

In Dornoch, Seven Years after.

From "Ukens Nytt", 11.8.49. by the Sub-Editor of
"Aftenpost" - Einar Diesen.

The Norwegian Military Forces which were formed in Great Britain during the War were, as far as the Army was concerned, located in Scotland. The "Aftenpost" has visited a number of garrison towns, which so came into being, this summer, to find out what sort of repute the Norwegians left after this Military "occupation". This description of a visit to Dornoch is the first result.

Dornoch, Scotland, July, 1949.

A bright shining silver plate hangs in a place of honour in Dornoch's ancient Cathedral. It stands out a little, perhaps, from its surroundings - the grey walls that date from the 12th Century, have other plates, but they are of stone or bronze and are almost part and parcel of the crumbling walls. This plate is clear and bright, it bears the Norwegian Lion in gold and red enamel, which does not make it less conspicuous. The inscription tells that it was raised in gratitude by the Norwegian Brigade which had its schools and training detachments in Dornoch during the summer and autumn of 1942. It concludes thus: "Exiles from our own country, we Norwegians found a home among the Scots and Christian Brotherhood in this House of God." Indeed the lustre of this plate shines far. It is polished by kindly Scottish hands, - if not daily, then, at all events, very often. I found it in quite good condition when I saw it again the other day - a visible reminder that the bond which was knit between Scots and Norwegians during the War years, is still maintained.

Both this plate and many other small tokens, which I had occasion to note during my visit, indicate that the inhabitants of Dornoch do not regard the Norwegian "occupation" as a painful memory.

But the relations between the Scots and Norwegians have not always been so cordial as they are now. Many centuries ago, the then sparse population of these regions was alarmed by the sight of Dragon ships steering in towards the coast, and wild, disagreeable, mail-clad folk, with ~~sword~~ and shield, storming ashore. They were Danes, - a designation common to all such unwelcome guests, irrespective of where they came from. There was, of course, nobody in charge of a police station to issue passes, as is done today on arrival to these shores.

The local Chief, the Thane of Sutherland, - the nearest equivalent to his Scottish Title is the English "Earl", - hastily collected his men and set off to meet the Danes. A terrific battle took place on the seashore and the adjoining heathery heath, directly north of the little cluster of houses which, as yet, had not become Dornoch. The Thane, who was mounted, had his horse killed under him, and was himself in a bad way, for he had lost his sword in the fall. He quickly broke off one of the fore-legs of his dead horse and used it as a weapon. It was not at all so cumbersome as one would think. The horse had been newly shod, and the work of the Scottish Smith was solid and had been well done. In a deadly duel between the two Chiefs, the Viking received such a blow from the horse's hoof on his skull that he fell dead. His folk fled to their ships and escaped.

The episode of the horse's leg was associated with the locality to such an extent that it gave the name to the little town that grew up near-by. Dornoch, according to Celtic tradition, signifies "horse's hoof". And even though the entire occurrence is enveloped in the mists of legend, it is given such credence locally that a monument was raised on the spot where the mighty blow was so

effectively struck. It was erected many years ago, and was once overturned, and, in the course of years, broken by storms, but it was set up again and repaired by a local smith with solid bands of iron. It bears no inscription, however, and seems to have fallen somewhat into disrepute.

Even so, the local population has been more assiduous with the town which developed by degrees.

It is no insignificant town. It became the Capital of the County of Sutherland, and was given a Cathedral and a Bishop, and an imposing Bishop's Castle, that goes with these dignities. Craftsmen settled there, and fishers also, notwithstanding that the town has no harbour. Gradually it became famous as the smallest Capital City in Great Britain - its permanent population barely numbers 800 - otherwise, it did not attract notice throughout the years, except as being the place where the last Witch was burnt in Great Britain. That happened in 1722, and the victim was a woman who had tried to transform her daughter into a horse, and had then attempted to put horse-shoes on her. With the notorious lack of psychiatric clinics in that period, it is perhaps comprehensible that the population misunderstood such an assertion of the local traditions.

Dornoch, in other respects, soon became famous for its Golf Course. We who are proud of games of 50 years' standing, will note with interest that Dornoch was already well known for its Golf Course in 1616. There are only two places that can preen themselves on having had their Golf mentioned still earlier in history. And, in more recent times, Dornoch gradually became known as a holiday and bathing resort. It was not easy of access - when the railway was built, it by-passed Dornoch some distance away, and it was necessary to lay a side line to the Town. However, the main roads were good. North of the town, where the Vikings, in their day, dragged their Dragon ships on land, the famous Golf Course stretches northwards, and between it and the sea are the eternal sands. Thus it is evident that this must become a bathing resort. More and more people began to erect summer houses in the Town. On a most commanding site, a small hill, none less that the Newspaper Peer, Lord Rothermere, built an imposing palace in which he could spend several weeks during the year.

