

EINAR EVENSEN,
5200 Os.

Ministry of Veterans Affairs,
London.

Dear Sirs,

According to request by Miss Jacson, Ministry of Veterans Affairs, through Mr. Jakob Hjelle, Os, I have been asked to give a surveyable report of the events that took place when a Wellington bomber from the airfield at Wick in Northern Scotland crashlanded on the 24th of September 1944 at Haugland, Os in Norway, with six Canadian airmen onboard.

Although a long time has passed since these happenings took place I will make the survey as accurate as possible, based on recorded facts, reconstruction by memory and with good assistance from those persons who participated in the task.

If, against supposition, I may have omitted names, quoted wrong dates or the like, I must ask you to apologize.

It was early in the morning on 24/9-1944 just before 08,00 hours, I was sitting at the breakfast table in my home at Björnarøy, looking through the window. It was a grey morning in the autumn with a fairly good visibility. I was studying the set up for the day or more correctly for the evening and the night. The reason for this "thinking activity" was that the "Mil.Org."-group which I led at Lepsøy had important tasks to execute. This referred especially to a weapon transport from Austevoll to Os.

The plane is being spotted:

My thoughts were quickly interrupted.

There were planes in the air and from the sound I heard that they were not German. Consequently they had to be - yes - no doubt about it, it must be our friends from the West who wanted to give us a hand-shake to show that they were, after all, not very distant.

These thoughts ran through my head while I hurried into the yard to see and follow this unexpected morning visit.

As I stood in the yard I quickly located the plane. It was a twin-screwed bomber coming in from the West at low altitude. But to me it seemed as if something was wrong. What mattered was the speed. Tardy as a heavy-pulled barge it passed over me and headed for Os and then turned towards Haugland. Shortly afterwards it went down and landed. To me it seemed as if it hit the ground close to the youngsters' dance hall.

That it was a damaged plane with friends onboard that had to make an emergency landing was instantly obvious to me. The question was only whether the landing had been successful or the crew had perished.

As far as I could see from where I stood the plane had landed about 1½ kilometer from the quay at Halhjem. Here the ground was very uneven and the chances for a successful outcome were indeed small. If, nevertheless, they should have survived the Germans

had a strong guard on the quay at Halhjem, likewise a force at Os only 7 km. away and Ulven which formed the main military quarter was only 12 to 14 km. away.

As circumstances were, it was most likely that, if any of the airmen were alive, they would have been surrounded and apprehended already at the landing. It must here be added that the chief pilot must have been a very efficient and calculating man who miraculously managed to bring down the plane without hurting any of the crew.

What has here been said was confirmed during the following stay and during the transportation which the airmen later on had to endure.

The escape from the plane:

As I have already mentioned there was a guard at Halhjem only 1½ km. away. Luckily a replacement of the watch guard was taking place at the moment and therefore the reaction there was equal to nil. As the Germans arrived at the landing area they were so late that Magnus Askvik who was the first to gain contact with the airmen had been able to lead them away from the plane without meeting the Germans. The place called Björnen is a peninsula leading away from Os towards the Björnefjord. From the landing area and to the furthestmost point of Björnen there is an air-line distance of only 2 to 5 km. Here at Björnen there lived 5 families and here the airmen came into contact with Hans and Ingeborg Björnen (father and daughter). Ingeborg who mastered the English language was thereby of great help.

Ingeborg Björnen's story as told by herself:

As the Canadian airplane made the forced landing at Haugland on the 26/9-1944 the airmen were guided southwards to Björnen by Magnus Askvik who was one of the first who talked to them. First they arrived at the farmhouse of Björnevik. Nobody there understood them and pointed at Björnehaugen where I then lived. The airmen came, however, first in contact with the people of the farm called Björnen and Miss Martha Bruerøy (now Mrs. Haugland) followed them out to me. I speak a little English and I explained to them their whereabouts and that the danger of being arrested was great. Marta Bruerøy led them up into the wood and hid them in a slope of large boulders. I, myself, went first to Lunde as I hoped to gain contact with Harald Lunde, but he was not at home. I went back home and conferred with my father Hans Björnen. We agreed to contact Einar Evensen. Then I went over to our neighbour, Johannes Ferstadvoll, and he was willing to assist. My father and J. Ferstadvoll went to E. Evensen and arranged to bring the airmen to Björnetrynet at nightfall. Johannes Ferstadvoll and I guided them to Evensen and his men and left them in their care. Since then all was quiet at Björnen until November 17th 1944 when the Germans made a raid at Os and my sister, Hanna, was arrested as a result of this, and was imprisoned until the end of the war.

