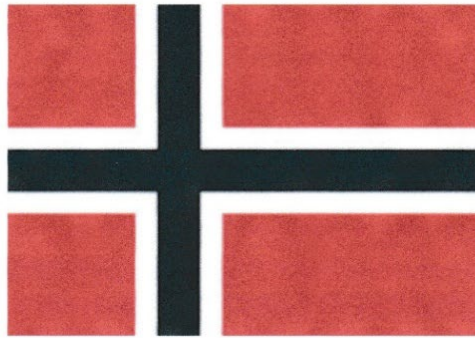




• DORNOCH •  
HERITAGE SOCIETY



*'The Norwegian Army in Dornoch'*

*talk by*

*Sander MacDonald*

*23<sup>rd</sup> September 2008*

This Norwegian forces weren't in Dornoch for very long at all. So, why have I chosen this subject? Well, there's two reasons. The first reason comes in two parts, which I'll tell you straight away. And the second reason is another part, and it will be at the end of the talk.

In the year 2002, a Saturday night in August, my wife went into Dornoch and I was watching golf on Sky TV, when Sky had the American Golf. And wasn't long gone when she came back and said, *'Will you come up to the bridge in the square? There's a gentleman there, he was stationed in Dornoch during the war, and he's not very sure where he was. Can you come up and try and help him?'* Well, can you imagine me watching golf and having a request like that? *'Please, will you come up? There's nobody up there that can help him'.*

I realised that if he was here during the war, he must be an elderly man. So, I went up, and there were several people at the bridge, so I said how do you do to a gentleman, a very tall man. *'Were you in the Army, or were you in the Air Force?'* He said, I was in the Army.

I said, *'What regiment?'* He said, *'Norwegian paratroopers. My name is Olof Bahn, and I come from Son in southern Norway. And this is my son, Ui'.* And Ui spoke up, and he said, *'My father*

*has been keeping telling me for many years of his time in Scotland during the war, telling me what a beautiful country it was, and how friendly the people were. And I suggested to him this year to come to Scotland for a holiday, and of course he readily agreed'.*

So I said, *'Well, if you're a Norwegian paratrooper, you're stationed up at Earl's Cross, Nissen huts up there'.* No, I wasn't at Earl's Cross. *'Well, were in the Dornoch Hotel?'*

*'No, I was not in the Dornoch Hotel. But I do remember meeting a lady on her bicycle who was travelling back to Embo, and I used to meet her quite often',* he said. Well, that threw me completely. I didn't know where he was. I said, *'Well, hold on. I'll go home, I'll get my car, and we'll have a tour around'.*

So I got my car, picked him up, and we went up to Dornoch Hotel. Definitely not here, he said. So I said, *'How about the Nissen huts behind the Dornoch Hotel?'* Nope, up to Earl's Cross.

Definitely not Earl's Cross. So I said, *'Well, a lady on her bike to Embo. No forces that I know of were stationed between Dornoch and Embo Street, but I'll take you up to Embo Street'.*

So we went up to Embo Street. Nope, nothing there. So I said, *'Right, come on, I'll take you into the cathedral and show you the plate presented by the Norwegian Brigade when they left Dornoch'.*

And, of course, we arrived at the cathedral. It was after nine o'clock, and the Cathedral was closed. But Joyce went to Tordarech, and she got Jim Mattson, told him what it was about. He gave Joyce the key, and we went in, and we locked the door behind us. It was pitch dark. I showed him the plate, and I said, *'When are you leaving Dornoch?'*

*'We're leaving on Sunday morning at ten o'clock'.* Right, I said, I'm on duty in the cathedral tomorrow morning. Call in at ten o'clock. The lights will be on, and you can get a photograph. So we left the cathedral, and as we came to the door, there was a knock on the door, and there was Jim Mattson. *'Don't you remember the Norwegian forces in Burghfield?'* Oh, I had forgotten all about Burghfield. So, come on, in the car, off we went up to Burghfield.



We parked outside Burghfield, and we walked in, and I said to Olaf, *'Do you recognise anything here?'* 'No'. So I said, *'You've got to visualise this building without the dining room. As it is, just like that.'* Oh, well, he said, Maybe.