And then came the War.

I think now especially on this. It is evident that, in the course of years, war after war has exercised its influence on Dornoch, as on other places, - essentially in that the town and district have given soldiers to the most famous Scottish Regiments, and has suffered great losses. There are monuments in memory of soldiers who fell in the Boer War, in Egypt, in the Sudan, in India, and other battlefields of the British Empire. Nevertheless in the town, life has continued its course unperturbed, but it was not so during the last war. In the first place the people themselves were affected as never before, and in the second place, foreign troops came to the town.

The Great Railway Company - L.M.S. Railways, had just established a marine hotel, with a magnificent view over the Golf Course and the beach. It was immediately requisitioned by the State, and troops took it over as a barracks. In 1942 the Guard and the Norwegian troops moved in.

Lord Rothermere's pseudo-Gothic Castle on the hill became the Officer's mess, and here Major Skjold Brodin, the Norwegian Commandant in the town, resided. The hotel was turned into Military offices and barrack rooms for training units of the Infantry. Engineers, and the so-called "Auxiliaries". In a small wood close to the monument of the ancient Vikings' ignominious defeat, the Paratroops moved into provisional barracks, Nissen huts of corrugated iron with rounded roofs. The wood was the headquarters of some millions of crows, whose Scottish "caw-caw" sounded like rolling thunder for 24 hours a day. It was no wonder that these soldiers gradually got the name of being the wildest and most dangerous of our folk. On a piece of ground

beside the Golf Course stood the Messen huts of the Officers' School. A large summer house just beside the hotel became the hospital. Tailor's shops and other useful institutions were established here and there. Even the Golf Course, - the local "Holy ground" - became the exercise ground, though with a fence around every "green" - the carefully tended grass plot around each of the 18 holes. On the shore, the Engineers erected the strangest barricades. A rifle range was established on the heather heath between the town and sea, and the practice with ammunition and explosives made its mark on the life in and around the town, - both night and day.

Dornoch took it calmly. The town has no industry of vital importance, so all the men capable of bearing arms were away with the British Troops. But the population found no reason to do as the "Times" suggested regarding towns where Commando detachments were billeted later - lock up all silver ware and daughters. For the daughters themselves were away, they were either in Womens' Units or in industries on places entirely different to the lovely firth of Dornoch. There were not so many left in the town, and those that were there were really elderly people. But they received the Norwegian soldiers with all the cordiality that a people, otherwise reserved, are capable of. Apart from the large canteen, which was built and managed by the official British Canteen Institution, R.A.A.F.I., the ladies of the town arranged an extra canteen in a chapel, where they served tea and cakes cheaply and allowed the lads to take their ease and listen to the radio - something that was entirely lacking in the camp.

When an American submarine Admiral told a detachment of the personnel, on an island in the Pacific, about all the games and indoor amusements he had arranged to cheer them up when they went ashore, there was great discontent. "What?", he said, amazed, "You generally like baseball, pingpong and so forth, don't you?". "Yes", replied one of the fellows, "but none of the things you mention wears a skirt." That remark of course, touched the core of the problem. A little of the entertainment desired by the fighting men, all the world over, must wear a skirt. And that was the case also in Dornoch. But here it was almost as difficult as in the Pacific Ocean. When, occasionally, a dance was held in Camp or in the dining room of the former Hotel, the entirely male committee had to "trawl", practically speaking, the entire County of Sutherland, in order to find dancing partners who knew dances more recent than the Minnett. And, in order to get them to visit such a wolves' lair, as a military camp constitutes, for an evening, all sorts of promises had to be given. Accordingly, guards had to be set on the stairs during the dances to see that the guests did not go above the first floor. One evening a class from the Office of Information was on guard - they were people who were being trained as war correspondents, and information officers, - and it was the draughtsman Johan Bull who was posted on the stairs. He took his duty with a gravity that only a great humorist is capable of. The first that went raging to the orderly lieutenant of the day were nursing sisters who wanted to go up to the M.O.'s office, and the Quartermaster's Clerkess who wanted to go up to prepare the accounts. Johan Bull did not allow a single "skirt" to slip up the stairs.

The Norwegian troops left Dornoch in the Autumn. The training unit was transferred to the towns of Rosemarkie and Portrose. They were replaced by the Army Service Corps with Indian Mule Drivers - but that is another story.

