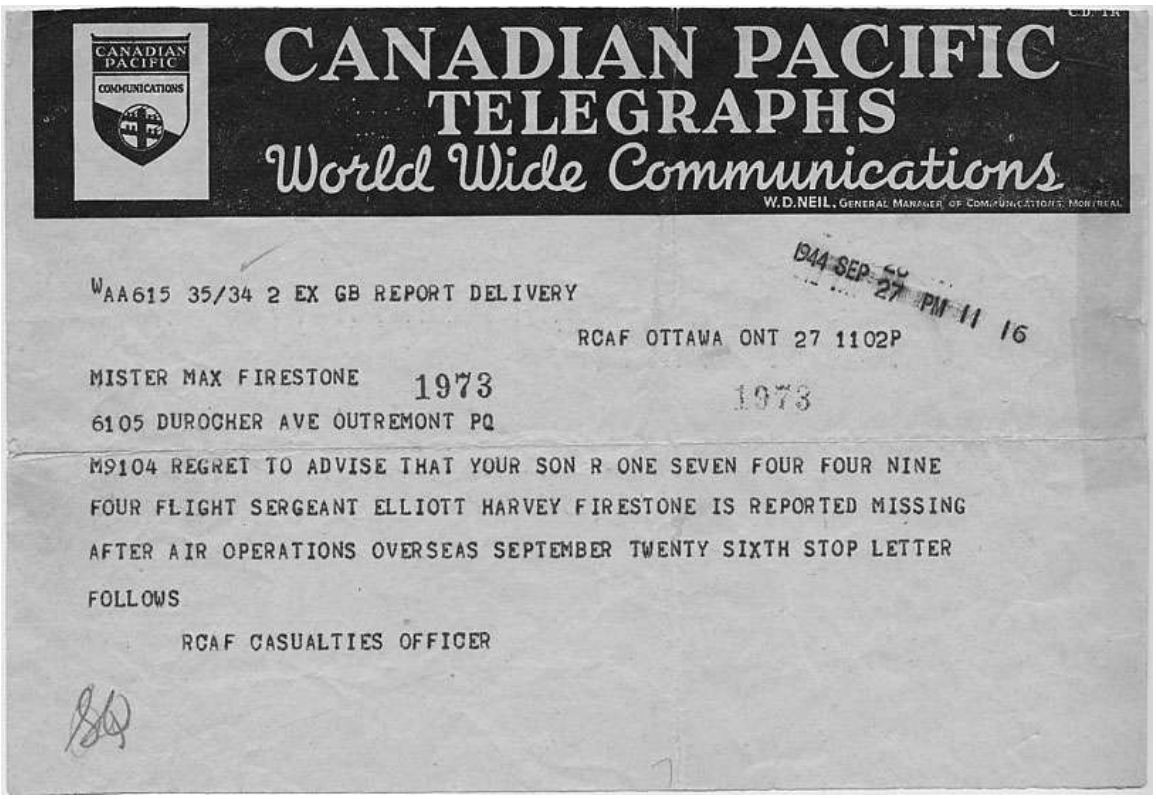
[1] 6:30 a.m. for the crew that had taken off from Scotland was 7:30 a.m. local time in Norway.
[2] Ingemar Askvik reported in a letter in August 2001 that on the morning of September 26th 1944 Halvard Kalve of Bakkasund saw the aircraft approach, heard the shooting and saw green flares fired from the aircraft. He reported that the flares did cause the firing to stop temporarily.

in, and to take crash positions.

Grandy sent a final message to Group informing them that we were attempting a crash landing. Although we were in a desperate predicament he never upgraded our distress signal to maximum priority; he continued sending QDM-3 to the end. He tied down the key that enabled our radio transmission to be plotted by our Group operating stations.

Grandy then strapped himself in at the wireless set, Neil was on the navigator's table, Biddle was in the pilot's position, Deeth, after first pumping down the flaps and opening the top hatch, took up his place behind the door. Graham and I braced ourselves on the floor behind the main spar. Silently we turned to each other, shook hands and waited, wondering if we were going to be able to make it to land or if we were going to crash into the sea.



CANADIAN PACIFIC
TELEGRAPHS
World Wide Communications
W.D.NEIL, GENERAL MANAGER OF COMMUNICATIONS, MONTREAL

1944 SEP 27 PM 11 16

WAA615 35/34 2 EX GB REPORT DELIVERY

RCAF OTTAWA ONT 27 1102P

MISTER MAX FIRESTONE 1973

1973

6105 DUROCHER AVE OUTREMONT PQ

M9104 REGRET TO ADVISE THAT YOUR SON R ONE SEVEN FOUR FOUR NINE FOUR FLIGHT SERGEANT ELLIOTT HARVEY FIRESTONE IS REPORTED MISSING AFTER AIR OPERATIONS OVERSEAS SEPTEMBER TWENTY SIXTH STOP LETTER FOLLOWS

RCAF CASUALTIES OFFICER

Telegram Received September 27th 1944

IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE
407S/227/1/58/P.1
FILE No.

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE
OVERSEAS

1st October, 1944.

Mr. Max Firestone,
6105 Durocher Ave,
Outremont, Quebec, Canada.

Dear Mr. Firestone:

It is with the deepest regret that I write to confirm the cablegram informing you that your son, Warrant Officer Firestone, has been reported missing on Active Service. I would like to convey to you the feelings of my entire Squadron.

In the early hours on 26th September, 1944, Elliott, along with the rest of his crew took off on an operational patrol. Unfortunately the aircraft never returned and we have since heard nothing from it or any member of the crew.

We lost one of our best crews when this aircraft failed to return and your son was one of its most popular members. His abilities were recognised, not only by the other members of his crew, but also by the rest of the Squadron. His loss is deeply felt by every member of this Squadron.

Your son's effects have been gathered together and forwarded to the Royal Air Force Central Depository, where they will be held until better news is received, or in any event, for a period of at least six months before being forwarded to you through the Administrator of Estates, Ottawa.

Please accept my deepest sympathy, and if there is anything I can do to help you at this time, do not hesitate to write.

Yours sincerely,

R.A. Ashman

(R.A. Ashman) Wing Commander,
Officer Commanding, 407 Sqdn. RCAF.

Letter from Wing Commander R.A. Ashman, CO 407 Squadron

ADDRESS REPLY TO:
THE SECRETARY,
DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE FOR AIR,
OTTAWA, ONTARIO.

OUR FILE R174494 (R.O.4)
REF. YOUR
DATED

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

OTTAWA, Canada, 4th October, 1944.

Mr. Max Firestone,
6105 Durocher Avenue,
Outremont, P.Q.

Dear Mr. Firestone:

It is with deep regret that I must confirm our recent telegram informing you that your son, Warrant Officer Second Class Elliott Harvey Firestone, is reported missing on Active Service.

Advice has been received from the Royal Canadian Air Force Casualties Officer, Overseas, that your son and the entire crew of his aircraft failed to return to their base after taking off at 12:50 A.M. on September 26th, 1944, on an anti U-Boat patrol. The last message received from the aircraft was at 6:00 A.M. which stated that they were unable to reach their base and that they were altering their course to land in Norway.

The term "missing" is used only to indicate that his whereabouts is not immediately known and does not necessarily mean that your son has been killed or wounded. He may have reached enemy territory and might be a Prisoner of War; and should you receive any card or letter from him please forward it at once to the Royal Canadian Air Force Casualties Officer, Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa. Enquiries have been made through the International Red Cross Society and all other appropriate sources and I wish to assure you that any further information received will be communicated to you immediately.

Attached is a list of the members of the Royal Canadian Air Force who were in the crew of the aircraft together with the names and addresses of their next-of-kin. Your son's name will not appear on the official casualty list for five weeks. You may, however, release to the Press or Radio the fact that he is reported missing but not disclosing the date, place or his unit.

Your son was promoted to the rank of Warrant Officer Second Class with effect from August 29th, 1944.

..... 2 .....

R.C.A.F. G. 32B
500M—1-44 (3778)
H.Q. 885-G-32B

Letter from RCAF Casualty Officer , first page

Permit me to extend to you my heartfelt sympathy during this period of uncertainty and I join with you and the members of your family in the hope that better news will be forthcoming in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

A.E. Thompson S/O

R.C.A.F. Casualty Officer,
for Chief of the Air Staff.

Letter from RCAF Casualty Officer , second page

Flight Lieutenant M.M.N. Neil,
Next-of-kin, Mrs. M.M.N. Neil, (wife)
175 Woodville Avenue, Toronto, Ontario.

Flying Officer G.A. Biddle,
Next-of-kin, Mrs. G.A. Biddle, (wife)
2204 Parent Avenue, Windsor, Ontario.

Flying Officer G.F. Death,
Next-of-kin, Mr. N.P.F. Death, (father)
224 Pearson Avenue, Toronto, Ontario.

Pilot Officer K.W. Graham,
Next-of-kin, Mrs. K.W. Graham, (wife)
258 Greenwood Avenue, Toronto, Ontario.

Warrant Officer First Class, G.E. Grandy,
Next-of-kin, Mr. P.R. Grandy, (father)
562 Glebeholme Blvd. Toronto, Ontario.

Warrant Officer Second Class E.H. Firestone,
Next-of-kin, Mr. Max Firestone, (father)
6105 Durocher Avenue, Outremont, P.Q.

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Letter from RCAF Casualty Officer , crew next of kin list

From Civilian to Wireless Air Gunner

As war clouds gathered over Europe in the late summer of 1939, I, like most others in the Western World, trusted in the assurances given that Hitler would not risk an all-out war against the Western Allies. Having limited knowledge of the history that led to the many problems facing the peoples of Europe and Asia at that time, I consequently did not realize the seriousness of the situation. Not quite seventeen, the terror and dread of war meant little to me. My concerns dealt with the trials and tribulations of everyday living at home in Montreal.

Realistically, I had little thought for other than what was transpiring in my own little universe. I was encapsulated in my own small world, totally absorbed in my daily work and the sporting activities I was involved with during my few leisure hours. I worked seven full days a week delivering telegrams by bicycle for the Canadian National Telegraph Company at the branch office, located on the ground floor level of the Dominion Square Building in the heart of Montreal. I started work before seven thirty in the morning and finished at six in the evening, from Monday to Friday. On Saturday I worked there until one, then I went to the main office, located at the corner of St. Francois Xavier and St. Sacrement in downtown Montreal, and worked for the balance of the day, usually until after six in the evening. I worked on Sunday at the main office from eight until six. It usually took an hour to travel to and from work. You can readily see that I had little time for other concerns, even though I would have liked to have been more involved with other endeavours.

As our nation first mobilized its forces at the outbreak of hostilities I, working for the telegraph company, had the experience of delivering call-up notices to very many servicemen, who were in our reserve forces. Even though those who first were called to serve anticipated receiving their orders by telegram, they all displayed grim apprehensive nervousness when I

handed them the telegram confirming when and where they were to report.

Subsequently I had the sad and trying misfortune to deliver a number of telegrams to the next of kin of servicemen who were missing or who had been killed in action. It was always a highly emotional experience and brought the grim realities of war, which to many seemed very far off, a lot closer to me. At that time 1 never thought that one day a messenger would deliver a telegram to my parents, informing them that I too was missing in action against the enemy.

The first year of war took a lot of young men from the work force; the company I worked for was no exception. With the drain of manpower to the services I was able to move from delivering messages to being office boy to the General Manager. I worked much shorter hours and had more time to devote to sporting activities. I played a lot of baseball during the summer and hockey in the winter. In the fall I boxed and all in all was very active in sports. I guess that all my spare time was devoted to one type of sporting activity or another.

In short order I was able to become a clerk in the service department, working the graveyard shift from midnight to eight in the morning. I did not remain there too long. I then was transferred to the branch on Phillips Square in down-town Montreal. As more and more men were called up our company was hard pressed to fill the many vacancies that materialized. I quickly moved up the ladder and it was not long after becoming a clerk that I was assigned to the Queen's Hotel branch, as manager. I had moved from office boy to office manager in less than a tenth of the normal time period.

From the onset of war, I felt an obligation to serve in the armed forces. I had little difficulty in convincing my parents that I should enlist, but any mention made on the subject usually brought on many valid arguments for me to wait until I was old enough.

Finally, I enlisted in the air force. As most other young men, I

yearned to fly and I hoped that I would be accepted for pilot training but had doubts that I would be that fortunate. I had been forced to leave school after the ninth grade and therefore my schooling was less than the required standard for aircrew training, which at that time was a minimum of high school graduation. However, after taking a number of proficiency tests I was informed that I had passed with flying colours (pun intended). When the recruiting officers learned that I knew Morse code, had some experience in radio procedures, and that I was working for the Telegraph Company, they decided that I should be trained as a wireless air-gunner.

Due to my father being of German birth my acceptance into the service was delayed for several months. I guess that it was prudent to investigate my background as I could have been a security risk. I was able to stay on at the Canadian National Telegraphs and was working as the manager of their office in the Queens Hotel, when I finally received my call-up.

After initial training at the Manning Depot in Lachine, P.Q. I was posted to guard duty at the Storage Depot in Moncton, N.B. I was there for just a month and then was posted to the Wireless School at Guelph, Ont. I was in Guelph for seven months and after successfully completing the wireless course I went on to Gunnery school at Mountain View, Ont. At the end of the course there, I received my wings as a wireless air-gunner and was promoted to the rank of sergeant.

Wireless School - Guelph October 1942

Wireless Class - Guelph. Note: Several in class were killed in action.

Number 4 Wireless School, R. C. A. F.
Guelph, Ontario

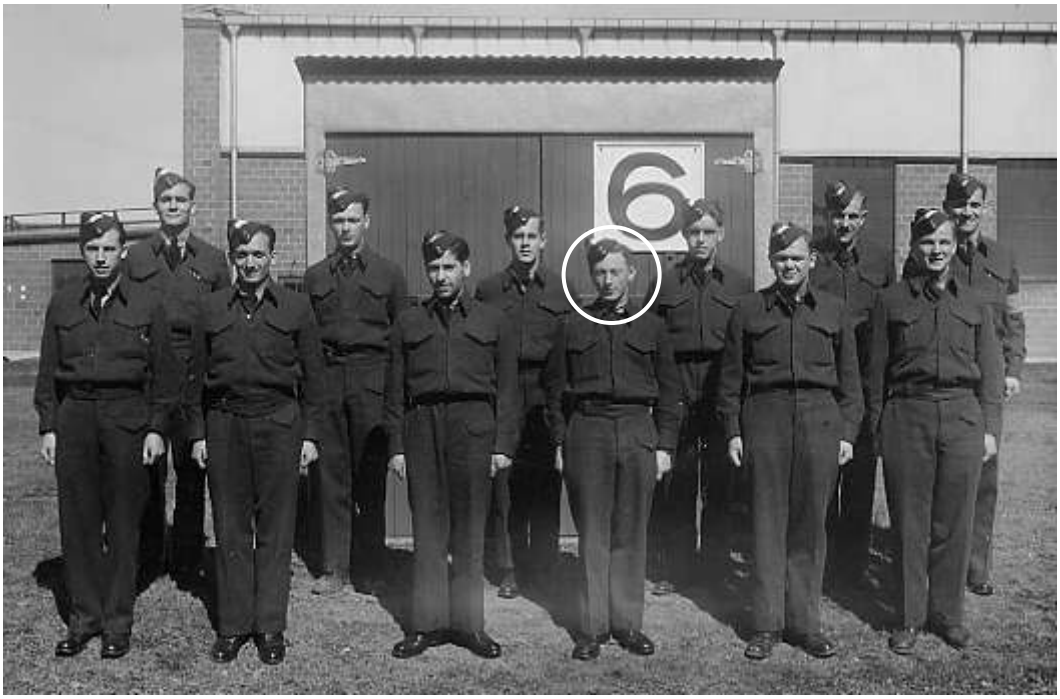
This Certificate is Awarded to

R174491 LAC Firestone, E.H.

for proficiency as a Morse Operator with a speed of 20 *words per minute (Letter-figure Code Groups) and* 22 *words per minute (Plain Language), on completion of Wireless Training at No. 4 Wireless School, R.C.A.F., Guelph, with Course No.* 53.