Burghfield dining room extension  
Historylinks Cat No. 2012\_048\_03

And then I asked him a question, which I should have asked him when I first met him. I said, *'Where did you actually sleep when you were billeted in Dornoch?'* Oh, he says, *'There were*

*16 of us, and we slept in a room above a garage'. Oh, I said, I know where you were just down there in the garages at Burghfield.*

So I took him down there, and of course, the garages are all built up. There's a house there now, I think. So I went round the corner to Robbie Mackay, the gardener.

He came out, and he says, *'Well, I can't help you at all. Go in and get Ewan'.* So I went into Burghfield, got Ewan, and Ewan came out. Ewan knew about it, and he explained to the gentleman, and Olaf was looking. No, things weren't registering with him. So Ewan says, *'Go in to the bar and have a drink with me'.*

We were sitting round the table, and there were several people in the bar there, and Olaf was sitting opposite me, and he wasn't saying a word. He was just looking round about. Suddenly he said, *'This is the blue room. We used to have lectures here'.* So I said to Ewan, When you purchased the hotel, was this room any particular colour? *'Well, yes, it was the walls were blue all the way round'.* So as soon as he said that, Olaf started remembering things, and he remembered being out in the garage and whatnot. It was really great. So we took him down to the house afterwards. He had supper with us, and the next day I met him in the Cathedral a photograph was taken and off he went.



*"In gratitude from the Norwegian Brigade which had its School and Training Unit in Dornoch during the Summer and Autumn 1942.*

*When exiled from our own country we Norwegians found a home among the Scots and happy Christian Fellowship in this House of God."*

The emerald lady that he met on the bicycle almost certainly was a maid in one of the houses on the road up to Burghfield. He would have met her as he was coming down from Burghfield there.

When I got home on a Sunday evening, I started thinking about the forces in Dornoch in World War 2 and there was nothing at all about Norwegian forces. So I jotted down various headings in an exercise book and thought no more about it until, I don't know, several years

later, when Helen Fairgrave was co-chairman of the Heritage Society. I don't know what years that was. I've lost track. Well, she was co-chairman. She phoned me up on a Monday night and said, Sander, will you come up to Burghfield on Wednesday afternoon and meet some Norwegians who are coming for a cup of tea? They'd like to ask you some questions about the Norwegian troops in Dornoch. I said, *'Helen, I'm not keen on doing that at all'*. We spoke for a few minutes and her last remark, as she put the receiver down, she said, *'I'll have to do it myself, and I'm not even from Dornoch,. I'm a stranger here'*.

That was at five o'clock. I had my evening meal just after that and at six o'clock I phoned Helen back and said, *'Right, Helen, I'll do it for you. What time?'* Half past three. *'Fine'*. So that was my camera club night and I was doing well that night

The next morning, it was wet. I didn't realize how lucky I was that that it was wet because I sat down in the chair and got out the headings that I'd jotted down, looked up some bits and pieces that I had about the Norwegian forces, and just made some paragraphs on a piece of paper. My wife came through eventually, and she said, *'What have you got there?'* And when I told her she looked and she said, *'Oh, for goodness sake, she said, Can you not put that in order? You'll get all mixed up with these headings here, there'*. So I put it in some kind of order.

In the afternoon we left for the Burghfield and as we were leaving the house, she said to me, *'Are you not taking the folder up with you that you did yesterday? Knowing you, you'll forget everything you've written down. You'll not remember anything when they ask you a question'*. So I took the folder with me and we arrived at the Burghfield about 25 past three. And I was met again by Ewan.

When you go into the hallway in Berwick, the dining room is on your left and I happened to look in the dining room. There were chairs set out from the door, almost three-quarters of the way, with thresholds down both sides, cups and saucers, plates, food, and I said to him, *'What's on you?'* *'Oh, he says, It's set for the Norwegians coming to hear your talk'*.

I said, *'What talk?'* *'They're giving a talk to Norwegians coming here this afternoon'*. I looked and I said, *'How many?'* *'There's 85, with two interpreters'*. I said, *'You're joking'*.