And seven years after my last visit, I could once again jump off the train at the town's Lilliputian Railway Station, where a young civilian arrived at the same time as the train, took a uniform cap off a peg, and was the Stationmaster. Before me lies Dornoch, just as somnolent and quiet as before - and just as charming, with ivy on the grey walls, rose hedges, and other idyllic features strewn over the picture of the town with lavish hand. It was, perhaps, still lovelier, still more finely

polished:- and most of those who moved about its streets had the stamp of the international seaside visitor. I could see the flag on the old officers' mess on the hill. But no, it was no longer a mess; it was a summer residence for Lord Rothermere. From afar it was to be seen that the peer had sold it. His Castle had now become Burrefield House Hotel. The town was now obviously dedicated to summer visitors in earnest. Indeed, its a fact, the remains of the ancient Bishop's Castle, the proudest historical ruin of the town has also become a restaurant, and bears a shield announcing the "Castle Inn", with tea and lunch and rooms to let.

However, it was to the huge marine hotel that I first and foremost now turned my steps - to our "barracks" - had they managed to make an hotel of it again. When I thought of how the building had been treated by the various batches of soldiers during these years:- when I recollected how the wood work had been torn up, the plaster scraped off the walls, and how the floors, roof and walls appeared, - I considered it extremely doubtful.

No sentry box stood at the corner, as in the old days, but the "barracks" lay before me, newly painted and spruce - Burrefield Hotel, with flowers and croquet lawn, putting green, and colourful garden parasols on the erst-while parade ground. It was just as spick-and-span within: soft carpets on all floors, new wood work on the stairs, the walls and the rafters. It was again a luxury hotel, - and not least in its prices.

The porter was the self-same Sandy McDonald who had been caretaker of the property while it was loaned out to the Norwegian troops. He proudly showed me his old Norwegian pass, which allowed him to pass the sentries at all hours of the day. It bore the signature of a popular and efficient Norwegian Officer whose somewhat forceful soubrigue was not due to lack of either esteem or respect but had its origin in his own use of the same as an invariable expression.

The barman, by way of contrast, was international. He might be from yards, like so many other serving folk in Great Britain, or from some other place, - he was indefinable.

"Here was a sergeant's mess seven years ago", I informed him, while he busied himself with bottles, and clinked ice against glass.

"I don't think the sergeants would have any objections to the alterations if they came here today" he observed, casting a critical eye over the rows of bottles with their colourful labels.

A visit to the dining room where the head waiter, Charles - also an international type, - sales over a corps of waitresses, reveals, first and foremost, that the Artist - Beatrix Macdonald, had decorated all the open wall spaces with motifs drawn from the Greek Mythology, - though with exceptional modesty. No goddess reveals more of nature's handiwork than any wall brought up British golden doors, any day, on any bathing beach between John O' Groats and Sargata. Thus far do the mural decorations stand in stark contrast to the "fresco" drawings which saw the light of day during the military epoch.

A quick tour around told me that Burrefield had removed all visible traces of our visit. All the ugly hats are gone: only the foundation of the canteen remains. Besides this over in the wood where the paratroops were an old rusty Nissen hut still stands. It is being put to some use. To compensate for all this crown have vanished. But has our visit left other traces?

Here, I will let the town's spokesman, or, more correctly, Provost J. G. Macdonald, the proprietor of the town's ironmongery business in Castle Street, speak on behalf of the town.

"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 straight-forward 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."

The town's Chemist, Mr Johnstone, who was a sergeant during the war, and was home on leave only once, had on that occasion reason to be genuinely impressed by the behaviour of the Norwegian guests, and maintains that everybody else in the town agrees with him in this. Others standing by nodded their confirmation; most of them had one or two little episodes to add to the picture.

Perhaps the sweetest little compliment of all is that which comes ~~from~~ from a quite ordinary citizen of Dornoch. - "the coffee in the Norwegian camp smelt so delicious; its odour was entirely different to that of the Indian Mule drivers".

Sinar Dissen.

