

Wartime Diary of Arne Bjorndal — Translation

*[*The paragraph indentations of this translation correspond to the indentation used in the original Norwegian text. The pages of the original diary are numbered through page 31; in this translation the numbering continues after page 31, but the numbers are enclosed in parentheses.]*

2.

9 April 1940

At 00:20 I was awakened by the sound of air raid sirens and understood immediately that it was German warplanes and that the Germans were now attacking Norway.

We sit in the basement for about 2 hours. At 03:30 the alarm sounds again, and this time it lasts for about an hour.

At the breakfast table we hear that the order to mobilize has been given and that the Germans have launched an attack on Norway. Norwegian warships have encountered the enemy off the south coast of Norway and in the Oslo Fjord.

I am scheduled to be examined in chemistry, and so I put on my best uniform, white gloves, lacquered belt and my high-topped riding boots and head for the Norwegian Military Academy. While riding the tram down the street, the air raid siren sounds again and I have to walk the last stretch down to the Academy. I meet Cadet Krogh, who tells me that Fornebo¹ has been bombed, and that a Norwegian plane was shot down.

Most of the cadets have arrived ...

3.

... at the Academy (only half of them were scheduled to take the exam).

At the Academy we are told to wait for more detailed orders. The Commandant has not yet heard anything from the General Staff and cannot simply suspend Academy procedures without further ado.

The planes continue to pass over us, they are flying at an altitude of about 1,000 meters and the large 75 mm anti-aircraft cannons cannot shoot at them because they are too low. At 09:30 they have still not heard anything from the General Staff, but the Commandant gives the order to mount all the heavy machine guns at the Academy and begin shooting at the planes as soon as they appear.

¹ Translator's note. The main airport serving Oslo and Eastern Norway from 1939 to 1998. Replaced by Gardermoen, north of Oslo.

Ammunition was fetched from Akershus Fortress, and a half hour later 6 or 7 heavy machine guns had been mounted and were ready to fire at incoming planes. One was mounted on the Academy roof, two in the courtyard, and one on the roof of the post office. The others were back-up.

4.

Soon they are all shooting, and there is an unimaginably loud roar and whining of shells.

Regular shifts numbering three cadets each man the heavy machine guns, and those who are not outside sit in the basement, as the air raid siren sounds incessantly.

The Commandant's wife leaves the Academy together with her children, the Commandant is visibly relieved. At 12:00 there is a pause. We still have not heard anything from the General Staff. The Commandant has ordered all the cadets to evacuate the city, and we are allowed to return to our rooms (one half of us at a time) and fetch our field equipment. We are ordered to return to the Academy by 14:30 at the latest, as we are to leave for Elverum at 15:00.

I was among the first allowed to go and fetch my things, and I headed up to Schultsgate 7. Up on Hegdehaugsveien the air raid siren sounds again, but we do not have ...

5.

... time to stop and so continue on up the street. Up at Industrigate we hear a strange rushing sound that turns into a whine. We know what it is — an airplane diving to drop its bombs. We jump into an entryway and immediately thereafter hear two powerful explosions. With no further interruptions, we reach "Studentarhuset", our student quarters (Schultsgate 7).

At the "house" everyone was outside to watch the planes. We could see that all of them seemed rather confused (but so were we, I suppose), and some of the second lieutenants living there came and asked us what they should do (they were in uniform), but we couldn't give them advice. We didn't know ourselves what lay ahead. We told them that we thought it best for the time being to get out of the city as soon as possible, and we said that they would no doubt receive instructions later. Bratseth and I managed to hijack an automobile ...

6.

... and arrive first back at the Military Academy. We removed the heavy machine gun from the Academy roof and replaced the roof tiles. Thereafter, a detachment carried a lot of equipment from the depot, which we packed into large sacks.