Date 16th April, 1943. A H Russell S/L
for, Chief Instructor.

Wireless Certificate



Number 6 Bombing and Gunnery School, Mountain View, Ontario, 22 April 1943

O.T.U. – Debert, Nova Scotia

The First Plane Crash

After Gunnery School I was posted to the R.A.F. Operational Training Unit at Debert, Nova Scotia, where I was crewed up with two R.A.F. types and another Canadian. Warren Schofield Clark was our pilot. He came from Wales and was known to one and all as ”Nobby” Our observer, Bob Seddon, was from the Manchester area in Lancashire. Barry Strickland, who came from Manitoba, and I were the two wireless air-gunners.

My training, and the few operational trips in Canada, was rather uneventful but I was involved in a serious plane crash at Debert, N.S.. Aircrew were a superstitious lot. One of the superstitions firmly believed in, decreed bad luck for any crew flying with a substitute in any position, to take any one else aboard during an operational flight was even more taboo. For this particular flight we were to have someone aboard our plane to evaluate how we functioned as a crew. We were apprehensive when we learned that a stranger would be flying with us. Not that we worried about our capability, but due to the superstition.

We were hardly airborne after take-off and had reached a height of approximately sixty to seventy feet when the airplane shuddered violently. I glanced out of the window facing my position at the radio to see the port wing vibrating very badly. The port engine tore out of its mountings and fell off. The plane flipped on to its side and fell. We hit the ground port wing tip first and tumbled tail over nose for a few hundred feet. When we first touched the ground the plane burst into flames. I was in my seat at the radio position and fortunately was only bruised by the pounding as we hit and tumbled about. Barry Strickland and the Flight Lieutenant, who had been in the back of the plane, were able to run from the wreckage but the pilot, navigator and myself were trapped in the forward part of the plane as the bulkhead door had been jammed by the crash.

We tried desperately to force the door but to no avail. The flames were all over the plane and the heat was very intense. We had been fully fuelled and carried depth charges and ammunition aboard as we were to fly out over the Atlantic on an anti-submarine patrol. The ammunition started to go off, due to the flames and heat, and several tracer bullets flew past our faces adding to our fears and desperation to break down the bulkhead door. We could not go out the escape hatch as it meant going through the wall of flames that had surrounded the forward part of the aircraft. We had little room to manoeuvre, throwing ourselves against the door had no effect at all. We put our arms around each other for support and simultaneously kicked with all the strength we could muster. At the third kick the door collapsed and we hurried out of the plane. We ran to put as much distance as possible between ourselves and the aircraft as an explosion was imminent.

We hurried toward an ambulance that had pulled up about a hundred yards away. The fire trucks did not even venture as close, as they knew we had depth charges aboard and they feared explosion from them as well as the gasoline. We were almost at the ambulance when we were blown forward by a blast from the crash as the depth charges exploded.

We scrambled to our feet and turned and looked back at the plane which was still a mass of flames, thankful that we were out of harm's way and that we were not seriously hurt. The ambulance driver called to us and holding the rear door open, asked us to embark so that we could be taken to the hospital to have our injuries looked at. To this day I do not know who the individual was that was with us. He and Barry Strickland had put a lot of distance between themselves and the airplane and we waited for them to join us at the ambulance. It had been a very warm day in July and the stranger had removed his battledress jacket and shirt just before take-off. Apparently when we first hit the ground, he had been thrown forward and had hit the wire mesh covers over the oxygen bottles that were affixed just back of the bulkhead on the starboard side of the plane. His chest was a

mass of welts and bruises and he was bleeding profusely but in such a state of shock that he was completely oblivious to the fact.

We climbed into the ambulance and in short order we were at the station hospital. The Flight-Lieutenant was immediately taken to the operating room for attention. We were a burned, bruised and battered lot but our injuries were minor. I had minor burns on my left arm and hand. My right knee gave me some difficulty but all in all I felt fortunate. My knee however seemed to worsen, and by the following day I had difficulty in walking. I hobbled around for about ten days and slowly the knee healed. The others had much the same injuries with the exception of the stranger. They used over seventy stitches to close his wounds; he was in hospital for some time and was sent home to England on discharge from the hospital. On completion of training at Debert I was posted overseas.

Number 2 Squadron, Debert, Nova Scotia
(l to r) Sgt Harvey Firestone (Red), wireless air gunner; Sgt Warren Schofield Clark (Nobby), pilot; Sgt Barry Strickland; Robert Seddon (Bob)

To England and Operational Training

After two weeks embarkation leave I was on my way to Halifax and in short order I embarked on the Queen Elizabeth for England. I was selected to be an aid to the gun crew aboard. The opportunity to fire the larger Bofors guns was a very interesting experience. There were approximately twenty thousand troops on the ship and we were crowded in like a bunch of sardines in a can. We who were chosen to be part of the gun crew were more fortunate than the others as we had much better meals and accommodations.

On arrival in England I was sent to Bournemouthe to await posting for further training. Within a very short while I was posted to an R.A.F. radio school at Hooton Park near Chester. I was then on my way to a radar school to learn how to operate air-borne radar. Then it was on to Operational Training School at Silloth in Scotland where I crewed up with five other Canadians to form our crew. After completion of Operational flying training we were posted to our squadron.

Our six man crew consisted of two pilots; Gord Biddle, our Skipper, George Deeth, Second Pilot; Maurice Neil, Navigator; Ken Graham, George Grandy and I were the Wireless Air Gunners. Each of the WAGS performed three different roles. During each flight we interchanged positions, alternatively serving as radio operator, radar operator, and in the rear turret as air gunner.

We met at O.T.U. (Operational Training Unit) at Silloth, an R.A.F. station, situated just north of the border between Scotland and England, near the east coast. George Grandy and I were the first selected to fly as a crew. George and I had met at a radio school and had also attended a radar course together. In fact we had shared a room while in London on leave, before reporting to O.T.U. The others were strangers to us and to each other.

Our skipper, Gord Biddle, had been through O.T.U. training earlier. After completing his initial training he had joined the squadron and had flown as a second pilot on operations to gain experience. He then had been posted to O.T.U. to become a Captain and to select his own crew. Ken Graham had been on operations in North Africa and India. Maurice Neil and George Grandy had been instructors for some time in Canada before being posted overseas. George Deeth had come over directly from flying training in Canada. I had trained at an O.T.U at Debert, N.S. and had flown on operations off the east coast of Canada before being posted overseas. In all we were fairly experienced in our work and each in his own way contributed to what became a very proficient team.

The purpose of the training we received at O.T.U. was to familiarize us with the aircraft, teach each member his individual responsibilities and develop the six of us into a cohesive unit. The indisputable reality that in war, the more you know and the better your physical condition, the greater your chance of survival inspired us to work very hard. We were determined to do our best. We did very well in our work and were proud of our accomplishments. We ranked as one of the better crews on our course, if not the best.

Carrying out ditching and crash techniques properly could mean the difference between life and death. Our crew had set records in the R.A.F. and had been asked to give exhibitions of our prowess to visiting dignitaries several times. Our excellence in those procedures would stand us in good stead in the future.

During the latter stages at O.T.U. we participated in an air-sea rescue mission to try to locate a Polish crew that were missing somewhere in the North Atlantic. We were one of several aircraft involved in the search. I was acting as radio operator when we reached our particular search area. There was a lot of radio activity at the time. The other planes were unable to communicate with Group stations controlling the search. I on the other

hand had no difficulty in maintaining contact with Group and could hear the other planes in their unsuccessful efforts to do so. I was able to pass messages to and from Group and the other aircraft. During my watch I acted as a conduit for eight other planes.

When I resumed my next turn as radio operator I was surprised to learn that neither Grandy nor Graham, the two other radio operators in our crew, were able to maintain contact with Group nor any of the other aircraft during their watches. Once again, however, I had no difficulty in doing so. This was most fortunate as we spotted some of the wreckage of the plane and were able to advise Group and home other aircraft and naval vessels to the location. As we were running short of fuel we had to discontinue our search but were gratified that others had arrived on the scene. We were forced to land at an emergency airport at Port Ellen to re-fuel. We had so little fuel left that our engines just about coughed out as we landed.

The following day at our squadron meeting my work of the previous day was highlighted and I was indeed proud as the Squadron Leader informed the assembly that, "The R.A.F. would be a much better and safer establishment if all wireless operators were as capable as Flight-Sergeant Firestone." Later on that day I learned that I had been mentioned in dispatches for my efforts.

Radio School, Hooton Park, Cheshire

OUT, Silloth, Scotland - 3 June 1944
Bottom (l to r): F/O George Death, 2nd Pilot; P/O Gord Biddle, 1st Pilot; F/O Maurice Neil, Navigator
Top (l to r) WAGs: Sgt Harvey Firestone; P/O Ken Graham; W/O George Grandy

407 Squadron

Operations

On completion of O.T.U. we were posted to our squadron, which was located at Chivenor in the county of Devon, on the west coast of England. We flew on patrols over the Atlantic Ocean and over the Bay of Biscay, seeking out U-boats and the supply ships servicing and re-fuelling them. The German U-boat fleet employed the French ports on the Bay of Biscay as their main base from which they roamed out into the Atlantic.

Submarines, operating under water as they did, were impossible to detect from the air. They were compelled to surface from time to time, however, to re-charge their batteries. They invariably did this at night under cover of darkness and they were consequently susceptible to discovery at those times.

Therefore our patrols were mainly carried out after dark, searching for them with radar. Our objective was to attack any unfriendly submarine or naval vessel we discovered.

Radar enabled us to search a broad expanse of sea. With the assistance of a revolving scanner (antenna), under suitable conditions we could search an area up to ninety miles in every direction. If we detected a blip (signal) on our radar screen of an unknown object on the water, we homed to it. We flew in the dark with no lights on, at an altitude of approximately 800 feet. The strategy was to approach the target prepared to attack in the event that the object proved to be unfriendly. We had secret equipment aboard known as I.F.F. (Identification, Friend or Foe) which enabled us to identify friendly planes and ships; as well it helped identify us to them.

The Leigh-light was a carbon-arc searchlight that generated fourteen million candlepower. The beam was extremely intense and was highly blinding to the gunners on deck, giving the attacking aircraft a great

advantage. The plane also had the added advantage of surprise; frequently the sky was totally cloud covered and it was not possible for the boat or submarine crews to see the attacking aircraft until the Leigh-light was turned on. If the attack was carried out properly there was little chance for the gun crews on the ships or submarines to react until after the aircraft had passed over them, and had dropped its depth charges.

We had a .303 calibre machine gun in the nose of the plane. This gun was used for strafing purposes on offence and could be utilized on defence in the event of an attack by fighters. Some planes, but not all, were equipped with .303 machine guns on either side. We had four .303 calibre guns in the tail turret with 20,000 rounds of ammunition, and carried eight depth charges in the bomb bays. The depth charges were released in strings of four. The theory was to straddle your target between the number two and three charges.

For some weeks prior to D-Day the squadron was engaged in "Operation Cork". We operated exclusively over the English Channel and the Bay of Biscay in an attempt to keep U-boats out of the Channel and away from the invasion armada in its pending voyage across to the shores of France. Just prior to D-day, operations were stepped up and we then flew both day and night patrols.

The American Army under General Patton broke through the German lines in mid July and scurried on towards the Bay of Biscay. The main U-boat ports of Brest, St. Nazaire and Lorient were rendered useless to the German U-boat fleet. Submarines could no longer find shelter there so the main thrust of U-boat operations was transferred to the northern bases, which the Germans had established on the west coast of Norway.

The U-boat fleet continued their relentless attacks on Allied shipping but now had to roam from bases much further than they had previously. At the end of July, our squadron on the other hand, moved to a station in

Scotland to be closer to their Norwegian base of operations. We operated out of our new base from the first week of August 1944 until that crucial day in September when we did not return.

Hyde Park, London - June 1944

F/Sgt Harvey Firestone

P/O Ken Graham, W/O George Grandy

At the seaside:
Maurice Neil, George Grandy, Ken Graham, Gord Biddle, George Deeth

George Grandy, Harvey Firestone
Relaxing - lower front right -

The Flight Begins

26 September 1944, Midnight to 5 a.m.

Rain, which had been intermittent throughout the previous twenty-four hours, intensified as we entered the new day. It was shortly after midnight on Tuesday, September 26th 1944.

Our crew had been briefed for an operational mission, which was to be a night-time anti-submarine patrol off the coast of Norway. We were flying with 407 Squadron, known as the Demon Squadron, one of the few all-Canadian squadrons serving with Coastal Command. We were attached to the R.A.F. and we were based at Wick, which was situated on the east coast of the northern tip of Scotland.

We were in the "Ops" Mess, having the usual eggs and bacon meal before an operational flight; with us were three other crews who, too, were to fly that night. We were scheduled to be the first crew for take-off and they in turn were to follow, each to his own patrol area and time schedule. We had finished eating and had gathered around in a group listening to Maurice Neil, our navigator, who was reviewing the meteorological information we had received during our briefing with the navigators from the other crews. He, in jest, suggested that in order not to have to put up with the bad weather of Northern Scotland, he should plot a course to Sweden and we all could relax, forget about the war and enjoy a stay there. We laughed at his proposition but readily agreed that Sweden had to be much better than Northern Scotland. Little did we know then how soon our thoughts would turn to Sweden again.

As we left the "Ops" Mess, we voiced our concern with the blustery weather conditions. We feared that the trip would be cancelled, due to the worsening winds and lowering cloud formations. Just a few days earlier we had been forced to forego an operational trip due to Gord Biddle, our Skipper, having come down with a very high fever. We did not want to miss two consecutive trips, so we hurried to get on board our assigned plane for the flight. It was "S" for Sugar #NB811, a Leigh-light equipped Wellington.

Despite the wild and stormy weather, we were given the green light to take off. With visibility down to about a quarter of a mile and with a 50 knot wind from the west we managed to become airborne at 00:50 hours. We headed out over the east coast of Scotland and proceeded on to our patrol area.

Notwithstanding the bad weather our patrol continued in a routine manner over the North Sea for about four hours. We were flying at an altitude of approximately 800 feet, our usual patrol height, about thirty miles out from the Norwegian coast on a course roughly parallel to it. Suddenly, at 04:52 hours, our starboard engine coughed and sputtered but then commenced running smoothly again. Biddle climbed hurriedly to 3000 feet, to continue on with the patrol. A short time later the same engine coughed once and took fire. Biddle throttled back immediately then switched the engine off, closed the fuel cocks and gills and had George Deeth, our second pilot, feather the propeller and switch on the automatic fire extinguisher for that engine.

The Crash

8 a.m.

As the crew braced themselves, Biddle swung the plane around into wind. Without power, at over 100 knots, he attempted to make a wheels up landing on what appeared to be the only spot possible. We barely missed flying into a house that was in our path as we came down. We did hit a cluster of trees which were a few feet in front of the house with our port wing, shearing branches about six feet from the ground. Biddle brought the tail down first to slow us up and then jammed the nose in. We slewed around and came to a very sudden jarring stop, having landed in approximately 65 feet.

Before we assumed crash positions we had removed the astrodome cover and had thrown it to the rear of the plane. This was done in order to allow us to exit the plane as soon as possible. When the tail hit the ground the astrodome cover came plummeting forward toward Graham and me. I instinctively ducked and in doing so lost my balance and was thrown head first into the main spar, losing consciousness for a few seconds.