Ingeborg Björnen (sign.)

Continuation by E. Evensen.

Contact:

After having made several attempts to ascertain whether there

were any survivors all was calm until 13,30 hours. No news about apprehension, death or escape. All negative, and I therefore went home to get some food. As I entered the room two men sat and talked with my father, Johan Chr. Evensen. I instantly understood that I now was to achieve the contact and the information I had been hunting for during the entire morning. The two men present were Hans Björnen and Johannes Ferstadvoll. They had already told my father that the airmen were in their care, six in number. They wanted my father to let the men have a motorboat which he possessed to enable them to sail back to England. My father was willing to let them have the boat but he was greatly in doubt whether they would succeed on account of the motor which was not in a proper condition. I could only confirm what my father had already told that they might certainly have the boat but that they would never reach back to England with such an engine even if I, myself, accompanied them. Apart from this there was sufficient oil and equipment available. Hans Björnen got disappointed for, as he put it, the airmen had to get away from Björnen as soon as possible on account of a German raid which was soon expected. He wanted to do whatever he could to prevent their apprehension. I therefore offered him to give the airmen shelter and protection the best I could as things were. We agreed that the men should be fetched at Björnetrynet at a certain fixed time. Thereafter Mr. Björnen and Mr. Ferstadvoll went back to Björnen to bring the men to the place where they were to be fetched.

Preparations:

The men who were to be used in the rescue task were picked after thorough valuation. They had to be men who were able to stand both psychological and physical strain. The cover should also be as secure as possible. The Mil.Org.-group used a summer cottage for their instruction courses which was rather free-and-easy and at the same time it was located close to the fortress of Röttingen. This house was selected with greatest care just of aforesaid reasons and the only awkwardness was that the transportation of such an explosive load had to pass strategic points at which German troops were detached. We were in lack of a good interpreter and although this could easily be arranged we could not be sure of the quality and the attitude which such a person might show in a situation like this. Mr. Nils Röttingen Seior was chosen and we knew him to be a fanatical opponent of the Germans. The others to take part were: Torvald Jakobsen, Hans Holmefjord and Magnus K. Röttinge. When the crew had been picked and after a brief bearing we agreed to use rowing boats. These were more practical than motorboats, silently drifting as they were, especially so since we wrapped pieces of cloth round the oars at the oar-locks.

The Rescue Action:

That afternoon the watch did not seem to move. The excitement was immense. Everybody were eager to get on the move. The weather was especially favourable with a calm sea and a grey sky with drizzling rain, a weather perfectly fitted for a task like this. We all felt as if we were to attack the entire German force, and we were fully aware of the fact that the chasing for the airmen were in full operation. Everything was set. Each of our men knew exactly what was his task and we started at the time fixed.

At Ramsholmen one of our boats was left whilst the other continued to Björnetrynet, about 500 meters away, where the men were to be fetched. The time during which the two men, Mr. Torvald Jakobsen and the interpreter Nils Röttingen, were away to fetch the airmen was felt like an end untold. But everything worked out nicely and at the time stipulated they were back again with the most precious load that had ~~been~~ ever been stowed in the boat. The exultation was tremendous. We all felt that half of the victory had already been achieved, since this first attempt had been so perfect.

The Germans were on their guard and had placed 7 sentry-boats over an area of some 3 quarter-miles where the possibility of escape might occur. should a crossing of the Björneffjord be attempted. This we had taken into account and we consequently refrained from taking that course at this stage.

Then we suddenly felt a dreadful fear for out of the mist appeared all of a sudden a German sentry-boat which fortunately was discovered by the discerning eye of one of our crew.

What rescued us was solely the silent pull of our boat.

If a boat geared by an engine had been used we had all been mercilessly doomed.

Our two rowing boats sailed silently between islets and rocks until we reached the bridge extended between Bruerøy and Röttingen. This was a place which we had to pass and the greatest care had to be exercised. One of our men was disembarked for reconnaissance of the area. After a while in greatest excitement we received the signal and we were able to pass the very last of the points which were considered most dangerous.

Ten minutes later we reached our shelter and were under roof.

I am convinced that our new friends felt greatly relieved at being lodged in the house and after having got some food their tension was considerably reduced.

