

Hidden Heroes: World War II in Norway

Feel free to use any or all of these stories in your lodge's cultural programs. When presented in their entirety, this group of stories will take about 20 minutes. I like to have between three and six people take turns reading.

INTRODUCTION

1. Jean Bittner, Sons of Norway District 5 cultural director, collected letters from fellow District 5 Sons of Norway members in 1997-98, things that they and their families experienced while living in Norway during World War II. This and an additional volume of stories were privately printed by District 5 and distributed to District 5 lodge libraries.

The 80- and 90-year-old members who submitted the stories were schoolchildren during World War II.

This fall, the book "Hidden Heroes: World War II in Norway" was created from many of these letters.

Many books have been written about famous heroes and the history of the Second World War in Norway. These stories tell about the unsung hero: friends, relatives or neighbors. Anyone could have been a hero: a mother, child, or the boy next door. In Norway, everyday people performed brave, unselfish deeds.

In Norway, the long years of the war were mundane with the daily struggle for food, clothing and warmth. They were also heroic, in the many ways that very ordinary people quietly did extraordinary things.

Here, then, are some of their stories.

NORWEGIAN INVASION

2. I was in the first grade when the war started. People were talking about Hitler and his march into other countries. Since Norway was a small country way up north, many thought we would be spared, but they were wrong.

On April 9, 1940 the warplanes came flying in over Norway and the war started. What I remember from that day were the grim faces and the ominous voice of the man who was reading the news on the radio. The voice was so dark and serious and he was telling about the heavy airplanes that were rolling in all over the country. (Nancy Tuznik, Scandiana lodge)

3. I remember clearly, on one of the first days of the invasion, my sister and I stood at the window by our balcony and saw our very first airplane ever. It was a large, black plane with white swastikas painted on both sides, and it came in very low over our house. We could even glimpse the pilot in there, and I remember being surprised to see a man. I think I must have expected a monster of some sort, maybe a troll. After all, this was the enemy, and the only "bad guys" we knew of were trolls and such creatures. (Inger Thoen, Askeladden lodge)

4. I was 15 years old, working on my neighbor's farm, when I saw German planes flying right above my head on their way to my hometown, Voss. It was not long before I heard the explosion of the fire bombs being dropped over the town.

The next day, my friend and I took off on our bicycles for Voss. The town was in ruins and small fires were smoldering throughout. The town was completely deserted.

When we got back to the farm, I found our house filled with people who had fled from their farms further down the valley. There must have been over 50 people at our house and we had to try and feed them all.

The next morning, my father and I hitched up our two horses and drove to the Bulken railroad station. There was one freight car sitting on the tracks, filled with wheat flour, all confiscated by the military.

My dad told me to just follow his lead, don't look right or left, and do as he did. The station was full of German soldiers and I was scared. We drove up to the freight car, opened the door and filled our wagon with one-hundred kilogram sacks of wheat flour. We drove off without any soldiers saying one word. I was very proud of my dad and everyone thought he was a hero. (Ola Hirth, Nordlyset lodge)

NORWAY DURING THE WAR

5. We had a small farm that I grew up on. On the farm we had a few cows, pigs, chickens, horses, sheep and also a beautiful elkound.

We had to report all the animals to the Germans, so they could keep track of all the farmers and what they had. We could only keep so much for ourselves on the farm. The rest we had to turn in.

I remember when we took in the wheat and oats in the fall from the field. We went into the barn at night. We hammered the wheat and oats up against the wall so we could sneak some out and take it to the mill at night to make flour. We had a friend at the mill who helped us, and I am sure, many other farmers.

If the Germans had found out, they probably would have killed the mill master and done other bad things to the farm. (Sverre Thoresen, Fosselyngen lodge)

6. In the beginning of the war we had radios and everyone was listening to BBC to hear the news about the war. The Germans put a stop to that. All the radios were taken and put in storage or sent someplace. If a radio was found in your home, you could be shot. I found out a week before the war was over, that we had a small radio hidden in our house all the time. I'm glad I did not know about it. It was kind of dangerous living among Nazis or Quislings. We learned to keep our mouth shut. (Ellen Solberg Stenvig - Christian Radich lodge)

7. Everything was rationed, flour, sugar, margarine, coffee, cocoa, tobacco and cigarettes. I could remember my mother roasting something. I think it was peas and it smelled awful. This she ground up and added it to the few coffee beans they could buy with rationing cards. We had it better than people in the towns because we had a farm and could hold something to the side. My father had gotten hold of a grinder and ground some of our own wheat for bread. In town they even used ground bark from trees to mix into their bread. There were lots of townspeople riding their bikes out in the country in hope of being able to buy a few eggs or some meat. They had to be careful. If the Germans caught them, it would all be confiscated and they would have to pay fines or maybe put in jail. They would often pick berries, tyttebaer (ligonberries) or blåbaer (blueberries) and hide other food in the berries. (Nancy Tuznik, Scandiana lodge)

8. I had a very long way to walk to school, it took me about 45 minutes one way. One wintry morning when we got there, the classroom was dark and cold. This small country school had just two classrooms. The two teachers were husband and wife. They lived in an adjoining apartment. We knocked on the door several times but no answer. We walked in and they and their two sons were gone. They had escaped to Sweden. Some days later there was a new teacher here, an older man from the northern part of Norway. He was more "German friendly" and was our teacher until the war was over. We did not like him at all. (Nancy Tuznik, Scandiana lodge)

9. The Swedish Red Cross was given permission by the Germans to feed the Norwegian school children soup, and I think that saved many. We also got cod liver oil for vitamins A and D. We clamped our nostrils together to not smell it and closed our eyes to not see it, as we tried to swallow it. One could taste it all day practically, but it was a very important part of our meager diet.