From our position Graham and I had no way of knowing that we had made it to land. We fully expected to see water come pouring into the aircraft. Ken was anxious to exit the plane; he helped me to my feet and literally threw me through the hole in the roof where the astrodome had been. As I was on my way out I saw Biddle climbing out of the front escape hatch. For the first time I realized that we would not have to contend with water, we had made it safely to land. I turned to help Graham from the plane and as we jumped to the ground saw that we had attracted a small crowd of people. Graham and I turned to help the other members of the crew exit the plane and with great relief saw them emerge apparently without major injuries.

A hasty check on our physical condition indicated that Neil had sustained a gash on his head and a cut on his hand when the table he was on shattered. Grandy and the radio set had fallen on top of Deeth, both were battered and bruised but not hurt seriously. Biddle had been jolted and flung forward against the control column and was in apparent pain from the pounding he had taken. He also appeared to be in an advanced state of shock. Graham too had been pummelled about but, other than bruised, seemed to be in good shape. I had a large bump on my head and a sore neck. We were very thankful that we had come through with so little in the way of injury that would delay us in putting as much distance as possible between ourselves and the aircraft. We hastily attended to Neil's wounds with medication and bandages from our escape kits.

Our next consideration was to destroy the aircraft and to leave nothing that would be of any military value to the Germans. I had detonated the secret equipment known as IFF before taking crash position, all our code books, maps, charts and any other item of military value had been thrown into the sea. We made absolutely sure that we had left nothing in the plane that would be of any use to the Germans, and then, as training dictated, we attempted to burn the aircraft. We had been burning in the air but there were no flames evident once we were on the ground. We spent a few fruitless minutes attempting to set it on fire with two of the incendiary bombs that we carried for that purpose. Like the jettison valve, the incendiaries did not work. I climbed into the aircraft and grabbed the Very pistol and the remainder of the cartridges. I shot two cartridges into the plane, the other I shot into what presumably was a pool of hydraulic oil and in a few moments the plane was burning once again.

The delay to set fire to the plane and tend to Neil's wounds allowed more people to gather. The crowd had grown to about thirty people and we could see more on the way. Although we did not know it, we had come down on the outskirts of a small town called Os, a thriving village of approximately 1500 residents, located in the district of Haugland. None of the gathered group attempted to help or impede us, obviously fearful of what their actions might bring from either the German authorities or the resistance movement.

Knowing that we had to put as much distance as possible between ourselves and the aircraft immediately, we approached the nearest individual and asked him if he could tell us exactly where we were. He fortunately spoke English, and pointing toward a hilltop nearby where a group of uniformed men were milling about, stated that there was no time for explanation, that we had better leave immediately as the group on the hilltop were German soldiers and that they would soon be on the way. He did turn and indicate the direction we should take through the mountains to the east. I turned to leave with the other members of the crew and as a gesture of gratitude, thrust the Very pistol that I was still holding into his hands.

After the war we were to learn that the man's name was Magnus Askvik and that he was one of the leaders of the community, being the principal of the local school. We also learned that he was the only English speaking Norwegian at the crash site. With him was his son, Ottar, a young boy of thirteen. Ottar, along with his nine year old brother Ingemar, had just sat down for breakfast with their parents when they heard the plane approaching. They had rushed to the window in time to see us as we approached, hit the trees and crash. Ingemar was restrained by his mother from leaving the house but Ottar was able to go out with his father to the scene of the crash.

In the years to come, Ottar and Ingemar, inspired by what they had seen, played at being pilots, crashing at the site and evading the Germans. They eventually joined the Norwegian Air Force and did become pilots. They have both been flying for many years as Captains with Scandinavian Airlines. They have shown the site and explained the circumstances of our crash there to many of their pilot friends and all have expressed amazement that we could have survived. All are of the opinion that Biddle performed a miraculous feat in getting the plane down as he did.

Aerial view of the crash site taken many years later.

The final approach path follows the line of the arrow. The aircraft may have touched at the spot at the end of the arrow, the left wing tip brushed the trees beside the house (star), a pile of rubble caught the left wing, slewing it 90º and stopped it (cross)

Cross Country

We headed in a southeasterly direction for some time, hurrying as best we could to increase the distance between the aircraft and ourselves. Unfortunately the terrain was heavily wooded and very rugged, making our progress very slow.

We stopped only to catch our breath momentarily and to bury our Irwin jackets and flying boots. They would have identified us very readily had we been seen still wearing them. We also turned our battledress jackets inside out to further help us look like civilians of the area. I do believe that any German or Quisling spotting us would readily have taken us for what we were, six airmen on the run. We crossed small mountain streams, and even trotted up one for some distance hoping to throw off any dogs should they be used to track us. In short order we realized the wisdom of our move as the Germans were using dogs and it was not long before we heard them barking in the distance.

We continued on for about three hours; finally at the crest of a rather high hill we came upon what looked like a hydro installation with signs in both German and Norwegian indicating that the poles contained high voltage lines. We stopped and studied the maps that we had, to try to determine where we were, but due to the many waterways, islands and peninsulas jutting out into the fjords, we could not pinpoint our exact location.

We took stock of our situation, having attempted to set fire to the aircraft and assuring that we had left nothing behind that would be of any help to the Germans, put as much distance between the crash site and ourselves as possible, and having discarded what clothing that might easily identify us as allied airmen, we had complied with the first three requisites that our escape and evasion training had dictated.

We discussed the wisdom of separating into pairs or staying together and chose to stay as a group for a while longer. Agreeing that our next move was to find help as soon as possible or our liberty would be of very short duration, we continued on.

After once again climbing to the crest of a hill we stopped to discover that we were not too far from the shore of a fjord. Nestled in a small cove at the foot of the mountain were four or five cottages scattered amongst the trees.

We had another conference and it was agreed that Neil should go down and see if there was any possibility of obtaining aid from anyone there. He was to check at the nearest cottage and if all was in order, to signal us to approach.

We concealed ourselves amongst the brush and watched Neil picking his way cautiously down the steep slope, through the heavy growth, towards the house. We lost sight of him and some anxious moments passed while we silently awaited his reappearance. Finally, to our immense relief, he appeared in a clearing at the side of the house and waved. We took this as a signal to follow him and we started down to meet him. He started towards us and we saw that he was accompanied by a woman. We scrambled down, and rushed toward them in our anxiety to determine where our next steps might take us. We gathered around Neil and the woman, to learn that she spoke English rather well.

We spread out the maps of Norway that we had in our escape kits and showed them to her in the hope that she could point out to us exactly where we were. She could not identify the area that we were in on our map but told us that we had crashed at Haugland on the outskirts of Os, three kilometres south of the city of Bergen, that we were on a very narrow peninsula, with no land route out other than to retrace our steps and to do so would mean walking back into German hands. She explained that as much as she would like to be able to help us she could not, as she knew nothing about the resistance movement. She went on to say that, although she understood there was an active resistance group in the area, it was composed of men only.

We were then told by Neil that in his discussion with her at her house she had explained to him that the only way in which we could buy time was to hide higher up in the mountain in a small cave and if we were agreeable, her niece, who was to join us shortly, would show us the way there. The woman explained that if at all possible she would try to talk to a neighbour to see if he knew any way of contacting the resistance or if any help could be available in whatever form.

As we talked the niece joined us; her aunt explained that she could not speak English and it was obvious that she was a rather shy person. After a short discussion between the two women in Norwegian, the niece motioned us to follow her. She left the little clearing where we had congregated and headed into the brush with the six of us at her heels. The woman walked with us for a short distance during which she wished us luck, and left, promising to contact us later if at all possible.

We climbed in a southerly direction for some time, the young woman in front and the six men hurrying to keep up with her. The rain that had been intermittent picked up and it was not too long before we were soaked through. We finally reached the cave, which turned out to be a small depression in the side of the mountain, just after mid-morning.

Biddle, who had developed a bad chill, was able to lie down and get some shelter from the weather but there was little room for more bodies.

We huddled in and about the cave for several hours, in an attempt to stay dry, and out of sight of anyone who might be in the area. We felt thankful to be alive, and were determined that if at all possible we would in some way manage to get out of the plight we were in. We realized that it was impossible for us to able to return to England before our next of kin would receive telegrams advising that we were "missing in action," and wondered what their reaction would be.

Fortunately we were all in pretty good condition considering what we had come through; suffering only minor hurts and bruises from the crash. We changed the bandage on Neil's hand and tended to his head wound. They did not seem to inconvenience him very much. We were, however, concerned for Biddle, who was suffering from the chill he had developed and there was no way for us to help him other than to huddle close together. We could not light a fire as the smoke would draw attention to our position. In the early afternoon Biddle was able to sleep for a short while and we were gratified to learn that he felt some better after he woke.

A Long Morning and Afternoon

Time moved very slowly; we occupied ourselves by examining our escape kits not knowing exactly what treasures we might find. They contained maps of Norway and Holland, and much to our great surprise, maps of France and also a few French francs. The maps were printed on silk and coated with rubber to prevent them from deteriorating. Finding the maps of France and the French money, made us momentarily turn our thoughts to the possibility of making our way south. We knew that there were a number of highly organized escape networks throughout occupied Europe and that these networks had provided shelter and the eventual means of evasion for many airmen. A number had made their way from the north of Holland down through Belgium and France and had eventually crossed the Pyrenees into Spain and then on to Gibraltar and eventually back to England. None of us recalled having been told that the escape networks reached as far north as Norway. We felt, therefore, that it would be far easier to attempt to reach Sweden than to try to head south towards France.

The kits did contain a few goodies in the way of food tablets to help sustain us. There was a rubber water bottle, some tablets to purify water, a small compass, a little file, a miniature razor, tablets to help keep us awake, sewing thread, needles, buttons and a small quantity of medical supplies. These kits were issued to us before each operational sortie and had to be returned unopened after each trip under very severe penalty for not doing so.

We engaged in whispered discussion of how best to conserve the meagre rations that we had with us. We had nothing in the way of food other than the tablets in our escape kits. I had had an orange which I foolishly had given to the girl who had led us to the cave not realizing how incriminating it would be if she were to be found with it. Years later, as a grown, charming woman, Martha Haugland (nee Bruaroy) informed me that she did not eat the orange but had hidden it in the underbrush as she returned home. She had realized the danger it presented and did not want to be found with it in her possession.

We explored the area in the immediate vicinity of the cave, not wandering too far in any direction and never out of sight of each other. We discovered a lot of very large blueberries on some bushes nearby but we hesitated to eat any for fear that we might become ill.

Neil filled us in on what had transpired when he first left us. He told us that he had found two women at the first home he approached but that they could not understand him. One of the two women was Martha Bruaroy, the woman who had guided us to the cave, the other was her mother. It was Martha who led him to her aunt's home where Neil met

Ingeborg Bjornen. She spoke English very well, having spent a number of years in England working as a nurse. Ingeborg and Martha, after a short discussion, had agreed that Martha would take us to the cave.

With darkness soon approaching we contemplated our first night in Norway, little realizing the tremendous activity our crash had generated on three fronts. We knew full well that there would be a hurried search by the German forces in the area to attempt to find us, but did not anticipate the dedicated effort on the part of Ingeborg Bjornen to get help for us, nor could we imagine the frantic attempt to locate us by various members of the very well organized local resistance groups.

As mentioned before, when the Bay of Biscay ports that had been havens for German submarines operating in the Atlantic were cut off by the advancing Allied armies in France, the Germans diverted their naval activities to the sea ports on the Norwegian coast. They had a very large submarine base at Hattvik that was also used as a training school for sub crews. It was situated less than eight kilometres north east of where we crashed and was very heavily fortified. A large army post was located on the east side of the village of Os and they had a garrison and anti-aircraft installations on Rottingen, an island about three and a half kilometres from where we crashed.

The main German army garrison and a large prison camp were at Ulven, less than one kilometre north of Os. This base was a Norwegian military installation prior to the war and had been taken over by the Germans. After the war the Norwegian army continued to use and are still using the base. In 1982 I had the honour to lay a wreath at the base of a memorial located just outside the main gates of the camp. The memorial is in memory of the over nine hundred allied seamen, airmen and commandos who were shot by the Germans and whose bodies are buried in unmarked graves on the hillsides surrounding the camp. Until March of 1945 the Germans shot most prisoners taken in Norway, rather then send them to prison camps in Germany. Their deaths were ordained by Hitler's infamous "Commando Order".

A month after Dieppe, twelve British commandos were captured in Norway on a mission to blow up a power station. The Germans found a British "Handbook of Irregular Warfare" on one of the commandos. Hitler read from it: "Never give the enemy a chance, the days when we could practice the rules of sportsmanship are over. For the time being, every soldier must be a potential gangster.... Remember, you are out to kill." Hitler raged at all commandos calling them thugs and gangsters and stating that they did not enjoy the protections of the Geneva Convention because they violated the Hague Convention on Land Warfare. Henceforth, Hitler announced, all commandos were to be shot, even if they were

in uniform and had surrendered willingly. ”They are to be slaughtered to the last man and without a trial,” he commanded. Hitler insisted that the word be put out to all the German armed forces in a formal order. The Commando Order was issued on October 18,1942. After D-Day it included any parachutists and all Allied troops found operating beyond the battle perimeter. It remained in effect ”fully in force” until the end of the war. Nowhere was it carried out with more ruthlessness than in Norway.

In the mistaken belief that we were a heavily armed commando group, a rumour circulated by the resistance, our capture became one of the top priorities governing the activities of all the German forces on land and sea and air in the area. All available units were immediately called out to search for us including many from further afield. Every man that could be taken from his normal activity was utilized. They set up roadblocks and searched and questioned everyone in the area. They put up notices and admonished one and all that the penalty for aiding us was death; that anyone thus caught would be shot on sight.

Within a very short time after we had left the crash scene the Germans rounded up all the citizens in the Os area and terrorized them with brutal beatings and torture during the interrogations that followed. Many were sent off to prison, never to return. We learned of the frenzied activities of the Germans some days later from those who were helping us evade capture. The threat of death to themselves and their loved ones could not detract them from their efforts to resist a despised enemy, and in doing so, help six strangers in their time of need.

Norwegian Preparations

After leaving us Ingeborg Bjornen hastened to one Harald Lunde's home. She believed that he was an active member of the resistance, and therefore might be able to help us, but he was not at home. Disappointed, she returned to her home to find her father, Hans Bjornen, there. She told him where we were and after a short consultation they decided that they would approach an acquaintance, one Mr. Kristian Evensen, to see if he would allow us the use of his boat in order to cross the North Sea. Ingeborg then went to a trusted friend Mr. Johannes Ferstadvoll, to persuade him to accompany her father to Mr. Evensen's home at Bjornaroy some distance away. He readily agreed and shortly the two men were on their way.

On her way back home from Mr. Ferstadvoll, Ingeborg found the route teeming with German soldiers who were looking for us. She scurried on home ahead of the searching soldiers. Hurriedly she filled a small container with milk, dashed out and eluding the Germans once again, came to us in the early afternoon. She reported that her father was attempting to get help to us; she could not impart other news as she had no knowledge of what was in the offing. She explained that the Germans were in the area in great numbers and that our position was very grave. In her words, "the danger of you being arrested is very great." She then informed us that the berries were edible and she left us with little hope that we would see her again.

Ingeborg arrived back home to find that the Germans had taken over the homes on the cove, hers of course included. She was immediately questioned but she disclaimed any knowledge of our whereabouts. The officer in charge of the group informed her that he knew we were hiding somewhere on the mountain nearby. He declared that we were British commandos and very heavily armed. He imparted the information that we were cut off on the peninsula, that the whole area was surrounded and that our capture was imminent. He let it be known that he had no intention of risking the lives of his men by approaching us in the dark, that they would make camp there overnight, and flush us out in the morning.

On the pretext that she was going to pick berries for the Germans' breakfast, Ingeborg was able to come to us in the late evening. The news she had was grave. We were trapped. We were to be picked up by the Germans in the morning unless in some manner we could get off the peninsula.