*'No, no, he says, There's a Norwegian cruise liner in at Invergarden, and they're coming here today'*. If a hole in the ground just opened up, I would have dived into it no bother. Just then, Helen arrived. *'How many people are coming, Helen?'* *'Oh, about 12'*. *'What am I supposed to do?'* *'You're supposed to talk to them, or just answer any question'*. *'Do you know how many people are coming?'* *'No'*. I said *'There's 85'*.

Just then, they all arrived. And the interpreter was at the front then. She said, *'Are you the gentleman giving the talk?'* And I said, *'Well, I just found that out about five minutes ago'*. I said, *'Look, I've written this out. How will that do?'* And she looked at the time. *'If you read the paragraph out, I'll translate it. Right'*. So I looked round for Helen, and she disappeared. If I had got her, she would have been throttled there and then, I'll tell you that. Just then, a gentleman spoke to me, and he said, *'Is the hotel still an hotel?'* And I said, *'Were you stationed here during the war?'* He said, *'Yes. In the Dornoch Hotel?'*



I said, *'Have you been back to Dornoch since the war time?'* He said, *'No'*. I said, *'Are you going to visit the hotel when you visit the Dornoch?'* He said, *'No, we haven't got time'*. I said, *'Stay there'*.

I looked up and got the interpreter, and I said, *'Look, there's a gentleman here who's been in Dornoch during the war time, and he was stationed in the Dornoch Hotel. I'm going to take him up to the hotel'*. I didn't ask could I. I said, *'I'm going to take him up to the hotel and bring him back'*. *'Can you give me ten minutes?'* *'Yes, I can give you ten minutes'*. So I saw the chap, and I said, *'Look, I'm giving a short talk, and I'll pick you up as soon as it's finished. Whether you've eaten your food or drunk your tea, forget about it. You're coming with me'*.

So I did my wee spiel, and I got a nice wee clap, and that was fine. So I got the gentleman and his wife, took them in the car, and came down Castle Street, and as we were crossing over to go up Argyll Street, he recognised the old police station and I pointed out the new one. As we drove up the hill he spotted Abden House, more recently Ross House occupied by the University of the Highlands and Islands, on the left saying *'the college on the left. Oh, that was our hospital'*. *"That's right, I said. You've got a good memory."*



We spent some time touring around the Dornoch Hotel. We drove round the front, the west side and the back. He was concerned that we wouldn't have time, particularly when I said we would go to the Cathedral to see the plaque, but I assured him *"even if the bus goes off, I'll take you to the ship. There's no problem. You'll get there"*. So we went in the Cathedral and he took photographs and by the time we reached the Burghfield we met the rest of the visiting party boarding the bus so that was fine. We said goodbye, and off we went.



About three weeks later, Helen gave me an envelope, full of papers, and in it was a letter from Captain Dunderdale of the Gordon Port Authority. I didn't realise that Captain Dunderdale's wife was at the Burghfield, but she had gone down south because her sister was very ill. The letter was to thank a gentleman who gave a talk to Norwegians with a letter enclosed from the gentleman who I took on a tour of Dornoch. In it he said the highlight of the whole cruise was his visit to Dornoch, and he wished to thank the gentleman who took him around and about down. Great. Along with that, he enclosed about eight or nine full-scale papers telling how he escaped from Norway. Unfortunately, these papers, along with the wee talk I gave the Norwegians, I put away safely in the house. So safely, I cannot find them anywhere.

I do remember the gentleman telling me how he boarded a trawler, which would be the *'Shetland Bus'*, along with, it was 42 or 43 other people, and how they made their way out of a fjord in pitch dark passing German machine gun posts on either side of the fjord, out into the North Sea. And once they got out into the North Sea, the captain of the trawler went

full steam ahead to put as much sea between him and Norway before daylight came in. They ran into a storm and as you can imagine, 43 people inside that trawler, diesel fumes, the trawler all over the place, nearly every one of them was sick. They arrived in darkness in Shetland in a bay where they anchored and in the morning they went to go to the nearest port. They started up the engines, and the engines lasted one minute, and they conked out, they ran out of diesel, it had just had enough to take them over.

But this gentleman had a scrap paper and handwritten down the names of every passenger on that boat, both their date of birth and where they were born. And against his name, I think it was Martin Maskovic, his date of birth was I think it was 1922. So that would have made him 19 or 20 when he was in Dornoch. Against his name, place of birth was Vladivostok.