More and more cadets arrived back and we got hold of 3 buses and 3 closed delivery vans (Ritzvans). The drivers immediately began to load the vehicles with ammunition and weapons, all the heavy machine guns and some mortars. The last cadets to arrive said that they had encountered German soldiers out in the streets. The Germans had asked them where they were going, but they pretended not to understand and continued on to the Military Academy. Lieutenant Homsen came in civilian clothes. He was living out on Drammensveien and he said that several hundred soldiers (German) had come marching in so that ...

7.

... he had not been able to be seen in his uniform and had to dress as a civilian. It was now 14:00 and we were an hour away from our departure. The Commandant still looked pale but held a short orientation for us and reported what had occurred up to that time. The Germans had flown in these soldiers to Fornebu (about 400, he said) and they were now marching into the city.

Some of the pilots (including Hagen) had already gone up to Kjeller Airfield at 08:30 in order to get as many planes into the air as possible. Likewise, the anti-aircraft artillery (some of it) was sent out to boats in different parts of the city. Reidar Godø Tvette?^{*} (artilleryman at Akershus Fortress) was already on his way to Oskarsborg Fortress² by early afternoon.

Cadet Sergeant Skau arrived at the Academy in civilian clothes around 14:00 and reported that sentries had been posted everywhere around the city ...

^{*}Am not completely certain of his name.

8.

... and that the Germans had marched to positions outside the National Theater, and he had seen sentries posted at the railway station, at the fortress outside the post office and at a number of other locations. The post office is situated vis à vis the Military Academy and we were expecting the Germans to appear at the gate at any moment and take everyone at the Academy prisoner without having had an opportunity to defend ourselves. There were a number of cadets who asked the Commandant for permission to put on civilian clothes and sneak out of the city one by one. The Commandant replied that it was better to be taken prisoner as a unit than to be picked up one by one. But it was a huge risk to be gathered together and in uniform in the middle of Oslo when all the important points in the city were occupied by the Germans. At 14:30 the buses drove into the courtyard and we were ordered ...

² Translator's note. On the west side of Oslo Fjord near Drøbak. The fortress cannons and torpedoes sank the German heavy cruiser "Blücher" early in the morning of the 9th of April 1940.

9.

... to take our packs and rifles and board them. We all believed that that we would be taken prisoner as soon as we emerged onto the street, or that they would throw a hand grenade into the bus if we did not stop. At 14:45 everything and everyone had been loaded into the vehicles and the custodian opened the Academy gate. With the Commandant in the lead bus, we drove down Tollbugate toward the East Station. Everyone was ordered to remove their caps, conceal their rifles, open the top uniform buttons and look as much as possible like we were tourists or were being evacuated. We had our hearts in our mouths and expected at any moment to be stopped by a German "Gefreiter", a private, who would then make quite a catch. We were around 70 officers and cadets together with the three delivery vans filled with weapons and ammunition. But no "Gefreiter" appeared, and ...

10.

... we managed to get past East Station and roll on out onto Trondheimsveien. Here on T.veien we stopped for gasoline for a few minutes and heard that T.veien was closed off up at Gjelleråsen and that we would not be able to leave the city by the regular route.

Here we heard our first description of an anti-aircraft battery that had been in a skirmish with German planes. The planes had dive-bombed the battery a number of times and several of the soldiers had been killed. The battery had been put out of commission, and a second lieutenant (I think it was Bentzen) shot himself when he saw how things were going. (He was engaged to be married to a German girl, and the last thing he said was: "I'll not be taken prisoner by the Germans."*)

It was Cadet Sergeant Fyrvoldt who gave this account, he had been at the battery, ...

*reported as I remember hearing it.

11.

... and he came back to (into) the Academy just before we departed.

We drove south on rural highways and other small roads until we entered the main highway south near Kolbotn (or perhaps it was Klemmetsrud). The entire time there were bombers and transport planes hovering right over our heads, and more than once we expected that they would drop some bombs when they made a pass over our convoy.