During the early hours of that morning Einar Evensen, a group leader of the 2nd company of the Milorg (Norwegian Resistance) in Lepsoy, was at breakfast at his home in Bjornaroy when his attention was drawn by the noise of our aircraft's approach. He ran

out into his yard and quickly realized that the aircraft was in trouble and he watched as it passed overhead at a very low altitude, saw it turn toward Haugland, and realized that it was going to attempt an emergency landing. He knew that the terrain was very bad and that the chance of survival of any of the crew members was slim. He felt that if anyone had survived the crash they most likely would be apprehended by the Germans. He nonetheless decided that if there were any survivors he would do whatever possible to help them if the opportunity presented itself. With this in mind he hurried to make enquiries and much to his surprise learned that the crew had hurried from the crash scene in the direction of Bjornen. He sought information as to our possible fate and whereabouts without any success until after 1:00 in the afternoon and then being hungry, returned home for some nourishment.

On his arrival home he found his father in the living room in serious discussion with Hans Bjornen and Johannes Ferstadvoll. Einar realized that his morning search for the crew did not have to be continued into the afternoon when he heard Hans Bjornen ask his father to allow him the use of his 30 foot motor boat in order for us to try to cross the North Sea to the Shetland Islands.

Kristian Evensen, Einar's father, was more than willing to let his boat be used, but argued that due to the bad condition of the motor it would not be wise to attempt a trip across the North Sea. Hans Bjornen expressed his disappointment and told Einar that he wanted to do whatever possible to prevent the crew being captured by the Germans. They all readily agreed that the crew had to be taken off the peninsula that very night or, if not, capture was inevitable. The only way that this could possibly be done was by rowboat and that meant to enlist the help of others. Einar accepted the responsibility to enlist help and to find shelter and a secure hiding place for us if it were possible. Hans and Johannes agreed to see to it that the crew would be brought over to Trynevika, a small cove on Bjornetrynet, that evening. Einar would arrange for the manpower and the boats to be at the rendezvous point. They then separated, each hurrying to carry out the tasks they had undertaken.

Einar set about enlisting men for the arduous and most dangerous job of manning the two rowboats that were to be used. Five men were selected, Einar being one. Torvald Jakobson, Magnus K. Rottingen, and Hans Holmefjord were three very strong and capable rowers and knew the waters well, Nils Rottingen, being a strong rower, known for his ardent opposition to the German occupation, who also spoke English having lived in the United States for some time, was the other man to be asked. They all very eagerly volunteered when they were asked to participate.

While all this activity was going on, Johan Viken and Jakob Hjelle, who were both active in the Milorg at Os, Jakob Hjelle being the leader, discussed the downed aircraft at Haugland. They had heard that the crew had been able to take to the hills, and knew by all the German activity that up to that point in time the airmen had evaded capture. Jakob suggested to Johan, that he would not be surprised if their group would be contacted, as they were involved in hiding wanted people from the Germans, and their activity was known to some of the resistance groups in the area.

After their discussion Johan Viken contacted Magnus Hauge, who was the leader of the 2nd company of the Milorg in Os, by telephone, and in code asked if Magnus had heard of our whereabouts. Magnus, not knowing, replied that there was a shortage of potatoes nowadays but he would try to see if he could manage to supply some in the next short while. Some time later the phone in Magnus's home rang once again. Einar Evensen was on the line wanting to arrange a meeting with Magnus for the following day in Lepsoy.

On Strøno, a large island some five kilometres from the rendezvous point, the Milorg had been using a boathouse as a meeting place. It had been occupied earlier in the summer by the Germans but was considered to be a relatively safe place to hide us for a short period[3] even though the German garrison at Rottingen was just across the water less than a quarter of a mile away and the trip to Strøno would be very hazardous, passing many German sentry points along the way. The thought was that we were to stay in the boathouse during the hours of darkness, leave before daylight, climb up into the thickly wooded hills nearby and to remain hidden there during daylight hours, returning to the boathouse under cover of darkness in the late evening.

Early that evening the five men assembled and checked their equipment, muffled the oarlocks as best they could with pieces of rag, and assured themselves that all was in readiness for the journey to Bjornatrynet to pick us up. The men were silently grateful for the heavy clouds that had descended. At approximately eight o'clock, with relatively calm seas and a heavy drizzling rain, under cover of darkness they eagerly, yet nervously, got into their boats and rowed out, hugging the shoreline and hoping they would not be seen. Bjornafjord is roughly four kilometres wide at the point they entered it on their way to meet with us.

[3] Helen Mowinckel Nilsen comments: The boathouse at Strønen had a connection with the oyster pond. There was a boathouse below and a cabin on top. It had been occupied by a German Lieutenant who used it for pleasure with friends and girls, serving alcohol and good seafood. The German Lieutenant had contact with a "friendly" Norwegian who provided salmon, crabs, lobsters, etc. The German spoke Norwegian, the Norwegian did not speak German. On September 24th, 2 days before the forced landing the German met hid Norwegian "friend" and gave him the keys to the cabin as he was going on leave for 30 days to see his family in Hamburg. He said that he would not allow anyone from the fortress at Røttingen to use his place. The "friendly" Norwegian was a man in Einar Evensen's group and could observe the movements of the changing troops. This is why the boathouse was considered to be a safe place to put the Canadian for a while. (letter 27 September 2004)

Down to the Boats

Ingeborg Bjornen returned home after visiting us in the afternoon and shortly thereafter met with her father and Johannes Ferstadvoll. They told her of the plan to take us to the rendezvous point at Bjornatrynet. It was decided that Johannes would accompany Ingeborg. The trek through the woods was a very perilous one, due to the rain and the darkness it was even more so than usual, notwithstanding the presence of the many Germans in the area. Shortly before seven o'clock Ingeborg and Johannes quietly left Bjornen and started working their way through the woods in our direction.

Meanwhile the rain, which had been falling on and off all during the afternoon, developed into a heavy drizzle as evening approached. Darkness quickly descended and we stayed closer together under the rock outcropping in order to stay as dry and as warm as possible. We were quite startled when Ingeborg and Johannes suddenly materialized out of the blackness. She, practically without hesitation, signalled that we were to hurry and follow them. We scrambled to our feet hastening to comply but full of curiosity as to what was happening. Hushed enquiries broke the stillness of the night and we had to remind each other that any untoward sound could betray our position. She and Johannes led the way, as we silently wended our way through the trees and underbrush behind them.

We scrambled on at a fair pace, keeping as close together as the heavy foliage and the wet, slippery terrain would allow. Approximately a half hour later it became apparent that we were descending a rather steep incline and that we were approaching water. At the foot of the hill, as we emerged from the trees, we entered a little clearing. The clearing was rock strewn and not more than fifty yards in width. Less than a hundred feet away the waters of the fjord dashed against the rocks. Ingeborg signalled to us to get down and whispered that we should try to blend in with the surroundings so that we could not be seen by boats that were passing on the fjord very close to land.

Throughout the evening Johannes had not uttered a sound; it was obvious that he did not speak nor understand English. Ingeborg, in her conversations with us, had referred to her father and we were under the impression at that time that the man with us was Mr. Hans Bjornen. We did not discover his true identity until many years later.

We crouched down among the rocks and hastily took in our surroundings. Filled with concern for what was to happen next, we besieged Ingeborg with whispered questions. In reply to our curiosity, she explained that her father had agreed to arrange for us to be at the cove at that time. She went on to explain that some people her father had contacted were going to attempt to reach us and that we were to go with them. She claimed she knew nothing other than what she had told us. Though many questions must have been on the

minds of the crew, none were voiced, feeling satisfied that she would not be able to answer. We knew the present and our immediate future was in the hands of others and there was very little we could do to alter the course of events as they were unfolding at the time.

We waited nervously. We saw several boats passing not too far from shore and we wondered if they were looking for us. Little did we know then that the Germans had set up a blockade of the peninsula. They used seven patrol boats, plying back and forth, in an effort to make sure we were kept on the peninsula so that no attempted rescue by sea would succeed.

After Ingeborg had answered our questions, we settled down to a hushed, silent vigil. Eight pairs of eyes scanned the fjord, anxiously trying to detect signs of the approach of our expected rescuers. We had been waiting for about an hour when suddenly a rowboat materialized out of the misty darkness. We all seemed to spot it simultaneously. There were two men in a large rowboat drifting in towards the rocky shore. The man in the front was frantically waving for us to join them. We thanked Ingeborg and Johannes for all they had done and hurried to scramble on board the rowboat; scrambled is just what we did, with the boat tossing and pitching the six of us presented quite a sight in our attempts to get settled aboard. Once seated, we waved farewell to Ingeborg and Johannes who, standing on the shore, continued to wave until we lost sight of them.

Ingeborg and Johannes returned to their respective homes under the cover of darkness and were successful in not arousing the suspicions of the Germans. The next day however, when the Germans discovered that we were no longer on the peninsula, they swept down on the Bjornen home, arrested Ingeborg's sister, Hanna, who had not been home when we were in the area. Apparently, in order to shield her sister and father, Hanna avoided answering the questions put to her. The Germans were positive that she had contributed to our success in fleeing from Bjornen. She, like her sister, spoke English very well and this added to their suspicions of her. She was treated very harshly by her captors, suffering extreme torture at their hands in an attempt to get information from her. She defied them with such vehemence that she was eventually sent off to prison and remained there until the end of the war.

Boat Trip

As soon as we were settled in the boat the two oarsmen guided it out from amongst the rocks into the fjord and quickly settled down to a strong rhythmic stroke. We saw that they had the oarlocks well muffled with rags and noticed the sounds of their efforts were kept down to a minimum.

The Norwegians had not uttered a word; they seemed to be completely absorbed by the task at hand. We silently tried to take in our surroundings but visibility was not too good and we could see little other than the white caps of the waves close to the boat. The rain was now quite a bit heavier and we, unlike the Norwegians, were poorly dressed for the conditions.

George Deeth and I were sitting beside each other in front of one of the Norwegians. George whispered to me that he hoped he would not be bothered by the roll of the sea, as it was rather rough. I told him that I was not bothered by the sea but that the rain running off my hair down my neck was a source of annoyance. The Norwegian behind us stood up in the boat, took off the raincoat he was wearing and threw it over our heads. Before sitting down he leaned forward and asked in a form of Brooklyn accented English: "How's that Bud, feeling any better now?"

This was our introduction to Nils Rottingen; you can imagine our surprise to learn that he spoke English. Years later we learned that the other oarsman was Torvald Jacobsen.

We travelled on for about 500 metres and as we neared land we noticed another boat secreted against the shore. There were three men in the boat and it was obvious that they were waiting nervously for us to appear. As we came close the Norwegians in the second boat waved to us and greeted us with broad smiles, indicating how relieved they were that we had made it thus far.

The two boats drifted together close to shore as the Norwegians held a hurried whispered conference; one of the men in the other boat, who appeared to be the leader of the group, turned to Nils Rottingen, gave him instructions and Nils, acting as interpreter, then told us that three of us were to travel in each boat, and indicated who was to get into the other boat. It was apparent that their conference was about the distribution of weight in the two boats for we had noticed how they seemed to appraise us as they spoke. We later learned that the apparent leader was Einar Evensen and the other two men with him were Magnus K. Rottingen and Hans Holmefjord. After splitting the crew, I remained where

I was with George Deeth and one of the other boys; we followed as the other boat pulled away from the shore and continued on.

Visibility, which had been very bad, improved somewhat, and we were able to see further from the boat. We were able to detect that we were passing in between a number of islands, hugging the shoreline some of the time and at other times we were further out in the fjord. We pressed on and just as it appeared to me that we might be within sight of our destination, although I had no idea where we were, we would once again enter what appeared to be the open sea.

As we quietly put more distance between ourselves and Bjornatrynet there was cause for concern by the Norwegians as Hans Holmefjord spotted a patrol boat crossing our path. Rowing in both boats stopped and we drifted along in hushed silence for a while. The patrol boat continued on its way oblivious to the fact that their prey was so close and within sight. The Norwegians congratulated themselves for having made a wise decision in not using boats with power for the mission. They were convinced that had they done so all would have been lost.

On we went; more than twenty four hours earlier we had jokingly suggested that we would not return that night to the squadron, and there we were in the dead of night being rowed about on a Norwegian fjord in an attempt to stay out of the hands of the Germans.

We were in open water for about fifteen to twenty minutes when once again we were moving between islands. We eventually reached a larger land mass and as we turned to starboard, continuing closer to the shoreline which was to our port side, our attention was drawn to a light from a building at the water's edge. Framed in the window was a sentry. He did not notice us slip by and we continued on our way for a very short distance.

The lead boat pulled over close to shore on our port side and one of the Norwegians clambered ashore. He silently slipped into the underbrush and was lost from sight. We later learned that he was to reconnoitre to be sure that it was safe to proceed. Apparently he felt that all was well for it was not long before we were on our way again.

Soon we were able to see land on either side of us and realized that the waterway was narrowing, bringing us into a very narrow channel. As we proceeded we saw looming out of the darkness a bridge across our path. This is the bridge between Bruaroy and Rottingen. The bridge is about three metres wide and less than three metres high. Standing in the middle of the bridge was a German sentry. The crew were alert and concerned about the problem but the Norwegians seemed not unduly worried and we continued on our way.

As we approached the bridge the German looked down at us and we felt certain that we were in for a major problem, but as we slid silently under the bridge he simply turned and walked off the bridge. We were shocked at the turn of events but at a loss to understand why the sentry acted as he did. We rowed on for a couple of hundred metres and once again headed in to shore. Soon the sound of someone approaching through the trees was heard and our scout rejoined us.

We had been on the water for well over two hours when finally, after crossing more open water, we pulled to shore on what we later learned was Strøno, an island some four and a half kilometres long by two and a half kilometres wide.

A Leisurely First Day at Strøno

27 September

We disembarked to find that we were at a boathouse and that we had arrived at our destination. We quickly entered the boathouse and stumbled around in the dark but still managed to climb up into the loft under the guidance of the Norwegians. On entering the room above the boathouse, the blackout curtain on the one window was checked and a match was struck. A coal oil lantern was on a table in front of the window and it was lit. There were ten of us in the room, one of the Norwegians had stayed with the boats as a lookout.

Nils Rottingen quickly informed us that we were to remain where we were, that under cover of darkness we were to leave the boathouse and climb into the mountains, stay there until darkness had settled in and return to the boathouse at night, and that they were leaving us an old canvas which we were to take and to use for shelter from the weather. He went on to tell us that we were in a camp that had previously been used by the Germans and that across the narrow strait some 30 metres away at Rottingen was a large German garrison.

On assuring themselves that we understood what we were to do, they told us that someone would try to return the following night and wishing us well, they swiftly departed.

When they had gone we examined our surroundings and found that we were in a room with two narrow beds. The window faced west and one bed was against the north wall, and the other against the south wall. As mentioned before, there was a table and chair under the window. There also was a small stand beside each bed. The stands contained books that were printed in both German and Norwegian. The quarters above the boathouse were austere but fairly comfortable.

We determined that we had to try to sleep as soon as possible; one of us would stay on watch while the others slept. The watch was to be of one hour duration as it was well on in the wee hours of the morning and there were few hours left for sleep before we had to be on our way up the mountain. As I had been awake before six in the morning o f the 25th I had not slept in over forty hours; nonetheless I took the first watch.

As the others tried to get comfortable on the beds, I sat in the chair by the window. I tried to peer through the darkness outside but could make out nothing. Sitting there in the darkness the events of the previous day flashed through my thoughts. Implanted in my mind was the calm, cool efficiency that had been displayed by each of the other members of the crew. There had not been the least sign of hesitation or panic aboard the plane. The

crew had functioned extremely well under duress. I marvelled at our luck in not having to come down in the North Sea and at how fortunate we were to have survived the crash.