And I thought to myself, well, there's only one Vladivostok that I know, and that's in Far East of Russia. Could there possibly be a Vladivostok in Norway? Maybe a small village. I'll write to the chap. So I did that.

One thing I forgot to tell you, when I took him, when he pointed out the police station, he said, *'that's where one of our men escaped from the cells there'*.

When I wrote to him, I said, you say you're born in Vladivostok. I is that Vladivostok in Russia, or is there another Vladivostok? Could you possibly help me by enlarging on the details of the chap who escaped from the police station in Dornoch, and can you possibly give me any information at all of what you did in your spare time in Dornoch, if you had spare time?

He wrote back straight away, and said yes, I was born in Vladivostok in East Russia. My father was a fisherman, fishing for salmon and sturgeon to provide caviar for the Russian market. And the nearest place, nearest hospital to where we were was in Vladivostok.

The chap who was in the cells in Dornoch, he said, was a little bit mental. He couldn't remember why he was in the cells or not, but he was in there. He couldn't have been that bad, because fiddling around in the cells, he found that one of the bricks in the wall was loose. And he had something in his pocket, and he scraped away until eventually he was able to push that brick through into the cell next door. Once he done that, he was able to pick out some more bricks, and he climbed through into the other cell, where the door was open, and he got out. He didn't go out the front door, where he would be seen. He went out the back door. He was eventually found down in the Dornoch links, and they chased him, and he went out into the sea where somebody went out after him, and was able to take him back.

In respect of spare time he said his highlight in Dornoch was on a Sunday afternoon, going down to the rubbish dump to kill rats. Now, the rubbish dump, some of you will remember, was not where it is just now, but where the caravan site was. The caravan site was bulldozed over and soil put on, seeded, and that's where they used to go down. As a matter of fact, I used to go down myself there, chasing rats.

Now, I've had great difficulty in finding out things about the Norwegian troops. I've got snippets from various different people, and I put this together. If you'll forgive my pronunciation of Norwegian names, as I could be completely wrong and I'll sound differently, but I'll tell you this. The Norwegian Army, and that is the Norwegian military forces, which

were formed in Great Britain during the war, were mainly stationed in Scotland. When the people in Norway, who were able to listen to Olav Reiter, that's R-Y-T-T-E-R, broadcasting during the war from the Norwegian forces on active service, somewhere or other in Great Britain, they invariably heard the sound of bugle calls and troops marching. So, one got the impression that there was a great army on the march all the time. But, in fact, there was nothing on a large scale, and the Norwegian forces were scattered in small units throughout Scotland. In Dornoch, for instance, the schools and training detachments were stationed for a while before being moved later to Rosemarkie and Fortrose. In Tain there was a battalion, with Lieutenant-Colonel Gunnar in command, together with a staff company at the time under Captain Trond Bygdal. In Nigg there were four infantry companies, but this was eventually changed to three mountain companies. Number one was in Tain, number two and three were in Nigg. The number two mountain company and the Norwegian commandos were the only Norwegians to serve in active service in Norway. I think I have a note here, on 11 November 1944, 300 of the Norwegian soldiers, led by Colonel Arne Dahl, crossed the border into Norway, but they crossed in Soviet vehicles, because the Russians had already invaded Norway from the north on 8 October 1944. Of course the commandos were scattered all over the place, but no other detachments of Norwegian troops were there.

I get the impression that they were held back because the Norwegian Government, was said to be a government run by the Germans and it was called the 'Quisling Government' They said they were determined to fight to the last man, with Norwegian troops up in the mountains but in fact, on 8 May 1945, General Franz Boney surrendered on orders from the German high command. There were about 350,000 German military in Norway at the time.

Going back, Norwegian artillery were stationed at Everton, and for a time the Norwegians manned the guns on the North and South Sutors, as you come into the Cromarty Firth. Now I don't know if any of you have been to the Sutors at all. I've never been to the South Sutor, but in the North Sutor there are still signs of the gun emplacements, and there were some pretty big guns there at the time. A machine gun company were quartered there for a time, and Rosemarkie was a very important Norwegian military centre with headquarters for training units of the army and paratroopers.