Inscriptions under the Illustrations

1. This was once the Bishop's Castle. Now it is an hotel and restaurant.
2. The famous golf course, which is mentioned in history as early as 1646.
3. One of the three streets of the town, - the idyllic Castle Street with its old grey houses.
4. This was the residence of the Norwegian Commandant and the Officers' mess during the war. It is now Burchfield House Hotel.
5. The Cathedral which dates back 400 years from the 12th century, and the old ivy-clad post office.
6. The first meeting between people from the Dornoch District and guests from the North-east. The Thane of Sutherland slays the Viking chief by a well aimed blow of a horse's foot, and thereby lays the foundation of the monument which stands today on the shore at Dornoch.
7. Norwegian troops parade in Dornoch, 17th May 1942. Infantry recruits of "C" Coy march past under command of Lieutenant later Captain Donald (on the extreme left) the Commandant Major Skjold Brodin is seen in the foreground responding to the salute of the detachment. In the background are the ivy-clad walls of the ancient Bishop's Castle (to the right) and the Municipal Chambers.
Photographed by Martin Knapp, now a photographer in Steinkjer, but then a participant in the training course for information officers.
8. Before the war a stylish hotel. During the war a Barracks for Norwegian soldiers. Now a luxury hotel again, with croquet ground on the garage ground of the Norwegian troops.

~~Seaman~~ Alexander Ross

LT/JX/265497

7 Gate Street

Ennis

3 King St
Entho

11/10/48

Dear Willie

Many thanks
for letter received yesterday
I would only be so
delighted to favour you
for collecting, but sorry
to say I am going away
to Yarmouth Monday first

So please excuse
me!! I do hope to
be of use to you

Some other time.

Thanking you
for your kindness
to me in the
past. Kindest regards.

I am Yours
Sincerely

(MRS)

Barbara Ann Madry

SCOTTISH WAR MEMORIALS ADVISORY COUNCIL

*Chairman: W. O. Hutchison, R.S.A.
Secretary: A. M. Struthers, B.Sc.
Telephone: 31852-3*

10 ALVA STREET,
EDINBURGH, 2.


IN YOUR REPLY PLEASE QUOTE

26th February, 1946.

Dear Mr. Skinner,

I enclose herewith a copy of a leaflet on Rolls of Honour which has been prepared by the Scottish War Memorials Advisory Council. I should be grateful if you would let me know what the position in regard to a War Memorial is in your area.

Yours sincerely,


A.M. Struthers.
Secretary.

Wm. Skinner, Esq.,
Town Clerk,
Dornoch.

Mrs. Mallet, Raloraid
Joseph, Blackmore
W. A. Calder, Embro

14th April

27.

Dear

Hall of Honour

I am taking the liberty of sending you herewith a list of those from the Town and Parish who made the supreme sacrifice during the recent World War, and I shall feel extremely obliged if you will look over the particulars and let me have any corrections or additions which may be applicable to your area.

I may say that the response to my press advertisement calling for particulars was far from satisfactory, hence my reason for troubling you.

You will appreciate that it is most desirable that the Hall of Honour should include every member of the community who has died while on active service and that each name with the particulars of rank, corps or regiment should be perfectly accurate.

Your kind assistance and co-operation will be much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Yours Clerk.

Cambusie
The mound

Tuesday 10th Dec.

Dear Mr. Glenner.

The following
is my husband's name, rank
etc for the war Memorial (Insc)
(2820042) Sgt Donald Mackay
5th Batt Seaforth's Highlanders
Killed the 2nd day of November
1942, aged 26 years.

I must thank you
for your letter telling me you
would keep me in mind if
there was a vacant room
around Dorroch.

Yours sincerely
Helen Mackay

Craig. Ard
Rogart
9th Dec. 1946

W. Skinner
Town Clerk
Dornoch

Dear Sir.

In answer to
advertisement in Northern Times I
am sending you my husband's name
and Rank - and time of Death

T58494

Driver Marcus S. Matheson

Royal Army Service Corps

Killed in Action at Sea 12th Sept. 1944

Yours Faithfully
(H/10) Annie Matheson

Dunrobin Kennels
Golspie
Sutherland.

— 7/1/47

W Skinner
Town Clerk
Dornoch

Sir

I have read in the N.T.
that you would like the names of
those who fell in action, for the
Roll of Honour, and would be pleased
if you would add that of
Cpl Douglas Garvie
5th Batt Seaforth Hldrs.

Yours Faithfully
R Garvie

Skibo Cottages
Blashmore
Wornoch.

18th Dec. 1946

Mr. Skinner,
Town Clerk,
Wornoch.

Dear Sir

I am sending in my step
brother's name as was requested
in the Northern Times his number
2822068 Private John

MacKenzie
5th Batt. Seaforth Highlanders
Killed Francoforte
Sicily

Yours faithfully
James Grant

Hafod We

Llandegfan
Anglesey
N. Wales.

35th Dec.

Dear Willie -

I am enclosing
the particulars necessary
for the inclusion of our
son Stuart in the Roll of
Honour. Would you be
good enough to put it
through the proper
channel? Lizzie just gave
me the bare details saying
that you were having the
names sent in to you.