My thoughts turned to the ease in which we seemed to have travelled on the fjords. A very strict curfew existed and anyone caught contravening the curfew would be in deep trouble with the authorities; anyone caught helping us surely would be forced to pay with their lives, therefore I reasoned that the possibility that we were actually in the hands of Germans, or people working for them, existed.

The intelligence lectures we had received on escape and evasion, some given by successful escapers themselves, suggested that a ruse often employed successfully by German intelligence was to become involved with evaders in the pretext that they were helping them. In doing so they would gain the confidence of the evaders and perhaps obtain valuable information from them. I hoped that my suspicions were unfounded and that our new-found friends were what they appeared to be, brave, loyal Norwegians doing their utmost to help in the fight against our common enemy. The hour passed quickly. I went over to the bed, shook Neil who was taking over on watch, took his place on the bed and was soon fast asleep.

We left the boathouse, as we had been instructed, under cover of darkness a couple of hours later. We carefully descended the stairs, fully aware that our movements had to be very slow and deliberate in order to make as little noise as possible. We exited the boathouse onto a railed wooden deck which extended for a short distance over water and brought us to land a few feet away. The path leading from the deck followed along the water to the right for a very short distance and then veered to the left. It had stopped raining but the heavy clouds continued to make visibility very limited. We could, however, see that the clearing contained a large building which looked much like a barrack block, and that we would have to pass alongside the very edge of it, for its full length. It had windows spaced about three feet apart and as we had no idea if it was occupied or not we proceeded with the utmost of caution. Crouching down we passed under the windows and continued on, passed the building and headed into the underbrush along a very narrow pathway.

It was shortly after five in the morning and we doubted if anyone would be about at that time, nonetheless we felt it would be safer for us if we stayed clear of any path which most likely would be used by others. We laboriously climbed over the rocks and through the trees and foliage for about a half hour. We spotted an area that afforded good concealment from prying eyes and decided that we would remain there. We made a lean-to type shelter with the canvas and huddled on the ground under it.

Daylight slowly materialized and we were able to see Rottingen, through the trees, across the water. We estimated that we were some 350 metres above the fjord. A short while later we were suddenly startled by the sound of heavy gunfire. It was fairly close and sounded like heavy artillery. Naturally we were curious to know what it could be. Later we were to learn that the garrison on Rottingen consisted of anti-aircraft defences as well as coastal defences and that they had gunnery practice regularly in the early hours of the morning.

We remained where we were, filling the time with small talk and determining how best to conserve the tablets which we had in our escape kits, hopeful that the Norwegians would be able to bring food that night as they had promised. When darkness settled in we started on our trek back to the boathouse. We arrived back in the boathouse without incident and anxiously waited to see if our friends would be able to get back to us that night.

Norwegian Preparations Continue

Our day had been a leisurely one; we had lots of time to relax physically and recover from the volatile events of the previous day. It had been a relaxed day for us although we had to be very alert throughout.

On the other hand it had been a hectic one for Magnus Hauge. He cycled to his appointed meeting with Einar Evensen. They were to meet in a sawmill shed not too far from Einar's home in Lepsoy. On his way he saw the heavy concentration of German troops in the area engaged in the search for us. He assumed that they had narrowed down their hunt and were closing in on their quarry.

He entered the shed and after greeting Einar he was quickly told of the events of the previous day. Einar related how we had been evacuated from the peninsula at Bjornen and that we were now on the island at Strøno. They, knowing that our stay on Strøno would be of short duration, agreed that we would soon have to be moved to another haven.

They were in the midst of their deliberations when they were interrupted by the arrival of German soldiers wanting to know what they were doing in the shed. They were able to convince the Germans that they were up to no mischief. After the soldiers had left they agreed that Magnus would advise Jakob Hjelle through Johan Viken that the two groups would have to work in concert and that plans had to be formulated to eventually move us from Strøno.

Magnus returned home and called Johan Viken on the telephone, telling Johan that he had six sacks of potatoes and asking him what arrangements could be made for their pickup.

Stay at Strøno is Extended

27 - 30 September

After leaving Magnus, Einar rejoined his group and they arrived some time later at the boathouse. They were full of news of the German attempt to locate us and extremely pleased with their actions to thwart them. We questioned them about the boathouse we were in, there were a few in the area nearby, and the other large building close by. They explained that the buildings had been in use by the Germans until recently when they had vacated them, and therefore they reasoned we would be safe where we were. They told us of the garrison just across the inlet, and warned us to maintain the utmost of care in all our movements. Leaving a small package of food they departed, promising to be back within the next day or two.

Eagerly we opened the package of food to discover that it contained but one piece of what looked like raw fish. It was very hard and rubbery, had a fishlike smell and was very salty to the taste. We actually could not eat it due to its consistency.[4] Neil eventually rubbed it on his Wellington boots in order to try to make them waterproof.

For the following three days we carried out much the same program, going up onto the mountain before daylight and returning after dark. We were able to collect water from the dripping leaves of trees, and from a small stream. We had little food but managed very well with the tablets provided in our escape kits. The old piece of canvas provided what little shelter we had so we remained fairly wet and damp throughout that period of time, but nevertheless our morale remained high and our spirits good.

If anything, our trips up and down the mountain were the highlights of the days as we had little to occupy ourselves with other than to be sure that we were not seen by anyone. The Germans on Rottingen had their usual gunnery practice in the morning and from time to time at odd hours during the day, but there was little else to attract our attention. We usually huddled in our lean-to when it rained and did not wander far from it when there was no rain. Being constantly so close together eventually made us more sensitive to each other's habits.

I recall the two Georges starting quite a debate, which eventually involved us all, on the subject of profanity. George Grandy had used an expletive to which Deeth had taken exception; he claimed that swearing indicated a lack of vocabulary on the part of anyone who swore. They were at it for only a short time when one of them asked for an outside opinion and in short order the six of us were at it hot and heavy. It is difficult to describe

[4] Helen Mowinckel-Nilsen: The package was salted and smoked belly of a tuna. Very fat and delicious - in thin slices.

what it was like, each of us trying to get in our two cents worth, but unable to speak much above a whisper. Believe it or not the debate lasted until we were prepared to descend the mountain. If I recall rightly, tempers were a little short as we scrambled down. Whenever any one of us made the least bit of noise the others were quick to take him to task. In the morning all was forgotten and we were once again back to normal.

As the hunt for us drew closer, the group from Lepsoy, and the Milorg at Os decided that we should be moved from Strøno. In the mountains about twenty kilometres north-east of Os, the Milorg used a small cabin which was secreted midst the trees. The trip to the cabin would cover about thirty kilometres on both Bjornafjord and Fusafjord to Lonningdal, and then there would be land travel for some five kilometres to the cabin at Botnane. The trip on the fjords would mean passing two coastal fortresses at Rottingen and Svarvhella and the naval base at Hattvik. They reasoned that the trip presented a lot of obstacles fraught with danger, but once at the cabin we would be relatively safe.

Time to Move On

30 September / 1 October

We were surprised when the Norwegians visited us in daylight on the mountain at Strøno on Saturday, September 30th. Greetings over, they then told us that those with moustaches had to remove them, and that we all must shave then and there. They explained that this had to be done in preparation for our move that was to take place the next day, Sunday, October the first. Shaving turned out to be quite an ordeal for us, particularly for those with moustaches. We had no soap and the razors that were provided in our escape kits were extremely dull.

The reason Sunday was picked for the move was an obvious one. Hattvik, the U-boat training centre, was very active; fifteen to twenty vessels and submarines were daily scattered over the fjord near there, but on Sunday their activity was lessened. Einar Evansen had a twenty-one foot motorboat, the type very commonly used by people in the area when they were out fishing. It was felt that the Germans would not be too suspicious of that type of boat on the water at that time.

Torvald and Einar led us for some two kilometres across Strøno to a small jetty where they had the boat tied. Five of us were put in the hold of the boat, where the fish catch usually was stored. We lay on the floor practically on top of each other and, to our added discomfort, a heavy tarpaulin was thrown over us. The weather had changed and for once we were blessed with a clear day. The seas were calmer than they had been, and that was an added blessing. The engine of the boat was started and we pulled out and headed onto Bjornafjord. The boat was equipped with a small diesel engine that ran smoothly, but sputtered from time to time under its heavy load.

We continued on our way; those of us in the hold were curious but oblivious to all that was happening on the water. Little information had been passed on to us and we had no idea where we were heading. Although we were in possession of a Norwegian-English dictionary, we found it difficult to learn where we were going or what was to happen to us. Einar and Torvald were not in the least bit communicative. Much later we learned that a German patrol boat had come barrelling towards us at high speed to investigate our presence. Torvald and Einar were worried that the Germans had realized how deep in the water the boat was with it's heavy load and were coming to check to see what the boat's cargo consisted of. It also was the habit of the Germans to buy some of the catch of the local fishermen and there was the added probability that they were coming to attempt to buy fish. If they were told that there was no fish aboard then their suspicions would be aroused, and they would investigate to see what the hold contained. Einar and Torvald reasoned that they could not make a successful escape by trying to run for it. There was

nothing they could do but to continue on with the pretext that they were out fishing. As they approached, the Germans scanned the boat with binoculars, seemed to satisfy themselves that all was in order because they turned away without a question being asked.

Fusafjord is some six and a half kilometres wide as you head north from Bjornafjord, narrowing down to slightly more than two and a half kilometres at Venganeset which is a narrow tip of land almost due east of Hattvik. For reasons unknown to us we were deposited on the tip of land opposite Hattvik and were left there. It was early afternoon and the day was bright and clear. We were equipped with a pair of strong binoculars that the Norwegians had left with us. Secreted among the foliage we took turns watching whatever movement was on the water. We were able to observe how, due to the depth of water at lands edge, the larger boats could hug the shoreline and be less conspicuous from the air.

Our friends rejoined us some time later and motioned to us to follow them. We imagined that they must have reconnoitred the area, or had contacted someone, to assure themselves that all was in order to continue on with our journey. As we were walking to where the boat had been left Einar, using the dictionary, questioned us on how many guns we carried and also wanted to know how many rounds of ammunition were aboard the aircraft. We told him that we had four guns in the turret and one in the nose, that we usually carried in excess of 20,000 bullets. He asked what had happened to the bullets and when told of how we had been forced to dispose of them, by dumping them overboard, he was beside himself. He let us know that it was a terrible waste. To him 20,000 rounds of ammunition properly used, meant the dispatch of 20,000 Germans from Norwegian soil. I think that in some way he tried to scold us for not attempting somehow to save the ammo for his use. We were still trying to make ourselves understood when we came to the site where they had tethered the boat.

We scrambled down the embankment, entered the hold and were soon under way. We travelled for some time in a northerly direction on Fusafjord covering approximately five kilometres. As we approached Samnangerfjord we veered to a north-westerly course sustaining our steady progress for another two kilometres or so. We eventually decreased our speed and drifted in to shore.

Although our Norwegian friends had become less reserved, and had actually used the Norwegian-English dictionary in order to try to communicate with us during our discussion relating to the armament we had aboard the aircraft, they had lapsed into a complete silence and we were literally in the dark both as to our whereabouts and also as to what was taking place. It shortly became apparent that we were to meet someone and

we had arrived at the rendezvous point. It was located at the mouth of a small stream that flowed down from the surrounding hills. The stream was less than a hundred feet in width and appeared to be rather shallow.

It is hard to recall the length of time we waited there; I do remember that suddenly a light appeared momentarily amongst the trees opposite us and it was evident that we were not alone. One of the Norwegians immediately shone a flashlight towards where the light had appeared as if in reply to an expected signal. As soon as he had done so, there was a sudden commotion from whoever was on the other side. Einar and Torvald reacted by jumping out of the boat, waved for us to follow and quickly ran into the trees. We were out of the boat in a flash and hurried on, endeavouring to keep up with them and not to become separated from each other. We eventually came upon a shed of sorts and the Norwegians ran to it. They managed to get a door opened and we all rushed inside. Crowding around in a corner of the building the Norwegians took out their dictionary in order to explain what all the commotion was about. They excitedly used the Norwegian word "Tyske", meaning German, as they left fed through the dictionary. We had surmised the obvious and indicated to them that we understood. After they considered it safe, they left us, indicating that they would be back in a short while. We waited there in the dark and it was not too long before they reappeared. Sign language, our major means of communication, was used to let us know that once again we were to follow them.

Moving with extreme caution, but as fast as we possibly could, we scurried on through the trees. We did not hear nor see any sign of pursuit and when we approached a cluster of three boathouses sitting on the waters edge, we entered the middle one, on directions of our two friends. They let us know by their actions that they were very pleased to have succeeded in getting us to the boathouse. They indicated that we should stay where we were and that they would be leaving us. Without giving us the slightest clue to what the future held for us, they quickly departed.

Boathouse

Evening 1 October

We noticed a ladder leading up to an open trapdoor in the ceiling of the boathouse; climbing it, we discovered a small storage area with just about enough room for the six of us to lie down. We had been on the go for a long time without rest and were much too tired to bother to appraise our situation. It was readily agreed that the best thing to do under the circumstances was to get rest and sleep. The others sprawled on the floor trying to get comfortable, as I sat trying to remain awake on the first watch. It seemed to me that the other five were all fast asleep within a few seconds.

A very few minutes went by when movement outside the boathouse could be heard. The door was rattled and excited voices broke the quiet of the night. I reached over and shook Neil awake, motioning to him not to make any sound. He whispered that we should not wake any of the others, being fearful that any sound made would give us away. We waited with baited breath, then the noise diminished and all was soon quiet again. In a few short minutes Neil was back to sleep once again.

It was only years later that we learned the truth about this incident. When the German patrol arrived at the three boathouses they readily entered two of them and carried out an unsuccessful search. However, when they were confronted with a locked entrance to the third boathouse, the officer in charge called them away, admonishing them for taking too much time with the padlock. He chastised them for not realizing that we could not possibly be in the locked boathouse. The Milorg group hiding in the underbrush were so close that they could easily overhear all that was said.

After about a half hour had passed I was startled to hear the door to the boathouse being opened. I crawled to the opening just in time to realize that someone was at the top of the ladder. His head and shoulders slowly emerged out of the void at the top of the ladder and he glanced around. He was wearing an oilskin type hat and coat, much like the other Norwegians had worn. He turned to me and asked, ”Is anyone hurt and in need of a Doctor?” His presence roused the others and we assured him that we were in good shape and did not need any medical attention. He told us that he had to leave then, but would be back within a half hour and that we should be prepared to go with him. This was our introduction to Helen Mowinkel-Nilsen, otherwise known to British Intelligence SOE (Special Operations Executive), Norwegian Section, as R-15.

Special Operations Executive, more commonly referred to as SOE, had been set up as an intelligence organization in July 1940, whose task it was to organize, assist and direct Resistance movements in enemy-occupied territories in conjunction with the overall

Allied war effort. SOE had two functions: to instigate sabotage against the enemy and to prepare secret armies to join in the liberation of their countries. In carrying out its mission in Norway, SOE had several agents who, along with radio operators, had been either landed on the coast from boats or submarines, or had been parachuted into Norway. These agents were Norwegian nationals who in the main had fled their country after the Nazi invasion. They organized resistance groups and prepared a nation wide guerrilla movement.

Mowinkel-Nilsen had escaped from Norway in February 1942. He had been involved in underground activity against the Germans and was a wanted man. He, along with some others, had crossed the North Sea in a small fishing boat. After arriving in England he had joined the Special Forces, had been trained in Scotland and eventually parachuted into Norway with a radio operator. His prime purpose was to organize the resistance, and train instructors in weapons and sabotage.

Originally, when we crashed, Nilsen had issued orders to his groups that they should not get involved with us for fear it would jeopardize an important weapons movement. Later, after contact had been made between the members of the Milorg group at Lepsoy with the group at Os, their scouts, checking the German activity to find us, reported that all signs indicated that the Germans would soon be combing the island and therefore a safer haven had to be found. Jakob Hjelle, the leader at Os, suggested that his group would be better able to hide us. It was at this time that Nilsen became involved and the arrangements made for us to be taken from Strøno to Lonningdal[5].