But it went well, and we drove south through Askim and Mysen. The reason for driving so far south was that we could have been stopped by the Germans, owing to the fact that there was a roadblock at Gjelleråsen and the airport at Lillestrøm was occupied and some of the hangars were ablaze.

From Mysen we headed north through Trøgstad and Høland to ...

12.

... Bjørkelangen. Here we paused for a few minutes for a hasty lunch of coffee and open-faced sandwiches. While we sat there eating at a roadside inn, Quisling gave his speech. I was together with a couple of others on the second floor and didn't get to hear it, but Lieutenant Holmsen, who came up to us a little later, summarized it and said he had mentioned some State Council members and had especially urged officers to remain loyal to him. Holmsen laughed and said: "Yes — yes, in any case we'll continue on all the way to Elverum." We who had not heard anything of the speech didn't know what to believe, and no one offered any comments.

While we were still in Oslo, the mobilization order had been repeated, but we were fully aware that the Germans were behind it ...

13.

... so no one paid attention.

From Bjørkelangen we continued on over to Blaker and along the east side of the Glomma River to Kongsvinger. Here we stopped for an hour and then got back on the buses.

The mood during the first part of the trip was subdued, as we expected at any moment to be randomly stopped by one or another German patrol or be bombed by one of the planes that flew over us again and again. But now that we no longer feared being taken prisoner and "restrained", everyone felt considerably more relaxed, at least in the beginning, and so to the sound of a cheerful song we rolled into Kongsvinger, with Elverum our next destination.

Here in Kongsvinger we met Cadet Larsmoen, who had not arrived back at the Military Academy by 3 o'clock. So he had taken ...

14.

... a train from the East Station and traveled directly to Kongsvinger. He told us that there had been a number of Germans on the train. He had been in full uniform but had not been questioned by the Germans. He did not know where they had left the train.

At midnight the 9th of April we were in the bus on our way to Elverum, and the mood wasn't bad. For me, personally, the war could not have come at a better time, as I was scheduled for my oral exam in chemistry and had little hope of doing well.

The 10th of April at 02:15³ we drove through Elverum on our way to Terningmoen⁴. On the horizon south of the parade ground we noticed what seemed to be flames and then it became clear — it was the ...

15.

... first farm to become a casualty of the war in Norway.

Those who had been sleeping during the last leg of the trip woke up and asked what it was that was burning. No one replied, but from the serious faces they understood that it was our first encounter with the war.

The bus stopped suddenly; we had arrived at Terningmoen at 02:30, after a drive of almost 12 hours. As soon as we left the bus, we gathered together, and the Commandant, who had had a brief conversation with Commander-in-Chief Ruge (we did not know at this time that he had been made Commander-in-Chief of the Norwegian Armed Forces), came over to us and gave us the following orientation: “The enemy is now fighting with his own detachments at Sagstua⁵, about 3 kilometers south of here. The strength of both sides unknown. A good outcome of the fighting now taking place will be of great significance for us for the negotiations that our ...

16.

... government is conducting with the Germans.” Afterwards, we were given orders to immediately begin loading our machine gun magazines and to fill and load our own rifles. We were divided up into squads, and a half hour later 65 cadets were ready for battle.

While we were busy loading the magazines, we heard that Colonel Ruge had been appointed Commander-in-Chief. As we stood ready for departure, he came over and greeted us. He was still in the uniform of a colonel, with a Krag-Jorgensen rifle and gleaming bayonet resting on his shoulder. With a smile on his face and acting as though this were the most everyday thing in the world, he said: “Remember now, boys, you are your commander’s last reserve!”

We entered the buses that had brought us here and rushed toward Sagstua. The first person we met after we had ...

17.

³ Translator’s note. At this time, between 2-3 a.m. on the 10th of April, the firefight between German and Norwegian troops was going on at the Midtskogen farm, several kilometers away.

⁴ Translator’s note. A military base in Elverum.

⁵ Translator’s note. The Norwegian plan was to set up the first roadblock at Sagstua, and a second at Midtskogen.