— I hope that your
family will keep very

fit. We have Mac Lane
for Xmas - He chided
his right foot - the day
after he arrived - had
to have 4 stitches put in
to be up until they are
removed - we hope tomorrow
Not much of a holiday for
him!

With best wishes for
1847 -
Yours sincerely
John Sutherland

I'm not quite sure about
the date of Charles's joining
the 5th Seaforth's - but I
don't suppose you need that
information!

Air Sokoto, Nigeria
on 14th November 1942
Lieutenant- (Acting Captain)
Shuart Robertson Luthland
The Wiltshire Regiment-
(No 117664)

(Joined the 5th Seaforth
30 Aug 1939 —

10281

Pte John Ross
H Q Coy.,
23rd Rifle Battalion
2nd New Zealand
Expeditionary Force

Died a prisoner of war
in Salonica on the
8th September 1941

987911 Sgt. w/o W. S. Murray. R.A.F.

Lt. ^{Paper} James Murray, 5th Sea.
keeping book L. Murray.

No 2815590 Sgt John McKay MacDonald
D Company 5th Bat. Seaforth Hrs.
killed at El. Alamein on the 2nd.
November 1942. Aged 38 years.

BURGH AND PARISH OF DORNOCH.

ROLL OF HONOUR.

In order to Honour and Commemorate the men and women of the Town and Parish who made the supreme sacrifice in the World War of 1939-1945, it is desirable that a Roll of Honour should now be prepared. All those who have lost dear ones in the struggle for Freedom are accordingly invited to send a note of the Names, of the fallen together with particulars of Rank, Service, Corps or Regiment, to the undersigned as soon as possible.

Before the Roll of Honour takes its final form, a Public Meeting will be held for the purpose of discussing the matter.

W. Skinner,

Town Clerk.

Dornoch, 22nd November 1946.

*Please insert the above notice in
the first ^{two} issues of the Northern News
and send me a note of cost
ag*

Town Clerk's Office,

Dornoch,

29th Septbr. 1948.

Dear

War Memorial
World War 1939-45

In order to secure the necessary funds to cover the cost of providing, and inserting a bronze plate containing the names of the fallen on the north panel of the memorial, I have been instructed to arrange a house to house collection throughout the Town and Parish.

You have been appointed a collector by the Local Committee, and I am accordingly taking the liberty of enclosing a small notebook for recording the contributions collected by you. A short description of your area will be found on the front cover of the notebook.

Your kind co-operation and assistance will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Town Clerk.

Town Clerk's Office,

Dornoch.

29th Septbr. 1948.

Mr John W. MacLeod,
Fourpenny,
Dornoch.

Dear Mr Macleod,

War Memorial
World War 1939-45

I am arranging a house to house collection throughout the Town and Parish in order to raise funds to cover the cost of having the names of the fallen inscribed on the memorial.

Collectors have been appointed for the various districts and I am instructed to invite you to assist who has already been supplied with a collection book, and a note of the area in which you will collect.

Your kind co-operation and assistance will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

W. Skinner
Town Clerk.

3rd Sept

49.

Dear General,

War Memorial
Unveiling of 1939-45 Panel

On behalf of the Local Committee
I thank you for kindly consenting to
unveil the Panel on Friday evening at 6.15pm.

I now enclose copy of the
Programme for your information.

Yours sincerely,

Town-Clerk.

DORNOCH WAR MEMORIAL

UNVEILING OF 1939-45 PANEL - 9th SEPTEMBER 1949.

P R O G R A M M E

6 p.m. The Town Council, The Committee, The British Legion, Ex-servicemen and Women, Territorials, Clergy and Choirs will assemble at the Memorial and will be placed by Captain C. McHardy, T.D. (Decorations to be worn).

6.15p.m. Brig. General Geo. C.B. Paynter, C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O., Lord Lieutenant of the County will arrive at the Memorial and will be received by the Provost.

A short religious service will be conducted by the Ministers of the various denominations - Rev. J.G. Levack being in charge of the arrangements. Joint Choirs of the Churches will be in attendance under the leadership of Messrs. A. Clark and W.A. Calder.

Statement by the Provost, after which he will call upon the Hon. Secretary to read the Roll of the Fallen.

Thereafter the Provost will call upon the Lord Lieutenant to unveil the 1939-45 Panel.

The Lord Lieutenant's Remarks.

The Lord Lieutenant will then unveil the Panel.

ONE MINUTE OF SOLEMN SILENCE.

Prayer of Dedication.

Psalm 103.

Benediction.

Pipers will play "Lochaber No More".

One verse - GOD SAVE THE KING.

Wreaths will then be placed on the Memorial.