

Norway - occupied 9th April 1940, some resistance for four months. Population 4½ million, most living in towns and villages. Main occupation: farming on very small farms, fisheries and seamen, and some industry.

My background in this escaping situation. I left Norway in February 1942 after a breakdown in some military underground groups - some men had been taken by the Germans. I crossed the North Sea in a fishing boat with some friends, and joined Special Forces and got a very all-round training first, and later on, some special education. I finally went back to Norway in Bergen area with a radio operator, in order to organize and train instructors in weapons and sabotage (demolition) etc.

Magnus Hauge was at the time I came to Os area the chief of Os 2nd company and had his organization under construction west of the river trough Os, and covering the farm where our Wellington crew crashed. (Military Organization = Mil org)

Einar Evensen who lived near the beach in the west, was one of Hauge's group leaders and main contacts to the 2nd company. He was as well one of the first men from the Milorg who contacted the crew.

As I had a lot of places to give instructions, I had been in contact only a few months with Milorg in Os, and had a rather faint idea of how much I could expect from these men. I just knew a few of them and mostly under cover names.

German coastal defences in Os area was rather strong and important. There was a submarine training center at Hatvik, some kilometers east of Os. There was a military main base and prisoner camp at Ulven, less than 1 km north of Os. There was a fortress to cover the fjord and main sailing route from the south, up to Bergen town. This was placed on the foreland on the east side of the village of Os (1300 inhabitants). Rottingen fortification and anti-air base is just on an isle west of the main land of Os, and this was the place you will hear more about in this matter, and the special area where Einar Evensen lived,

worked, and did his "dirty" operations during this period and some time later on. He had a saw mill, and was building wooden houses.

Milorg in Os was a strict Military Organization, and had been run for some years, really in small scale since 1941, when I came to this area for the first time in May 1944. I did not know a single person. I got contact, Henrik Lyssand, who put me in contact with the local military leader, and we started the new Milorg as I was taught in U.K. Groups are 4 men, and only one having contact to another group of 4 men. We made the number 5, to build the link rational for this area. Instructors were taught, and most men were using cover names to avoid quick breakdown in the groups.

We formed a special group of young women and boys for scouting and courier service, and we had contact to a group of older men for supplying food and other necessities.

There was only one contact from Milorg Os to the main leading group of Milorg in Bergen, who could send messages by the radio operator to Home station in London, in code. I had my own special code for secret messages which Milorg in Bergen should not understand.

Wellington Entrance. 26 September, 1944.

I had some weapon instructions in Fana Company, 20 km north of Os, and was on my way back to my hideaway on a bicycle. When I was almost outside the gate of Haugeness fortress, early in the morning I saw a plane heading low over the sea, coursing the German fortress in a soft swing. No flak or shooting at all. The plane proceeded low over the trees against the west, and only one engine was lazy running. I could not see any identification marks, but I reckoned some crash landing was going on somewhere behind the hills.

When back in my hideaway, I sent some messages to some head men - "Cut out all activities immediately, keep flat", till new orders.

Later in the day we had a meeting, but no one at that time thought of this crew, which we did not know much about. We had to stop a small weapon transport to a troop who should arrange a depot.

Some messages came later in the day that the English crew of 6 men was hiding near Bjornen, a small place, rather lonely. Our most pressing orders had been out for some hours now, and the people in Bjornen farm had sent a message to some men who they could imagine were on the right side, may even be in some kind of contact to organized people. Evensen was one of them, and he quickly contacted his friend and discussed their possibilities. They did not know anything about me, who had U.K. contact possibility and took initiative to get the crew away in the evening.

In the meantime, our H.Q. had some reports from scouts. Magnus Hauge went on bicycle to Evensen's sawmill to bring news, which he already had got. A school teacher on the landing place had pointed out the pass to Bjornen, because he knew there was an English speaking woman there, and no roads were made to this lonely place. Some time would then be won. He told our observers that all men were healthy, and when the Germans came to the spot he had sent them in direction N, as the crew went SW. The crew tried to burn the plane, with no success.

The Germans had rather rapidly located the landing ground. They investigated and threatened all people they met, searching all houses, barns and sent a lot of soldiers in all directions. All roads were blocked, and our movements were more difficult the longer the day went. Hauge was sitting discussing the situation with Evensen in the sawmill when the Germans surrounded the place and asked what they did there. "We are working here, and just have a rest". After a while the Germans left and searched some boathouses near, and blocked the road with soldiers who questioned and terrorized the few people moving along.

The decision was taken. Five men was the rescuing crew and they picked up the airmen in the dark and rainy night and rowed them to the first hiding place, A hut where the Germans earlier in the summer had been stationed, near the fortress of Rottingen some 300 m across the water.

No food was available, but the 5 families did their utmost to take from small rations what they could go on without, and the helpers tried to fish to keep food on their tables at home.

The crew was instructed to keep in the hills during the day, and they made a hideaway with some old canvas to keep them reasonably dry. They had to keep watching all movements on sea, and run away if necessary. Everybody had to shave off beards, etc. German vessels and all kinds of patrol boats very early on the 26th surrounded the coast and controlled all small motorboats and row boats to prevent an escape. Oil or petrol was very hard rationed, only fishermen got a small supply lasting for just some hours daily, and to keep them away from the coast and the isles further west.