[5] Helen Mowinckel Nilsen comment: I saw the plane going down west of Os and reported to Jakob Hjelle and he instructed Magnus Hauge, Captain of 2 Os military company to try to pick up the airmen if they were alive and get them away. The next day I went with Einar to the cabin to get the number of the plane and the name of the skipper to try to get the "Shetland Bus" to pick up the crew at our rendez-vous outside Drønen, near the island that the crew was hiding on. You were suspicious and non-cooperative. At last I got "Red" as identification and went to Bergen to my wireless operator and started negotiating with our headquarters in London. Asking for the coded messages and at least 5 days to work out the transfer scheme, before the boat arrived. I never gave away my identity as a British agent until you came to Little Canada. Jakob was the only man who knew, as long as I worked in Os. (letter 27 September 2004)

Hot Porridge

True to his word Nilsen arrived back about a half hour later and with him were two men. We were on the move again; following them for about a half hour, we eventually turned into a lane-way leading to a farmhouse. We hurried up the lane to the house and crowded in the entrance to remove our boots and shoes. Three other men nodded greetings to us, one who spoke English very well indicated that we should take seats around a very large table set in the middle of the dining room, which was just inside the entrance. As we sat around the table we noticed that two women were busy in the kitchen, which was situated just off the dining room.

Nilsen explained that we were going to have some hot food, rest for a while and then we would be on our way once again. He explained that we had a rather tough trip ahead of us and that he hoped that we were used to hiking up mountainsides.

Years later we learned that we were in the home of Martha and Valentin Valentinsen. After each of us were handed a cereal dish and spoon, food, which turned out to be a massive bowl of porridge, was served. The bowl was set in the middle of the table and we helped ourselves. Having had so little food during the previous six days we were famished and we set in with a vengeance.

As we ate, Nilsen asked us where we were based in England. We explained that we were not going to give him any information relating to ourselves other than our rank, name and serial number. He smiled and said that everything would be all right, that we had nothing to worry about.

He identified himself as a Norwegian agent and said that he was connected to and in radio contact with the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) dealing with the planning and execution of sabotage and other secret operations in Norway. He commented that he had spent some months in Scotland for training and had been parachuted back to Norway to help organize and train the resistance groups in the area. We hoped that what he was telling us was the truth, but we became suspicious of him when he continued asking questions about the location or our squadron, its strength, and the type of operations we carried out. We explained to him the classified nature of his questions and that we could not possibly give him the information he wanted. He persisted, attempting to allay our fears by telling us more about his escape from Norway to England, his subsequent training and his mission in Norway.

Once again we developed misgivings about the group we were with. As mentioned before we knew that German intelligence employed many varied means of obtaining

information from downed airmen. We wondered if he was imparting the information about himself in order to get us to let our guard down. We became very apprehensive but did our best not to show our concern. We wondered if all that had taken place since our rescue from Bjornen could have been an elaborate scheme to obtain information from us.

We reiterated our intention not to give him information that we considered to be classified. Apparently realizing that he was not going to succeed in obtaining the sort of information he had requested, Nilsen explained that it was imperative we give him some proof of our identification. He required it, he said, to enable him to satisfy Intelligence in England that he was indeed in contact with our crew. He further explained that some of the psychology used to try to make the German task to find us more difficult had backfired in a strange manner. In order to keep the Germans from spreading out in their search, the Milorg had started the rumour that the plane that had crashed contained eight commandos who were heavily armed. This explained the frenzied activities of the Germans in their search for us. They surely would not have spent the manpower and equipment they disbursed in their search for us had they known that we were just six lightly armed airmen.

He had sent a courier to Bergen with instructions to advise England that he was in contact with a crew that had crashed. In attempting to convey as much information as possible, in his radio message to England, the radio operator, having heard the rumour but not realizing the truth, sent a message that indicated that Nilsen was in contact with a crew of eight and not six. This caused quite a flap in England and Nilsen was asked to identify the crew in some manner before any action would be taken. We, after a fair amount of discussion, settled on my nickname as the means of identifying our crew. Having red hair, I was known to one and all as "Red". No one on the squadron referred to me in any other way. In his next communication with SOE one of the crew was identified as "Red".

Nilsen then told us that as we were poorly shod for the next leg of our trip, arrangements had been made for us to have a change of footwear where possible. They then took out a number of pairs of old rubber boots and some heavy old wool socks. We were more than happy for the change in footwear. I in particular had been without shoes since the first day. To make matters worse, I had burned holes in my socks on the lantern at Strøno, in an attempt to dry them. We were given added articles of clothing which we pulled on over our battledress tunics. We were each given a backpack to carry and, thanking Martha Valentinsen for the food, we were on our way once again.

Fortified by the food we had eaten, and rested somewhat since arriving at the boathouse about two hours earlier, we headed out the lane towards the narrow road that ran alongside the small farm. We were undeniably a very motley lot. The boys in the crew

were all now adorned with borrowed clothes over their battledress, some with head-covering and some without. The Norwegians all wore waterproof hats and coats as protection from the rain, we however did not.

Night Mountain Hike

Leading the way at the head of our group, as we departed from the farm, were two Norwegians, Jakob Hjelle and Haldor Ovredal, the two men who had met us at the boathouse on Lonningdal. We knew them by their noms-de-guerre only at that time, which were Jakob and Sigvald respectively. Nilsen was referred to as Lange Johannes (Long John). He stood well over six foot six. Following the leaders were Grandy, Graham and Deeth, behind them, Nilsen towered over Biddle and Neil who were on either side of him. Rain, which had plagued us throughout had started once again. Nilsen had removed his raincoat and had thrown it over Deeth's head. The coat was so long it trailed on the ground at Deeth's heels. Walking beside me at the rear of our procession was a slim, blond Norwegian of about twenty years of age who was about six foot six in height. He spoke English, had a whimsical smile, and a very ingratiating manner. He had introduced himself as Lange Kjell. We were fast to learn that the closest we could come to pronouncing his name properly was to say, "shell".

We trudged along in the darkness eventually coming to a small stream that we had to ford. I had been unable to get rubber boots to fit me so had been outfitted with a good pair of socks and a pair of shoes. Although the shoes did not fit too well they were better than not having any. The lead group started across the stream with the others following. Kjell, noticing my shoes, told me to climb on his back and he would carry me across. I hesitated as the pack I was carrying was fairly heavy and, added to my own weight, I thought that it would make crossing difficult for him. He persuaded me and I climbed on his back and we started across. In the middle of the stream he stopped, turned to me and, with a mischievous grin, told me that it was time to get off. This type of joshing seemed to be second nature to Kjell; from then on, whenever we have been together, he and I have derived a lot of pleasure in teasing one another.

Crossing the stream, we headed into a valley with high mountains on both sides. We could see a long narrow lake stretching out ahead with the high walls of the mountain dropping vertically, straight down into the lake. The Norwegians had thought of everything for there, at the foot of the lake, a large dory was drawn up on shore. Stowing our backpacks into the boat we pushed it out into the water. We clambered aboard and once again the Norwegians showed their skill at the oars. The lake was about a mile in length and the two oarsmen negotiated the mile without effort.

Arriving at the head of the lake we went ashore onto a small beach; we quickly pulled the boat onto the shore and secured it. We gathered our gear from the boat, helped one another to secure the straps of our backpacks and prepared to follow our Norwegian companions. It was extremely dark, limiting our visibility considerably, but we were able to

see enough to determine that the route ahead meant that we would be in for a hard rough climb.

We labouriously worked our way upwards through the brush making very slow but steady progress. Coming now and then to areas where the ground levelled, and where the underbrush and trees were not as dense, we were able to make better time. We kept on for a while and then to our consternation we arrived at the foot of a very high steep cliff. Nilsen indicated that we had to climb the cliff and told us to move on ahead. We were quick to discover the reason he had questioned us at the farmhouse when he had asked us if we were used to climbing up mountainsides.

With Jakob Hjelle and Haldor Ovredal in the vanguard, indicating to us the best route to follow, the ascent started. We tried as best we could to follow in their footsteps, using the same footholds as they had, and reaching for the same handholds. Our progress literally slowed to a crawl. The going was very difficult, so much so that we had to stop every so often in order to take a short breather before continuing on. Clinging to the face of the cliff was almost as difficult as the actual climb. Nilsen at one point, thinking that Biddle was having difficulty, reached over, took Biddle's pack, slung it over his back, called to us that it was not much further to the top and that we were just about there. We took heart from his confidence and encouraged by the others attempted to quicken our pace.

Peering up, it was not possible to penetrate the darkness to be able to determine where the top of the cliff was. Looking down we could not tell how far we had come. No alternative was available; we had to keep on. Finally, after climbing for what seemed an eternity, we made it to the top. Greatly relieved, we rolled over on the ground and rested for a very short spell. We realized that Nilsen had used a bit of psychology when he had told us that we were almost to the top, when in reality we had not covered a quarter of the distance.

Nilsen told us that we still had some distance to travel to reach our destination, but as he wanted to go to Bergen without any delay, it was imperative that we move on, and that he and his men would return as soon as possible. He promised that the remaining portion of the route would be less difficult, and that we would have lots of opportunity to relax once we reached our objective. Buoyed up by the knowledge that we had covered the most difficult part of the trip, we once more set off behind our two leaders.

We hiked on through the trees until we came to a crescent shaped stream. As we carefully made our way across the stream we could see a little log cabin nestled in the woods. The stream seemed to completely surround the cabin on three sides as it meandered down the mountain. At long last we had come to the end of our journey.

Furtively we approached the cabin and as everything seemed to be in order, we went on to the door and entered. We were greeted by a young man; it was obvious that he had been expecting our arrival.

Although the distance from the farm at Lonningdal to our destination was less than four and a half kilometres as the crow flies, our journey had covered approximately seven and a half kilometres (about four and a half miles). We had travelled for one and a half kilometres (one mile) by rowboat on the lake at Lonningdal. This meant that the land portion of our little hike was less than six kilometres (about three and a half miles). Under normal hiking conditions that distance should take slightly over an hour to complete. However, to indicate how strenuous the climb had been, it took us just over three hours to arrive at the cabin.

Little Canada

2 October

On entering the cabin, we were introduced to Hans, a nom du guerre for Ivar Dyngeland who, too, was being sought by the Germans. He had been working in the Bergen area in some form of police work, when the Germans discovered that he was very active in the underground. He had been in hiding from them in Fusa, but went to the cabin to be with us during our stay there.

Introductions over, Nilsen suggested that we empty our backpacks which contained a variety of things; blankets, sleeping bags, plates, pans, some vegetables, a small package of ersatz coffee, a couple of tins of condensed milk, and a small loaf of bread

As we mingled about in the very small cabin where there were eleven of us in a very confined space, we had a taste of some of the food that we had brought. The bread was cut very thin and we all had a slice, which was covered with a thin coating of the condensed milk. We commented on the strange texture of the bread, and were informed that it was not made of flour but of wood. After the snack, those of us who smoked were offered tobacco and paper by those Norwegians who had lit up, and we rolled our own. The first puff of the cigarette practically choked us, as the tobacco was not cured, and it burned our throats. We had long been out of the few cigarettes that we had with us when we crashed.

As we smoked Nilsen explained that we were to remain with Ivar; that he and the others would be leaving very shortly. He explained that there were only two means of access to the cabin, the difficult one that we had taken from Lonningdal, and another route that led from an entirely different direction. He told us that he had many men posted in various areas in order to watch for the approach of German patrols. He was confident that it would be very unlikely for any German search party to be able to penetrate his circle of lookouts, without being observed. In the event that the search parties would move in our direction, runners would come to warn us of their approach.

It was just a couple of hours before dawn when Nilsen said that he had to go to Bergen and therefore had to be on his way. He assured us that we had little to worry about, that Ivar would take good care of us, and that he would try to get back to us soon. He and the others bade us farewell and in short order the three disappeared in the darkness among the trees.

Little did we know then of the elaborate arrangements that had been formulated to assure our safe passage from Strøno to the cabin in the mountains. We subsequently learned that, although Einar and Thorvald were mainly on their own during the Strøno to

Lonningdal part of the trip on the fjords, many others, who we did not see or hear, had been involved in our safe passage from the boathouse on Lonningdal, to the farm, and then on to the cabin. Lookouts had been posted in many areas along our land route portion to assure that all was well. These people were heavily armed and prepared to fight on our behalf should the occasion arise.

When the Germans came to the boathouse in which we were hidden was one time that the Norwegians, hiding in the underbrush nearby, almost intervened although they were badly outnumbered. Unknown to us, we had been locked in the boathouse.

After the departure of Nilsen, Hjelle, Ovredal and Harmens, we rolled out the sleeping bags in preparation to catch some well-needed sleep. The floor space of the cabin, being very limited, did not afford us too much room. The cabin interior was less than four metres by four metres square (twelve feet by twelve feet). Looking into the cabin, there was a small wood stove on the left wall and then a fairly large cupboard with shelves. Against the far wall opposite the doorway there was a long bench that was flush to the left wall. The only window in the cabin was almost centred on the right wall; beneath the window against the wall was a small table with two chairs on either side. There was a small shelf in the corner of the right wall by the doorway. There were also two small stools on the floor. Above the doorway in the eave of the roof was an area about a metre in depth; generally it was used for storage, during our stay it became a bedroom for a couple of us each night as well.

The space was limited but we managed rather well under the circumstances. We discussed the happenings of the day for a short while, but, tired from our very long and arduous trip, we crawled into our sleeping bags and were soon sound asleep. It was the first time that we slept in Norway without having a watch posted as we had been assured it would not be necessary.

We awoke well after sunrise to discover that Ivar was awake and moving about the cabin. We rolled out of the sleeping bags, tidied up both ourselves and the cabin, had a slice of bread with some of the condensed milk given to us by Ivar, for breakfast, and once again set about exploring our new surroundings.

The cabin was very clean and tidy and appeared to us to be fairly new. We learned later that it had been built by Fredrik Ovredal, Haldor's brother, in 1943. We went outside and explored the area near the cabin, located high in the mountain about four kilometres north-east of the lake at Lonningal and less than one kilometre west of Samnanger fjord. It was in a wooded area surrounded by both trees and the stream that we had crossed the previous night. Not one of us had much experience in woodcutting nor in building cabins,

but as one we admired the craftsmanship and expertise that had gone into the construction of the cabin.

Looking about we could not help but be reminded of Canada. One of the crew suggested that as the Norwegian Air Force, composed of Norwegians in exile, had set up a training center in Toronto called "Little Norway", we should in turn call the cabin and the area surrounding it, "Little Canada". We all readily agreed, and from that time on we referred to the area as "Little Canada".

We soon discovered that Ivar was not there just to act as a guard but he had the added responsibility of being the cook. He looked after making what food there was, and he did provide some interesting dishes. We ate with relish what food we had but didn't quite recognize some of the ingredients.

We could not stray any great distance from the cabin and there was little to occupy ourselves with. Early in our stay at "Little Canada", someone had the bright idea that it would be great if we could play cards, to help pass the time away. Not having any cards, a quick search of the cabin brought forth some thin cardboard that we thought would do to fill our needs. In short order we managed to fashion a deck and soon some of us were playing poker. Ivar watched us wondering what the game was all about. He did not understand a word in English, nonetheless we soon taught him some of the fine points of draw poker.

The cards were very thick and hard to manage, we had to split the pack into three lots in order to properly shuffle them. Two incidents took place during the times we played cards, one amusing, the other not so.

As I mentioned, Ivar was learning the game and had progressed very well, although we did have lots of delays trying to communicate with him. He had progressed to the point of realizing that three of a kind beat two pair. At the end of one hand he threw his cards face down on the table, indicating that he had lost. When his cards were turned over it was found that he held four Aces. He was under the mistaken impression that the two pair he held, could not beat three of a kind, held by one of the other players.