Now we were able to get better acquainted and we told ~~them~~ them of their whereabouts and that the possibility of returning to England was within reach and that cheered them up. They were also told that some days would elapse before the Germans would calm down and give up the door-to-door search which was in operation. Those days would be the worst as the search would likely be intensified and every corner would be rummaged for because, after all, we were hiding less than 6 km. from the landing spot. We had taken into account - which also proved correct - that since the hiding place was located opposite and close to the fortress of Röttingen the Germans would not think that we were audacious enough to place the airmen in such a locality. In order to avoid engaging more people than necessary who knew about our new friends we determined to use only the five men who were already taking part. This resulted in long days with a minimum of sleep for each of the participants. We found it best that each of the members were independent of employers in order to allow him to dispose of his time as suitable as possible.

Before we left the airmen in comfortable beds we told them how to spend both days and nights and even though we were so few there would always be one or two of our men in the neighbourhood to support them. The days to come would be rather straining with few hours to sleep.

The Germans' search was now frenetical and they ravaged wildly with raids, interrogations and body of men with dogs. We had to check which of the areas had been controlled, evaluate the possibilities of our hiding place and scan all rumours that were circulating.

The men picked for this task were beyond doubt the right ones because, when the job was finished no mistakes had been done. After three days things began to calm down. The Germans gave up the fight for the airmen.

Mr. Jacob Hjelle who was the leader of the Mil.Org.-group at Os had been told that the men were safe in our custody at the Mil.Org.-group at Lepsøy. This resulted in a vivid courier activity between Os and Lepsøy.

Mr. Jacob Hjelle was in contact with England about the further transportation of the men, but in the meantime he decided to pass them along to Lønningdal, either by land or sea. Sea transportation was preferable but this could not be effected without serious difficulties. We therefore had to make further evaluations and planning.

The airmen were kept in the shelter from 24/9 to 29/9 and everything went according to plan. So far the Germans had scanned all areas, except our hiding place and our home at Bjørnarøy. During the time the airmen stayed with us the problem of food supply was prevailing. Our rations, small as they were beforehand, could hardly be sufficient to nourish an additional number of six men. Our women did, however, a fine job and made wonders not only in tracing additional supplies but also in preparing the food.

On Sunday 29/9 at 11,00 hours we agreed with the Mil.Org.-group at Os that the removal was to be effected towards Lønningdal. This meant that we had to use a motorboat as distances were long and, in addition, we would have to pass two coastal fortresses (Röttingen and Svarvhella) and the naval base at Hatvik. The reason why we picked Sunday for this task was that from Hatvik the whole area of the Bjørnefjord formed a daily training center for German naval units of 15 to 20 vessels which were scattered over the fiord.

Mr. E. Evensen was the owner of an open 21' motorboat. This type of boat was commonly used by people in the area when hunting for tunney-fish which the German Navy was well aware of. We were of the opinion that this would arise less sensation, but we had to face the fact that the Germans frequently wanted to buy fish from the boats which might possibly result in their trying to hail us.

Mr. Torvald Jakobsen and Einar Evensen were to effect the transportation and around 13,00 hours the airmen were embarked in this boat at Eneviken, Strönen and the voyage for Lønningdal started. Five of the Canadians were placed flat on the floor and covered with tarpaulin. Afterwards I often recollected how uncomfortable they must have felt lying on the hard floor for hours during the passage although we enjoyed one of these fine and sunny autumn days with the fiord smooth as a mirror. This made, no doubt, the voyage more pleasant than if storm and rain had prevailed. Aft sat the chief pilot together with Mr. Jakobsen and myself. During the trip I had the opportunity of admiring this efficient and magnificent type of a leader.

The trip seemed to develop favourably for us. It did not seem as if the Germans on the fortresses paid our small louse of a boat much attention as it made its way over the fiord. A surf boat passed at long range apart from which everything was calm.

But the trip had merely started and when passing Bjørnen we encountered an obstacle which almost made the blood freeze in our veins and which should long live in our minds.

We were approximately amidst the fiord when suddenly a sentryboat which had been stationed at Tysnes came speeding towards us at

starboard side. Retreat by land was out of question and the situation was indeed getting hot.

Heavily loaded as we were there was the question whether they believed us to carry a load of fish from which they wanted to buy or had their suspicion arisen?

The only card in our hands was our audacity and a cool mind, but would it be possible to bluff the Germans?

Our course was 90 degrees towards the sentryboat. We turned 20 degrees starboard (towards the sentryboat) and Mr. Jakobsen prepared himself with his hand on the harpoon in the bow.