In 5 days the Germans prowled the mainland and soldiers from Rottingen were brought ashore to help in searching.

In the meantime I moved a student who was hidden further north of Os to a farm in Lonningdal 20 km east of Os, we needed a liason. Now we decided to move the crew by day to Lonningdal and up in our main cover and training area.

They were now taken on board in a small fishing boat and ferried along the seaside near land, passing all patrol vessels on inside, passing German fortresses and submarine base at Hatvik to an old boathouse, where they had to stay till the dark evening. They got some sandwiches for the trip, but we were too busy to think of food for them during the day, as we had a lot of things to do during the transfer. In the evening we brought them to a house to rest for some short time and they got some food before further transport.

Now they were out of reach for the Germans. In the night they were rowed along a lake a mile long and after a few hours time we got them installed in "Little Canada", a small cottage with a lake around. The student was placed here to make some contact to the guarding party and food was now brought more regularly.

The crew's outfit for long country crossing was rather heavy and inconvenient so we got hold of some old rubber boots to help some of them. They had a rather hard job to follow us during our mountain climbing. They were little trained for such tours, but never complained. We brought plates, pans and sleeping

bags with us when we led the group to Little Canada, and it was the safest place to "store" them for some time.

I now left them and tried to arrange the return to Shetland via our radio operator in Bergen. I stayed in Bergen for some days to make all arrangements with U.K. Two special messages had to be made for the London Norwegian news - "Keep the meatballs hot" to come 24 hours before the crew should be at the meeting place, and "It rains in the mountains" the same evening the subchaser would be there.

In the meantime H.Q. in Milorg Os recognized the return route, and arranged with the men to take care of the transport.

We had another obstacle during this radio conversation. When the plane crashed we put out a rumor that in the plane some commando soldiers were as well. The crew 8 in number were well armed with machine pistols, and this was brought to the Germans girlfriends the second day. The Germans then kept closer together and did not spread enough in the terrain. The searching took a lot more time and left us the necessary holes in their chain. But it was our boomerang. The rumor reached Bergen and when we sent message that Os Milorg had taken care of the crew all safe, the H.Q. in Bergen added 8 men. When I came in contact with Home Station and our H.Q. in London they were rather suspicious when I said 6 men.

The crew was very security minded. I could not have their squadron number or any number of the airplane. They were in fact a bit suspicious and at last I asked for a well-known nickname of one of the crew. After some discussion it ended with RED. I had to use that in our telegram to U.K.

Another thing I tried to blackmail U.K. to send 6 tons of weapons in change for the crew when they should be taken on board and this was refused. We got it later on anyhow.

During the time the crew lived at Little Canada another bombing attack was made in Bergen harbour. The submarine base was shot down, and some parachutes were used. The Germans concentrated all efforts to pick up some prisoners, and our area became more decent for a while.

When I came back from Bergen our special messages were distributed to all men who should be in the return routes, so they could know when and where to be to take over the retreating crew. It meant a lot of organizing work, and oil for the motor-boats had to be sufficient, also for some alternative routes.

For a short while nothing serious happened in our H.Q. But on the 9th of October we heard from London, after the news and among a lot of other special messages "Keep the meatballs warm". It meant quick move again. I rushed to Little Canada to start the return trip. The crew had just relaxed in the sunny day and asked for "another week".

Well, everything was "on the move" several places now, and we left the cottage and during the night they came back to the village Lonningdal, and were left with a Brengun and some pistols in a house storing fishnets and boats. A small river came out in the bay and on the other side of this river was the main road to Os. The Germans patrolled this road and they were just a few hundred meters away.

In the passing hours a lot of Germans passed along the road to search the village and about 11.00 hours our fishing boat came to the boathouses across the bay. The Germans did not take any notice, and we rowed the crew rapidly across the bay, and shortly after they were installed in the fish hole, and the vessel slowly left the place. We collected our Brengun and pistols and disappeared along the steep beach. We blocked the road with an immense stone we tipped from the topside of the road. The telephone wire was out, but we reconnected it some hours later as nothing seemed to happen.

During the day the escort should do some fishing to avoid suspicion, as the route was full of controlling boats, who immediately brought up all boats hurrying along. They passed some coastal fortifications, and in the afternoon the crew was passed over to another bigger fishing boat which was mainly in weapon and personnel transport on the coast. Another man was joining the group and they were left in an old sheephouse

on a small isle, now near the meeting place.

The next special message came - "it rains in the mountains" connected with "coming one day later".

We on the mainland had no possibilities to give any further help. It was just for us to hope that the Shetland boat should appear, as it did the next day.

The crew had no food or sleeping bags out in the hut which was very breezy, no glass in the window and no door. The following day they were taken in a small boat and put on board the submarine chaser. We thought of them crossing the North Sea in a gale in the night, and felt a big relief when the last special message came, indicating arrival - "Coconuts on holiday".

HELEN MOWINKER-NILSEN

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