The other incident took place when Gord Biddle, having found what looked like a German forage hat in the storage area above the door, thought he would have some fun. Going outside of the cabin he circled it until he was beside the window. Slowly he moved his head to expose only the cap and his forehead. I was at the end of the table near the window when out of the corner of my left eye I saw what I thought was a German observing us. Having a German Luger 9mm. pistol at my hand I instinctively reached for it, and

pushing myself quickly out of the chair, rose and pointed the pistol at the face in the window. As I did so I realized it was Gord. He was smiling at the reaction to his little joke. I admit that I took a very dim view of his actions at the time and I was not alone in my assessment of what had transpired. Gord had not realized just how tense we were, and later apologized for having scared the wits out of the lot of us.

A couple of days later Haldor Ovredal appeared with a dark haired stranger, who was introduced to us as "Pete". As mentioned before, there were only two possible routes to be taken to "Little Canada", one route was the one we had taken from Lonningdal, the other was from Rolvsvag. Haldor and Rolf Olsen (Pete) were two of the guards who were posted at Rolvsvag. Not long after we had other visitors in the persons of Kjell Harmens and Jakob Hjelle, who had come from the other side. Kjell and Jakob had come with a radio and some more provisions[6].

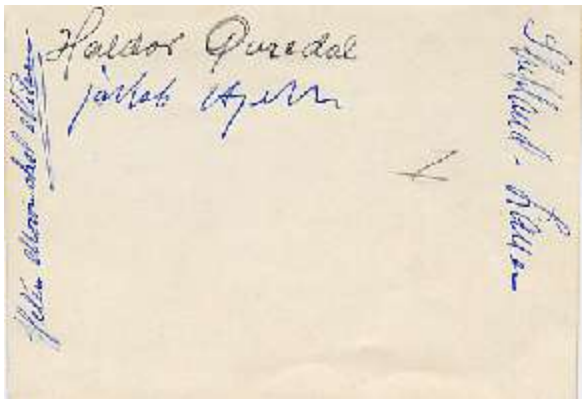
It is impossible for anyone to realize how extremely difficult it was at the time for the Norwegians to exist on the meagre rations that they were allowed. How they managed to feed six extra mouths is a story in itself. I do know that we were not dining at the Ritz at "Little Canada", but we did manage well with the provisions that were brought to us.

Bringing the radio provided Kjell with an opportunity to enjoy himself at our expense. He told us that we were unfortunate, not being able to understand Norwegian. If we could, he said we would be able to listen to all the news about our crew. He claimed that the Germans were warning the people to be on the lookout for us, announcing that we were dangerous and that anyone seeing us was to report to them immediately. They also threatened that anyone caught helping us in any way would be shot. He jokingly said that up to that time no reward for information, or our capture, had been posted or announced, probably due to the fact that the Germans did not have a high assessment of our value. He told us that had the Germans offered a reward, he would be the first to collect it as he would gladly turn us in, even for a single krone.

The other Norwegians sat about smoking and seemingly were in a heated argument. I asked Kjell what the problem was and he informed me that there was no problem. They were just having a political discussion and that Rolf, being a communist sympathizer and red headed, usually got very heated when talking politics. When Kjell mentioned Rolf s red hair I was surprised as it seemed very black to me. Kjell then told me that he had dyed his hair to try to disguise himself, as he too was on the German wanted list.

[6] Comment from Helen Mowinckel Nilsen: The provisions included fresh salmon, sea trout, potatoes, and bread (1/2 sawdust). (letter 27 September 2004)

Helpers at Little Canada - 1944



Reverse of photo - signatures from left: Helen Mowinckel Nilsen, Haldor Overdal, Jakob Hjelle, Shetland Larsen

Little Canada - much later

Norwegian Planning Continues

While we rested at ”Little Canada”, Nilsen and Einar were very active. On arriving home Einar had quite a scare. He learned that a stranger had arrived at his parents' home, pretending to be a Government agent. The stranger claimed that he had information indicating that Einar knew the whereabouts of our crew. On hearing that Einar was not at home, he left, stating that he would return the following day. The stranger arrived the next day in company of an acquaintance of Einar. He told Einar that he knew that Einar had helped us and that he too wanted to help. He suggested to Einar that he divulge our location to him, that he had a boat available off the Norwegian coast, and would be able have the crew transported back to England. Einar disclaimed all knowledge of the crew and insisted the man leave.

Nilsen, after leaving us at ”Little Canada” hurried to Bergen where he contacted the radio operator, Gunnar Wiig Andersen. For a few days, hurried radio messages passed back and forth across the North Sea between Gunnar Wiig Andersen and the Scandinavian section of SOE. Nilsen finally was able to satisfy the authorities that he was in contact with our crew. The fact that he had mentioned that the crew consisted of three radio operators, and one was named ”Red”, turned the trick for him. He, in an attempt to obtain much needed weapons and ammunition, thought that during the passing of messages relating to our crew it would be a good opportunity to ask for more weapons. He did so, asking for a ton of weapons and ammunition for each of us.

He left Bergen, having made arrangements for a our crew to attempt to meet with a ship, that was coming from the Shetlands to drop off supplies for the resistance movement. The incoming ship was to arrive at a specific time, land their supplies and leave. We just had to arrive during the short period of time it took them to do so.

He returned to Os, as preparations had to be made to move us from ”Little Canada” to an area nearer to the scheduled rendezvous point.

The Norwegian News segment of the BBC news would carry two messages. The first, ”Keep the meatballs warm”, to come twenty four hours before we were to be at the rendezvous point. The second, ”It rains in the mountains”, to be sent the same evening the boat would be there. Nilsen and the group at Os worked on the plan for our eventual move to the coast. The news came sooner than expected, but they were prepared.

Time to Leave Little Canada

The Vacation Ends

Our stay at ”Little Canada” had become routine in the first couple of days. There was little to do other than play cards and lounge about. We walked around the cabin but could not wander very far as the stream was deep enough to keep us on shore. Haldor and Rolf visited with Ivar a couple of times. Due to the language barrier we left learned nothing from their visits.

On October the 6th the first all Canadian daylight bomber raid in history took place over the Bergen area. The targets were the U-boat bases at Bergen and Hattvik. We were ten to fifteen kilometres from the targets and hearing the aircraft, we were out in force to watch the proceedings from our vantage point. We saw the flak rising to meet the oncoming planes and our sympathies were with the crews in the aircraft. We hoped that they all would make it back to base and wished that we could accompany them there. The raid was successful as it did damage the base and some shipping in the harbour at Bergen. A sad note is that some of the bombs went astray and hit a school where numerous children were killed and many others hurt.

While we had little to do during these days at ”Little Canada”, elaborate plans were being formulated to protect us in our move from our mountain hideaway. We were to retrace our steps down from the mountain to Ovredalen; then spend a few hours at the farmhouse of Ida and Nils Ovredal, not too far distant from the farmhouse of Martha and Valentin Valentinsen. After our stay at the farmhouse, we were to proceed to rendezvous with a boat at a quay about two kilometres away. We then had to retrace the route taken by Einar and Johannes when they had brought us north to Lonningdal. We were to proceed south on Bjornafjord, pass the naval base at Hattvik, continue south for another twelve kilometres then head in a westerly direction for about another thirteen kilometres to the island of Ospoy, which was at the western end of Bjornafjord. Our trip was not to end at Ospoy, it was just a dropping off place where we were to be picked up by another boat.

Along the way armed lookouts were to be posted to assure that the group would not be surprised by German patrols. The German telephone lines to and from Lonningdal were tapped and monitored so that all their telephone calls could be screened.

When Nilsen appeared with Kjell, Haldor, and Jakob, to tell us to get our things together as we were left leaving ”Little Canada,” we were a little surprised. We were very comfortable and had become attached to the cabin and the area. He told us nothing of what was in store for us other than that we had to be moved closer to the coast.

We left ”Little Canada” in daylight and proceeded on our trek down the mountain. We were not laden with the backpacks as we were on the way up and did make very good time. As we made our way we eventually came to the cliff that had been so difficult to climb. Nilsen indicated that we had to make our way down the cliff. I balked, saying that I could not possibly make it down that steep cliff. Nilsen questioned my reasoning, telling me that I had climbed up the cliff in the darkness, therefore it should be much easier to make my way down in daylight. With some difficulty we made it to the bottom and we continued on towards Lonningdal. Darkness descended as we quietly made our way down through the trees. Eventually we could see a clearing spread out before us at the foot of the mountain. Some fifty yards from us was the farmhouse that was our destination. We could see that there were some vehicles near the farmhouse and the Norwegians called a halt. A quick appraisal of the situation indicated that the area was being searched by the Germans. We remained sheltered in the trees for a while. Then we watched as the vehicles left and then two of the Norwegians went on to the house to investigate, while the rest of us remained hidden in the trees. Some time later at a signal that the way was clear to proceed we entered the house.

Dinner and Some Sleep

There were three occupants of the farmhouse, two women and a man, and it was obvious that they were very nervous. The Germans had been there questioning them and the object of their questions had just come in the door. Even though we were expected, our presence made them feel ill at ease. When they explained that the whole area at Lonningdal was swarming with Germans, their apprehension was understandable.

As we gathered about, my attention was drawn to a picture in a newspaper on a table nearby. The picture was of a bombed out building. The caption, although I could not understand or read Norwegian, seemed to indicate that there had been a large amount of casualties at the site. On questioning Kjell about it, he explained that it was a picture of a school that had been hit during the recent bombing raid. When I expressed surprise at the heavy casualties he further explained that it was German propaganda and that the figures could not be believed. He did say that there had been some children hurt, and that amongst the casualties were grandchildren of the couple whose farmhouse we were in. The owners of the farm were away and their children were our hosts at the time.

Once again we enjoyed the hospitality of complete strangers. We assembled in their dining room and were treated to food that we did not recognize, but was very much appreciated. We then were told that we had best get some sleep as we had to be on our way in a couple of hours. I cannot recall where or how the others in the crew slept, but I remember being shown to a bed that was recessed into the wall. It was the first time I had seen one like it. I crawled into the bed and was soon fast asleep. I was roused out of my sleep a short while later by Nilsen. He indicated that I should be very quiet and whispered that he wanted me to listen carefully. He handed me a crude sash with a pocket in it. He told me to tie it around my waist under my clothes. I was to tell no one about it. In the event of our safe return to England a Major Rogers would make himself known to me. I was to give him the belt. In the event of imminent capture I was to attempt to shred its contents. Under no circumstances was I to look at them. He checked to assure himself that the belt was secure and that there was no visible bulge at my waist.

We joined the others and Nilsen explained that we would be going on with Haldor and Jakob for a short spell. He and Kjell would be going their separate ways. We thanked our hosts for their hospitality, voiced our thanks to Kjell and Nilsen for all that they had done, and followed Haldor. Jakob had preceded us, to scout and see if the expected boat was in sight and to check if the way was clear. It was shortly after ten in the morning, and we would be travelling in daylight in a group so we had to be extra vigilant.

Reports of German activity, which was now centred in Lonningdal, were relayed to Nilsen through Jakob Hjelle who had his men scattered throughout the area. The main road to Os was just a short distance from the route we had to take and the Germans were patrolling the road in force. Nilsen had their telephone lines cut, and toppled several large boulders to block the road south, in order to impede any pursuit should it develop.

Ospoy

We covered a little more than a kilometre and a half when we spied Jakob waving to us from a boat house at a quay. We hurried over, and there beside the quay was a boat, and on the deck was a blond, ruddy cheeked, smiling individual who also waved at us as we approached. We got aboard and as we pulled away from shore we indicated our gratitude by saluting a smiling Jakob Hjelle. Haldor and Lars Orrebakken, our new companion, were to take us on the next leg of our voyage. We soon discovered that Lars could not speak English and neither did Haldor. Once again sign language was used to communicate. Lars owned the boat that was named "Snogg." He had volunteered to undertake the mission on hearing of the need.

We travelled south on the fjord, passing Hattvik, and proceeded without incident on to Ospoy. In total we had covered about thirty three kilometres on the fjords. We passed many German naval vessels and submarines on the way, waving at times to the crews who would wave back, not realizing who we were.

Ospoy was more or less a large rock projecting out from the water. Lars and Haldor deposited us on its shore and left us there in broad daylight.

We turned and scrambled up on the rocks in order to hide ourselves from any passing boat, when to our surprise a stranger appeared. He was tall and very thin, and carried a parcel under his arm. We were at a loss to know what he was doing there. In our attempts to communicate with him, we learned that he spoke Norwegian, Portuguese and a little German. We once again were faced with a language problem. He indicated to us somehow that he was to stay with us. As there was no one else on the island and he was apparently unarmed, we felt that he was not a threat to us.

We were on the island for a short while when a boat appeared and it was obvious that it was making for shore. As it inched its way to the rock, we tried to stay out of sight but the Norwegian with us soon showed himself and waved to us to follow. We went directly to the boat and were waved aboard by one of two men on deck. They motioned to us to hurry and in short order we were helping one another over the rails. As soon as the last of us was on board, we were on our way. This boat was obviously much larger and faster than the boats we had been on up to that time in Norway.

The man who seemed to be in charge, we learned after the war, was Sverre Ostervoll and it was his boat we were on. He motioned for us to get below, and we, following instructions, did so. We were in a cabin that was, although we were on a larger boat, still not large enough to accommodate the seven of us very comfortably. We again were in close

quarters but our spirits were very high. They received a real boost just a short time after we were on our way. Sverre Ostervoll, in pantomime, asked us if we wanted to smoke. When we indicated that we did, the other man whose name was Sverre Monsen, handed us a tin of tobacco and some cigarette paper, to roll our own. You can well imagine how our spirits soared when we discovered that printed on the tin, was a notice that the contents of the tin were for the exclusive use of His Majesty's Royal Navy, and on opening it found that it contained fine-cut, fresh real tobacco.

You can imagine our feelings! We had an inkling during our descent from "Little Canada" that we were heading home, but could not be certain of anything. We still had doubts that the people we were with were who they claimed to be. The fact that Sverre Monsen had the tin of fresh British tobacco indicated that they had close contact with allied naval units.

After leaving Ospoy we headed in a north by north-west direction for about five kilometres when a boat headed in our direction and, to our great surprise, came abreast. At the wheel of the boat was Einar Evensen, and he was there only for a few short moments, to wish us well on the final leg of our journey.

We continued on for a very short distance and then headed almost due south. We could make out land on either side of us. The fjord was a little bit over a kilometre wide, and we held our course for another five kilometres. We could see ahead that the fjord was dotted with many islands, both large and small. Finally Sverre Ostervoll headed between two of the larger islands in our path, and steered to a very small, rocky, island, on which there was a little hut. The two Sverres indicated that we were to stay out of sight of all passing boats and that they would come back that night, to take us to rendezvous with a boat that would carry us back to the Shetland Islands and freedom.

We did not know then that Sverre Ostervoll, due to his knowledge of the coastline and his skill as a seaman, had for a long period of time landed many allied agents and tons of ammunition in his boat.

We were still accompanied by the Norwegian whom we had met on Ospoy. Knowing that the many islands in the area were inhabited, and that many boats were passing very near, we hurried into the building to keep out of sight. Once again we checked new surroundings. Our new shelter was just that – shelter. It was rather filthy and had two separate areas. One section had been used as living quarters where there were bunks and a table, it had a small window on one wall overlooking the fjord. The other section was apparently a pen in which sheep apparently had been kept and was rather smelly. We were consoled by the fact that we were due to leave that very night, thus the state of our

accommodations did not bother us to too greatly. After all our experiences since being down in Norway, we felt a bit more inconvenience was little enough to bear.