Our plan was to make the Germans believe that we had discovered a tunneyfish and that we were preparing for hunting.

If this bluff would succeed the German Navy would, from our point of view, have suffered a serious defeat but we knew only too well what would be our fate if we were being caught in a situation like this. Compare the MTB caught in the Korsfjorden. But back to this incident. The sentryboat was now less than 500 meters away and some reaction was to be expected in some way or other. But there was no reaction. What would have been the result if only one of those hiding under the tarpaulin had risen? Through telescope (binoculars) with which the sentryboats were equipped, yes, even with bare eyes, this would have meant a catastrophe to everyone of us.

But then, at a distance of less than 200 meters, the Germans ported the helm and turned off.

This was indeed unbelievable. We all sat paralysed in the boat and not a word was uttered for a long time, but we all had our thoughts.

Those covered by the tarpaulin fortunately did not know what had happened. The course was amended and within half an hour we reached land on the other side. The only thing left now was the passing of the station at Hatvik, but we were now confident that we would succeed and so we did.

The passing of Hatvik was in itself exciting but nothing happened and in the twilight we gained contact with Mr. Hjelle and his men who took over the precious load which for 5 days was so unexpectedly entrusted to our care.

The remainder of the rescue task will be told by Mr. Halvor Övredal.

Mr. Halvor Övredal's story:

The first and most dangerous part of the rescue task had now happily and perfectly been carried through by Mr. Einar Evensen and his men. At Lönningdal Mr. Jakob Hjelle, Mr. Helen Mowinckel Nilsen and Mr. Halvor Övredal took over the precious and perilous load which the first men of the action group with their tiny boat had delivered at the appointed time and place. It is hard to conceive the strains both physically and psychically which these men from Canada had to endure on this trip. All of them were very brave and were, from our point of view, worthy representatives of their country in their fight against our mutual enemies. We dare say that their patience and strength gave all of us who participated in this task both inspiration and courage together with luck and unbelievably audacity.

The result was that we won the struggle against our common opponents. We who were fortunate enough to take part in this action have kept in our minds the memory of a fine and well organized action.

At Lönningdal our Canadian friends stopped for two hours and were well catered for after their hard trip. This meant primarily

warmth and food in the home of Marta Övredal at Lönningdal. Unfortunately their stay in her home should rather be a short one on account of the fear for the German watch patrols. Our friends had to proceed into the Norwegian mountains making a three hours walk on a very steep ground. At last they reached a remote lumber shantee in the mountains which had been erected for the use of the Norwegian civil defence forces. The owner was Mr. Fredrik Övredal.

The Canadian airmen baptized the cottage "Little Canada" and this cottage was to form their home for many days under constant fear. One of the men from our own action group, Mr. Ivar Dyngeland, (he is now dead) who was also hiding in the same cottage lived together with them all the time.

We tried to maintain a guard on all principal spots leading to the cottage "Little Canada". The admission to the cottage from Rolvsvåg was guarded by Mr. Rolf Olsen (now dead) and Mr. Halvor Övredal.

The other path leading to the cottage was guarded by people residing at Lönningdal and Övredal, but only two people knew what was the purpose of the guard, viz. Marta Övredal and Mr. Kjell Harmens.

Everything turned out well. German patrols were surching the area regularly without knowing what was going on. In the meantime Mr. Jakob Hjelle, who was the leader of the Mil.Org.-group at Os established contact with England for the return of the airmen to Shetland.

Then the very hazardous return from the mountains to Övredal was started. Everything was prepared from the farm of Ida and Nils Övredal. These two people who were then rather old had been asked to move away for some time. Their children Ingeborg, Marta and Knut Övredal were terrified at the news of the visit to be expected, but these women and men had been accustomed to many a shock and the arrangement, therefore, was successfully carried through.

In spite of lack of food the airmen were served a rather abundant Norwegian meal and in addition they could also enjoy some sleep before the next phase started. This remains, we believe, as a brief but cosy stop in the minds of all our Canadian friends. During the night at Övredal extra sentries were posted and a concealed telephone extension was connected with the German telephone net. Mr. Edvard Lönningdal and the brothers Fredrik and Alf Heggland were selected as telephone supervisors and they controlled the roads leading to Övredal and Lönningdal. In our leisure we have frequently wondered whether our friends really understood how dangerous this transportation by boat really was taking into consideration that it was carried through in bright daylight.

This is not said to underestimate the sound judgment of our friends but merely as an interrogation point. Before we left Lönningdal by boat the alarm was sounded twice, but fortunately both appeared harmless.