In Dornoch, the building we now know as the Burghfield Hotel was requisitioned by the government. , During the wartime, of course, it was owned by Lord Rothermere, and it was called 'Northfield', and it became the Norwegian Officers' Mess, and in charge there was Major Skold Brodin, B-R-O-D-I-N. He was the commandant. And the officers at Northfield were often visited by King Haakon. That's King Haakon VII





When he was in residence at Carbisdale Castle, he came to Dornoch, they said it was to discuss military affairs, but it's also said he came down often as he found the food in Northfield far better than at Carbisdale Castle.

Carbisdale at that time was owned by the Salvesen family. Colonel Theodore Salvesen, who was a wealthy Scottish businessman of Norwegian extraction and head of the Christian Salvesen

Shipping and Whaling Company, he bought the castle in 1933, and he also acted as Norway's consul. And through his consular connection, the King and the Crown Prince Olav, when they were in the north, they stayed with him. During that time, the Castle was the venue of a very important meeting, the 'Carbisdale Conference', which led to an agreement by the Allies which ensured that if Russian forces invaded Norway, they would not stay in Norway, they would withdraw. The Russians did enter Norway in October 1944, when in pursuit of the 28th German Army, and captured about 30 towns, including Kirkenes. But they left again in September 1945 in keeping with the terms of the agreement at Carbisdale.

I can remember King Haakon planting a tree in front of the cathedral. Now, photographs must exist of this, and of Norwegian troops in the square on the 17th of May 1942 when infantry recruits of C Company marched past under the command of a Lieutenant Houslid with the Commandant Major Skoll Brodin taking the salute. And I know that Martin Knopf, K-N-O-P-H, was then taking part in the training course for information officers and he took photographs of this. So there are photographs. I'm sure people in Dornoch must have photographs somewhere, but I've been unable to find any.



Martin Knopf was later a photographer in Steinka in Norway, and Steinka is virtually in the middle of Norway. The Dornoch Hotel, then the Railway Hotel, was turned into military offices and barrack rooms for training units of the infantry, the engineers and the so-called auxiliaries. And at Earl's Cross, the paratroopers moved into provisional barracks, that is Nissen huts. I don't know if you know where Neil Kerry's house is. They were down in front of that, but along a short bit.

I remember the commando course in the woods at Earl's Cross where the paratroopers trained. And after the war, several of us, when youngsters, used to pretend being commandos and try out this course. One of the obstacles was a pulley from tree to tree. You climbed up the tree, you hung on the pulley, and you swung to the next tree. One day when attempting this, I fell out of the tree and I finished up in bed for four days with concussion. I have no recollection of ever climbing that tree, and I have no recollection of how I got home. But I have recollection of a row my parents gave me.

On a piece of ground beside the golf course stood Nissen huts of the officer school and the college in Abden house became a hospital. You already know that because that gentleman who toured Dornoch with me told me it was used as a hospital. That house used to belong to Broda Butterworth's family.



Tailor shops and other useful institutions were established here and there and the golf course, even in 1942, was regarded as holy ground. It became the exercise ground for the Norwegian troops, although the golf course greens, were off limits.

The engineers erected barricades on the beach, not on the main beach as you go down, but on the beach to the left of what we call the Rocks. And they dug trenches overlooking the golf course, as you play the third, fourth, fifth, sixth hole, so that when you're in the trenches, you could look out onto sea in the event of an invasion from the sea. The rifle range, and we knew it as a target, just to the left of the 9th tee on the Struie course, was used for practice with ammunition and explosives. The sound of rifle fire could be heard in Dornoch if the wind was from the south. At night time, on a clear night, you could also hear rifles target shooting on the range.

The Norwegians had a large canteen. It was built and managed by the NAAFI (Navy Army and Airforce Institute), and that was behind the Dornoch Hotel, between Stafford Court and Skinner Place. In the social club in Dornoch, the WVS ran an extra canteen where they served tea and cakes cheaply, and where the soldiers could take their ease and listen to the radio, something that was lacking in their camp.

Now, during the war years, Dornoch's population was mainly older folk and young people, as men capable of bearing arms went away with the British troops. The population of Dornoch found no reason to do as the Times suggested regarding towns where commando detachments were stationed, of locking up all silverware and your daughters! In any case, the daughters in Dornoch were largely away, they were either in women's units or working in factories or in various places throughout the UK.