We had not realized it but our new-found friend was sheathed in many tiers of clothing. He busied himself by removing and trying to make a neat package of them. He made us understand that he had been in hiding from the Germans and that he was on his way to England and refuge there. We did try to make him feel at ease with us and I am sure we succeeded. We were able to learn that he had passed information on German shipping movements to allied agents. He showed us a picture of a boat that he claimed he had worked on and to our surprise it was a picture of the Altmark.

The picture, which showed the Altmark nestled in a Norwegian fjord, had had been taken just before the British Navy intercepted it, and rescued over six hundred British sailors that the German Navy were holding on board as prisoners. He offered me the picture and insisted that I keep it, obviously as a souvenir. I, of course still have the picture. It has more meaning now, as I very recently learned that the stranger was Johannes Jacobsen's brother.

As night settled in we became fidgety; unable to stretch out properly, we shuffled about. We had not eaten for some time and therefore became both thirsty and hungry. Very slowly the hours passed and there was no sign of Sverre Ostervoll. We had no way of knowing that he had attempted to reach us to bring food, and to inform us that our rendezvous time had been set back. He had been thwarted by German patrol activity on the water and had been forced to turn back.

Night slowly turned to day; we became rather concerned as the second day wore on with no sign of Sverre, our only contact with the outside world. Through the window we watched many boats passing on the fjord and speculated if they were friendly or not. With the help of our Norwegian friend we were soon able to recognize most of the friendly boats. Watching the boats as we did, we thought we could detect increased activity by the German patrol boats, noting that they were passing closer and closer to the island, thus increasing our fears that they might come ashore.

We had whiled away our time in idle talk throughout the first day on the island, but as the second day passed our conversation became more serious and we discussed what possibilities were available to us should no one appear within the next day or two. We soon realized that we had no other option but to remain where we were, our increased thirst and hunger notwithstanding.

At the side of the hut there was a small pool of water and Neil decided to drink the water. He gathered some in his water bottle, and using the tablets that were in his escape kit to purify the water, he satisfied his thirst. A couple of the other crew members did likewise. The results were dramatic as they became ill and were very uncomfortable for a number of hours. The foul smell that permeated the hut previously, seemed like a breath of fresh air to the conditions in the hut after the boys were ill.

Unknown to us, Sverre and others listening to the BBC broadcasts from England, heard the following transmission repeated over and over again," It rains in the mountains". It was followed by another message "one day later". These messages indicated to him that the ship from the Shetlands would be at a specific rendezvous point the following night at a pre-arranged time. He once again decided to attempt to reach us with water and food. The waters were unusually calm and the night was clear and bright giving him no opportunity to get through the German patrols.

Throughout the next day and evening the transmissions heard on the BBC were "It rains in the mountains," and there was no following message. There was furious activity by the Norwegian group leaders; they had to confirm that all involved knew that Sverre would be attempting to avoid the German patrols to get to us, and to our meeting place. That night they set up many diversions in order to lure the German patrol boats from Sverre's intended course. They knew that in order to assure that all their efforts to effect our liberation be successful, Sverre would have to succeed in picking us up and getting to the rendezvous with the ship from the Shetland Islands on time. As mentioned before the ship was to unload its cargo and leave immediately. If we were not there during the time they took to unload, they were not going to wait.

The stress of thirst and hunger, the repugnant smell of our surroundings, combined to keep the seven of us awake most of the night. On the one hand we desired sleep, on the other, we wanted to remain awake in the event Sverre would arrive.

Altmark in fjord in Norway

The Shetland Bus

We spent the third day much like the second. Fortunately the sick in our group had recovered somewhat. We were a thirsty, hungry and sleepy band, resigned to the fact that we had no other option but to remain where we were. We settled in to wait for nightfall. As darkness descended, we became very uneasy, voicing our concerns at spending another night and day in the hut, as we were positive that we would not be picked-up in daylight. We sat quietly in the dark waiting, each engrossed with his own thoughts, when suddenly Sverre Ostervoll appeared. It is amazing that we did not hear him approach. The first indication we had that he had arrived was a light tapping on the wall. He had cut the engines of his boat and had drifted quietly to the shore. He had a very hectic trip to reach us eluding three German boats en route.

He hurriedly shepherded us onto his boat, and we were on our way. It was very dark, and it is amazing that he was able to see where he was heading. The boat was extremely fast; and it seemed to be moving at full throttle. We travelled at high speed for some time, and then suddenly he throttled back, and we could see, looming out of the darkness, a large ship. Sverre slowed the boat and manoeuvred it close to a rope ladder suspended from the railing above our heads. We climbed the ladder, and as we got to the deck a number of sailors helped us over the railing. We had expected a British ship and when we saw the strange sailor hats they were wearing we momentarily thought we were in the hands of the Germans, as their hats were so similar.

We were led to a galley of the ship, where we were treated to hot tea, coffee and toast. The sailors with us explained that other members of the crew were off-loading ammunitions and supplies and that as soon as they were through, we would be on our way to the Shetlands. They revealed that they had arrived some time before and were preparing to leave, when we arrived. The captain knew we were to be there but they did not. We had

been on board only a very short time when we were on our way. We had made it with no time to spare.

We were told that Sverre Ostervoll, due to his knowledge of the Norwegian coastline and his skill as a seaman, for a long period of time had been transporting cargo and refugees to and from the ships.

The stories of heroism and adventure at sea, which ancient Norsemen liked to tell, related to the Vikings of old who sailed the seas between Norway and the Shetlands. Most of the tales related to the difficulties encountered in crossing the North Sea in a storm, as the waters between Norway and the Shetland are among the stormiest in the world.

The saga of the Shetland Bus is a modern story of the many crossings of the North Sea made by a small group of Norwegians who were living in exile. They used the Shetlands as a base for expeditions to the Norwegian coast where they landed weapons and supplies and rescued refugees.

Amongst these brave and daring men, a descendant of the Vikings of old stood out above the others. The sagas of his many adventures will live in the annals of Norway, as do the stories of his forefathers. This man is Leif Larsen who, as a Norwegian sailor, has more British medals than anyone else has ever been awarded. He became known as ”Shetland” Larsen and is a legend in his time.

The ship, captained by Leif Larsen, was called ”Vigra.” It was a one hundred and ten foot long, American built sub-chaser. It had actually been further north, up the coast, the previous night but had to lay over due to the weather.

After midnight on October 12th, we headed west toward Scalloway in the Shetland Islands. A terrible storm had blown up and we crossed the North Sea in a raging gale. Visibility was almost non-existent from the bridge; conditions became so severe no one could be on deck. The ship was

tossed about so fiercely that it was almost impossible to stand or walk about. Conditions became so bad that it was suggested that we all go below and try to sleep. We were shown to the crews quarters and took to the bunks assigned to us. Seasickness overtook almost everyone aboard. I was the only one of our crew who was able to sleep although it was not for long. A short nap was all I had; I was awakened by one of the crew members who told me that the two wireless operators were too sick to stand watch and the captain wanted know if I could manage their radio equipment. I spent most of the night taking incoming messages. The weather abated during the afternoon and finally, late in the day after a very rough crossing, we sighted the Shetland Islands. We were informed that we were to berth at Scalloway, the home port of Vigra. We had returned at long last from our patrol; but not in the manner usually acceptable, as duty properly carried out.

Leif 'Shetland' Larsens, Captain KNM Vigra

KNM Hitra, MTB, sister to KNM Vigra, at Scalloway, Shetland Islands, Scotland
Restored by Royal Norwegian Navy

Photos from 'The Shetland Bus' Website
Leif Larsens - The Scalloway Museum
KNM Vigra - Force 10

Back in Britain

We huddled about not knowing what to expect as the ship slowly drew up to the dock. An army captain approached us and introduced himself as Captain X. (his nom du guerre) I have forgotten the name he used. He informed us that he was second in command of the base, he was going to look after us during our stay in the Shetlands. He told us to consider ourselves under close arrest, just a formality, until such time as military intelligence cleared us. They had to be positive that we were who we claimed to be. He left but returned shortly with two other officers and we were escorted off the ship and taken to a large building near the dock.

We had to take baths in gentian violet in order to rid ourselves of the lice that we had. This was done in the venereal disease ward of the base hospital. We were then examined by doctors who had been flown in from an RAF nearby base. There also were fresh clean clothes for us, and finally, food.

After partaking of our first sit-down meal in weeks we gathered in the officers lounge where we were joined by some of the officers of the Vigra as well as a few other naval and army officers. Captain X informed us that we would be leaving by plane in the morning for London where we were to be de- briefed by MI9.

An army major joined us and introduced himself as Major Rogers. He immediately explained that he was the commanding officer and that he believed that one of the crew members had something for him. He suggested that that individual should see him in his office the following morning after breakfast.

He insisted that we send cables from there to our families back in Canada to let them know that we were still in the land of the living. These cables would be delivered before official news could be delivered through official channels.

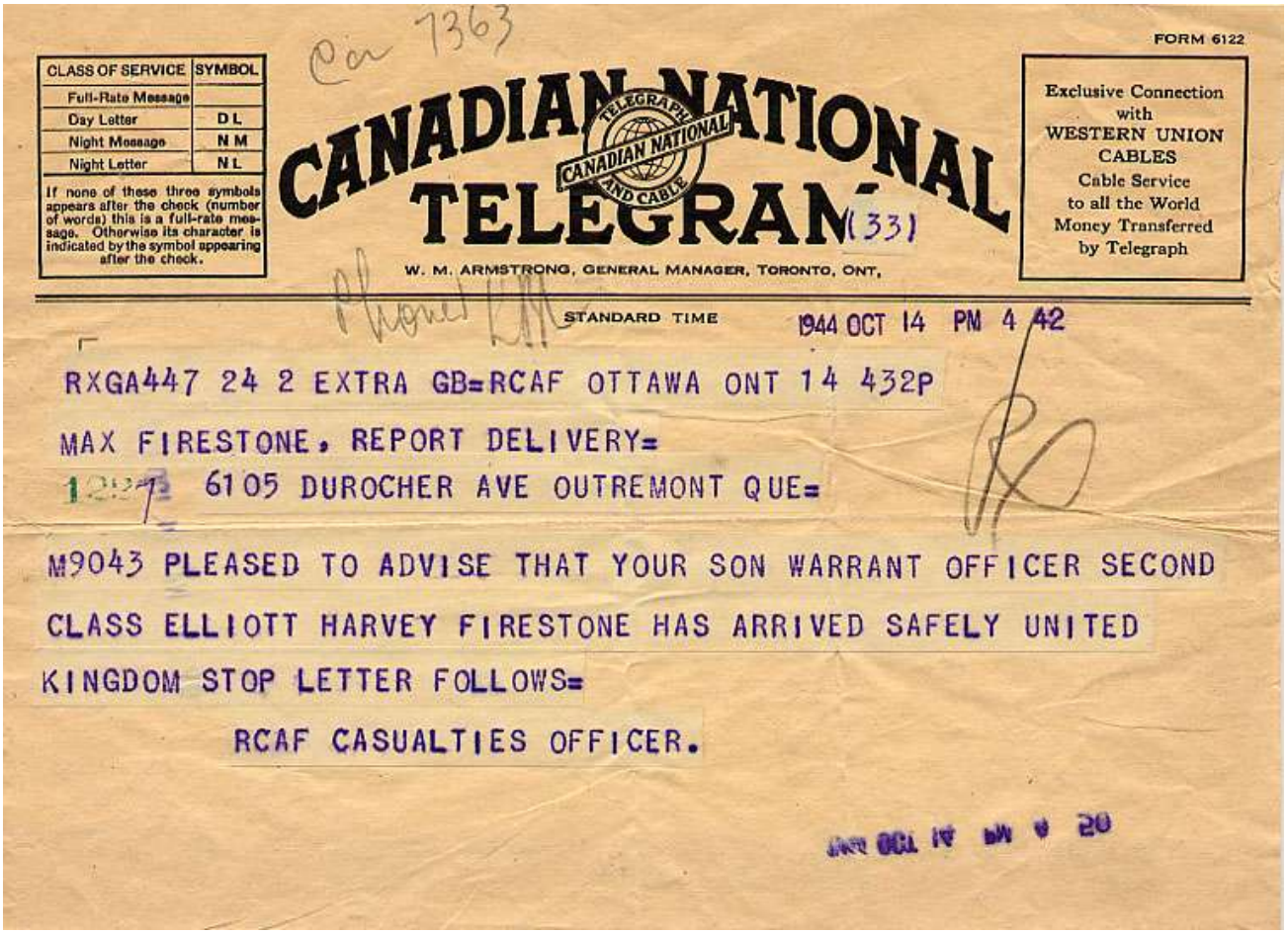
Immediately after breakfast the following morning I was ushered into Major Roger's office. He reached for the sash, opened it and glanced at the contents. Turning to me he asked if I had ever heard the phrase "Heavy Water". I expressed my ignorance; he then advised me to remember the phrase as it would be meaningful to me after the war. In discussion with Helen M.Nilsen when we first returned to Norway in 1965 he informed me that what I had carried to Major Rogers was up-to-date intelligence on the German attempts to develop and store Heavy Water in Norway.

I rejoined the crew and we were soon on our way to the airport and London. We were assured by Captain X. that the BBC would be broadcasting special messages over the next few days to advise the people back in Norway of our success in getting to the Shetlands.

When our Norwegian friends heard on the BBC broadcast the following night the message, "Coconuts on holiday", they then knew that we had made it safely back to England.

Our part in the success we had in evading capture was limited to our actions during the first twelve to fifteen hours, after that we were, in the words of Magnus Hauge, "six sacks of potatoes", that had to be delivered as ordered.

When we took off from Wick, we little realized the adventure we faced. We returned due to the courageous and dedicated actions of a group of zealous Norwegian patriots, who unselfishly helped us in our difficulty. They were not detracted from aiding us although they knew they faced certain death should they be caught. We owe much to all those brave people who helped us in our time of need. Words can never express our gratitude to our "HELPERS".



FORM 6122

CLASS OF SERVICE	SYMBOL
Full-Rate Message	
Day Letter	DL
Night Message	NM
Night Letter	NL

If none of these three symbols appears after the check (number of words) this is a full-rate message. Otherwise its character is indicated by the symbol appearing after the check.

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RCAF CASUALTIES OFFICER.

Cable from RCAF Casualty Officer Advising Safe Return - 14 Oct 1944

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CANADIAN PACIFIC TELEGRAPHS

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MR MRS MC FIRESTONE

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AM SAFE AND WELL BEST OF HEALTH WRITING HOW ARE YOU PLEASE CABLE WHEN WIRE RECEIVED .

HARVEY FIRESTONE

946AM.

Cable sent to parents of safe return.

ADDRESS REPLY TO:
THE SECRETARY,
DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE FOR AIR,
OTTAWA, ONTARIO.

OUR FILE R 174494 (R.O.4)
REF. YOUR
DATED

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

OTTAWA, Canada, 17th October, 1944.

Mr. Max Firestone,
6105 Durocher Avenue,
Outremont, P.Q.

Dear Mr. Firestone:

Confirming my telegram of recent date, I am pleased to inform you that the Royal Canadian Air Force Casualties Officer, Overseas, has advised me that your son, Warrant Officer Second Class Elliott Harvey Firestone, previously reported missing on Active Service, is now reported to have arrived safely in the United Kingdom on October 13th, 1944.

I join with you and the members of your family in your joy in your son's safety.

Yours sincerely,

J. L. Westman F/L
R.C.A.F. Casualty Officer,
for Chief of the Air Staff.

R.C.A.F. G. 32B
500M—1-44 (3778)
H.Q. 885-G-32B

Confirmation Letter from RCAF Casualty Officer

Returning to Canada
Clockwise from upper left:
WO1 George Grandy, Pilot Officer Gord Biddle, Pilot Officer Ken Graham, Flying Officer Maurice Neil, WO2 Harvey Firestone