We then arrived at Björndalsnøstet (house at the sea-side). There we met Mr. Lars Orrebakken who presented himself at the preaffixed time with his boat.

Now the final and decisive leg of the task of the Os-group started.

Our six friends were stowed under the deck of the tiny vessel and we saluted for the last time the group that had now fulfilled their mission. Mr. Lars Orrebakken who had the command of the vessel started on the final leg of the transportation from Os together with Mr. Haldor Övredal.

After a short while we reached the critical point which was Hatvik in the Björnefjord, one of the strongest naval bases which the Germans had on the Westcoast of Norway. We headed straight ahead between the German naval units lying in the fiord, 10 to 15 in number, both surface vessels and submarines.

We waved our hands to the vessels and crews who followed us through their binoculars and periscopes. Our friendly beckonings and gestures were reciprocated by the Germans, obviously because they believed us to form a friendly fishing team.

Our friend, the chief pilot, eagerly wanted to come up.

As the vigil and efficient soldier he undoubtedly was, he wanted to make his observations. If he succeeded in joining his wing again he would return to Hatvik and salute the Germans through a bombardment of Hatvik.

As things were, with a heavy heart, we had to prevent this brave soldier from carrying out his desire.

The remaining part of our voyage was passed calmly and comfortably. We passed the airmen in the hands of Mr. Einar Evensen and Mr. Sverre Östervoll. The latter brought them safely to M/S "VIGRA" which was commanded by Mr. Leif Larsen.

If we should try to sum up the incidents of this operation in a short resume there is a combination of three factors involved, viz. audacity, a fantastic luck and a small amount of efficiency. Our endeavours so luckily brought to an end were greatly re-compensated by the fact that over the radio we received the following statement from England:
"It is raining in the mountains".

Operation concluded!

Haldor Övredal (sign.)

Continuation by Mr. Einar Evensen:

After having had a good meal and rest at Lönningdal, Mr. Jakobsen and I started on our way home. We were in high spirits because we had succeeded so far.

The people at Björnen were notified that all was well and that they could now relax.

Nevertheless this operation had its consequences.

On the Sunday when we had led the airmen from our hiding place at Strönen to Lönningdal my family and I had been invited by our neighbours to join in the celebration of a confirmation. For obvious reasons I could not take part and my family had been able to explain away my absence.

Nothing happened until they were paid a visit by an unknown person who pretended to be a Secret Service agent.

This person spread the rumour that he was in contact with people who had informed him that the Canadian airmen were under my protection.

My family again managed to weaken this assertion by telling that they knew nothing about what he was talking about.

The man in question then told that he would come back the following Monday at 1300 hours.

When I arrived home on that Monday morning I was told what had happened and I therefore prepared myself for the meeting.

It was obvious that this man had to be stopped even if I had to use stronger means. Here seemed a match to be burning which could result in an explosion.

At the time stipulated the man arrived, but in order to avoid

an ambush I had to put my family at guard. The stranger brought with him a man whom I knew well, but as things were, I did not trust other people than the members of the Mil.Org.-group and my nearest family. This acquaintance of mine most likely saved the life of the stranger because one could scarcely find a more irresponsible person. If he really represented the sources he pretended to do he could not act more stupidly.

What he told was that he was a Secret Service agent having a boat available off the Norwegian coast in order to fetch the airmen back to England as soon as he could get in touch with them. The result of the meeting was that the man got so scared that he dropped the matter completely.

It only remains to be told that I got the opportunity to bid good-bye to the six airmen when they were fetched by Mr. Sverre Ostervoll at Aspøy.

Everyone who had taken part in this action were grateful of having had the opportunity of collaborating and the task will be a life-long memory for them all.

→ We succeeded because of faithful participation and self-sacrifice mingled with hatred against our enemies, audacity and luck.

During the raid and following apprehension in connection with this crash-landing and other illegal activity performed by the Mil.Org.-group at Os, two people were taken prisoners (hostages) and received a specially hard treatment.

In lieu of Ingeborg Björnen her sister Hanna Björnen was captured and got a severe treatment.

For Einar Evensen, his 71 years old mother Pernille Evensen was captured.

When she was returned home she was nearly dead as a result of sickness which she brought on herself during the captivity.

Os, February 15th 1971.

Einar Evensen (sign.)

The contents of this report is hereby certified.

Jakob Hjelle (sign.)

Haldor Övredal (sign.)