The Norwegian troops organised dances in the dining room of the Railway Hotel, and the all-male dance committee had to search high and low for dancing partners for these events. In, order to get ladies to visit what you would call a wolves' lair, as a military camp probably constitutes, they had to give all sorts of guarantees, and guards had to be posted on the stairs so that none of the lady guests got up to the first floor. The story goes that at one of these dance evenings, a class from the Office of Information was on duty. They were people who were being trained as war correspondents and information officers and it was a draughtsman of the name of Johan Boul who was posted as guard on the stairs. Now, Johan took his duty very seriously indeed. If no lady was to go upstairs, then no lady went upstairs. And in no time at all, the Orderly Officer was called out because the nursing sisters wanted to go up to the M.O.S. office and they were not allowed to by Johan Boul. Shortly after that, the Quartermaster's Clerk had the Orderly Officer out because Johan Boul wouldn't let her go upstairs to prepare the accounts.

Another story I heard was one about the Adjutant of the Parachute Regiment, a jock who was regarded as a great storyteller. The Para troopers used to train along there past Rosemarkie on the cliffs there and used to have live ammunition fired over their heads as they trained climbing up the cliff tops. And this jovial adjutant told how the detachment had acquired a mascot and that was a little dog. It first appeared outside the cookhouse and refused to be chased away. The cooks used to throw things and the dog used to run and take it back and have titbits. That was the thing and the dog just stayed there the whole time. Everything

was going well until one day the detachment had practice throwing live hand grenades. You can imagine what's going to happen next. An astonished observer saw the entire company suddenly about turn and run away while the little dog ran after them with a hand grenade in his mouth.

So, it doesn't say whether it was a live hand grenade or a practise one. I don't know. Anyway, after the war in 1949, a Norwegian gentleman to the name of, well I pronounce it, Einar Dyson, was a sub-editor of the Norwegian newspaper 'Aften Posten'. He came to Dornoch to find out what kind of impression the Norwegian troops had left after the so-called military occupation. He interviewed several people in Dornoch and in his report he says, and I quote "Here I will let the town spokesman, or more correctly, Provost J.G. MacDonald, the proprietor of the town's hardware business in Castle Street, speak on behalf of the town. And as some of you know, Provost MacDonald was my father. My father said this, he said:

*"There were soldiers of many nations here during the war, but I believe I may say that the Norwegians were those we remember best. It certainly must have impressed us when we saw how polite and straightforward they were, and how smart they were, both on and off parade. There is no doubt that the people of Dornoch thought very highly of their Norwegian war comrades. We have nothing but good remembrances of their sojourn here, and the plate in the cathedral will remind us of it for all time".*

Now the town's chemist was Mr. Johnson, and he was a sergeant during the war, and was home on leave only once. On that occasion he was genuinely impressed by the behaviour of Norwegian guests, and maintains that everyone else in the town agreed with him on this.

And, perhaps the sweetest little compliment of all is that which comes from a quite ordinary citizen of Dornoch. That citizen said: *"The coffee in the Norwegian camp smells so delicious, its odour was entirely different to that of the Indian mule drivers"*. This comment refers to the Indians of the Army Service Corps, who replaced the Norwegians, and of course they had mules.



Now the plaque my father referred to in the cathedral is not in its original position. It used to be to the right of the door going into the vestry, but this was changed to the other side of the aisle, on the wall beside the steps leading to the pulpit. (*uppermost plaque with wood mounting.*) The organ console blocked the view of the plate in its original position. The plate bears the Norwegian lion in gold and red enamel, and the inscription tells us that it was raised in gratitude by the Norwegian Brigade, which had its schools and training detachments in Dornoch during summer and autumn of 1942. od.

Now I'm now coming to the end of the talk, it's just a short talk, and I said at the beginning I would tell you the second reason why I have taken an interest in the Norwegians.

If I was a stranger, and I stood here in front of you this evening, and I asked you the question, were troops stationed here during the war, your answer would be yes. If I then said, what tangible evidence can you show to convince me that that is the case, the only piece of evidence I know is this plate in the cathedral presented by the Norwegians. And I'm leaving it at that, ladies and gentlemen.

There we are.