The Red Cross got a feeding program started. They picked out kids from larger families and the skinniest kids from various schools. These children were sent to a farm in the country somewhere to be "fattened up." My elder sister and I were sent to a farm, and to this day I remember the kindness of the people who took us in. The only problem was that we were not used to the richer and fatter food, so our stomachs could not tolerate it, and we could not keep it down. I think maybe we lost a little more weight, if that was possible. (Inger Thoen, Askeladden lodge)

RESISTANCE

10. We children tried everything to aggravate the Nazis. We all wore red knitted hats (nisselue) a sign that we were Norwegian patriots. When we had a chance to do it, we drew an "H" with a "7" inside and a "V" around it. That sign meant "King Haakon the 7th will win." One could see that sign all over on streets, walls, etc. (Ellen Solberg Stenvig - Christian Radich lodge)

11. During the war, the Norwegians started to work in the woods and on the mountains and no one knew they were there. They taught many men how to fight in the night. This was called the cold army and they worked to prevent the Germans from getting heavy water. They knew the areas and how to ski, which the Germans didn't know. They moved so fast, they could circle the Germans. They taught many men how to survive in the mountains and use maps of escape routes. (Cora Judkins, contributed by Carol Neiman)

12. The "underground movement" grew stronger as the war continued. Many people were involved in one way or another, even kids.

There were many things that we were not told in order to protect us, but as we got older, we knew what was going on.

We knew, even when we were never told, that my parents were hiding a Jewish family in the attic. This continued for several days until they could be smuggled out safely. They did this at great risk to themselves as they would have been shot if they had been found out. (Inger Thoen, Askeladden lodge)

13. Since we lived in a community with a long border toward Sweden, there were soon a lot of people coming through this area. These were people who knew the Germans were looking for them and many escaped to Sweden during the five years the war lasted.

Many of the people who lived there helped and guided these fugitives through the woods over to Sweden. (Nancy Tuznik, Scandiana lodge)

14. Uncle Ragnvald (Ragn-vald) told of the time a German U-boat captain ordered him to row the German back to his boat. Uncle did so steadily and silently – the captain unaware his seat was a covering for a box of grenades. (Joslyn Anderson - Norse Valley lodge)

END OF THE WAR

15. When the war finally ended on May 8, 1945, the Norwegian people went absolutely wild. I was 11 then, and I remember it very well. Flags came out of the woodwork. A few hidden five-year-old bars of chocolate which had been saved for this day were made into cups of hot chocolate drinks. I remember it tasting very rich and unusual as I didn't remember what chocolate tasted like. (Inger Thoen, Askeladden lodge)

16. When peace came, I didn't believe it. I recall so vividly that day at Hamar. A friend came dashing in and asked if I didn't know the war was over. I thought my friend was joking, but went out with her and saw it was no joke. I've never seen such rejoicing. People were wild with joy!

Within a few minutes, everyone in the city had raised large flags on their houses. Children had gotten out small flags, so that the whole city was one whirl of red, white and blue. It was a stirring sight. Tears ran down our cheeks. The whole city echoed with the singing of the national anthem and the King's hymn. (Signe Tangen, contributed by Margo Van Dal, Valhall lodge)

17. May 17, 1945 is the first real Syttende Mai I can remember. Everyone came to the church and after the service the long parades of schoolchildren lined up. Everyone were wearing their best clothes and they all had Norwegian flags. We marched and we sang all those wonderful Norwegian patriotic songs that we had learned even though we were not supposed to.

CLOSING

18. The book “Hidden Heroes: World War II in Norway” is filled with details from these stories and more. It is illustrated with over 50 pictures from Riksarkivet (Rik-sar-ki-vet), the Norwegian national archives. These letters are a wonder to read, because many are written about war from a child's perspective, instead of the adult perspective that we normally find in a history book. This senior-friendly large print book is easy and enjoyable to read. Hidden Heroes is a fundraiser to help support programming at District 5's Sons of Norway youth heritage camp, Masse Moro. We hope you consider buying this book for yourself or as gifts for your children and grandchildren. You can get one book for a \$25 donation, five books for a \$100 donation, or 15 books for a \$250 donation to Masse Moro, in care of District 5 Sons of Norway. You can also buy the book without a Masse Moro donation for \$20. Tusen takk.