... arrived was Cadet Ekoanes. He came groveling over to the road, his face covered with a smile. "I missed the bus and so I took a train and got here just in time to join you." He had attached his bayonet and crawled up to us on the bus, and then we drove a few hundred meters up the road. We exited the bus quickly and hastened down below the road so as not to be surprised by enemy fire.

The troops were ordered to advance in succession. A platoon of the Royal Guardsmen was in position, and it was not difficult to see that they were happy to get reinforcements. Our method of advancing was to send the buses 100 meters along the road, then position them diagonally over the road. Afterwards, a platoon on the left side of the road advanced until it was even with the buses, and finally the platoons on the right side of the road. After each advance, we dug ourselves in and ...

18.

... lay with our rifles ready to cover the other advancing platoons. We expected to run into the Germans at any moment, but nothing happened, no German appeared, and I guess we could say we were a little disappointed. By 7 o'clock⁶ (perhaps it was 8, I hadn't looked at my watch for a long time), we had worked our way forward to the Midtskogen farm, and here we found a lot of ammunition and spent cartridges, hand grenades, a revolver and an officer's cap that the Germans had left behind. On the roads and in the ditches there were traces of blood and the ruins of the farm were still burning, so these were all clear signs of fighting. We stopped our advance and prepared defensive positions. We dug in, covered the bottom of the trenches with greenery, hauled large slabs of stone which we secured in the breastwork in front of our positions, and finally we camouflaged everything with birch and spruce branches. The platoon leader (Lieutenant ...

19.

... Holmsen) gave us our firing instructions and flanking assignments, so now "he" could come and would get what he deserved. But no one came. I had a position on the far left flank, and now I had time to look around. We were allowed to move about a little in order to keep warm, but someone had to be manning the machine guns at all times. The entire time while we were advancing, we were wading in snow, sometimes up to our waists. Of course our boots were filled with snow all the time, and I was wet halfway up my calves. Now I began searching in my backpack. I didn't find any socks. No food either, but I had several pair of woolen underwear I could use as socks, if I made a few "emergency" alterations. I took a woolen undershirt with long arms, slashed them off with my bayonet and wrapped them around my feet as best I could. As for the socks I had been wearing, I cut off the soles, wrung ...

⁶ Translator's note. From what I have read online, the firefight at Midtskogen took place between 2-3 a.m.

20.

... the water out of them and wore them over my boots like galoshes. Moreover, I wound a band around my ankle, so now I could wade in the snow to my heart's content without getting snow in my boots.

* Now that warmth was returning to my feet, I began feeling sleepy. I lay down in my foxhole in the snow; but it was too cold to sleep. Instead I went over to my neighbors, Ottestad and Ernst Thue, who had dug out a hole for the machine gun, and they served up all kinds of sinister stories. That warmed me up a little, but nothing that lasted.

At 12 o'clock (approximately) we were told that we could go over to the farm (Midtskogen, part of the farmhouse was still standing) and we would be served some coffee and food. We did so, half of each group at a time, and, a pity to say it, but we weren't really hungry.

As the afternoon progressed (about 2 o'clock), half of the cadets were removed from their positions at ...

* The German envoy⁷ in Oslo drove through our positions at Midtskogen in a car with headlights blacked out. We lay low in our positions so that he would not see anything. He was on his way to Elverum to negotiate with the Norwegian government.

21.

... Midtskogen and loaded onto two large buses. The Germans had withdrawn and were presumably making their way southward along the shore of Lake Mjøsa, so it was not unreasonable to believe that we might encounter them one place or another south of us.

We prepared for all eventualities and sat ready with our rifles between our legs or pistols in our laps. We saw nothing along the way until we drove further south to Espa, where we met a group of bewildered people who told us that about an hour earlier the Germans had disarmed several hundred men on this spot. They had had a heavy machine gun mounted at the front and back and completely had the upper hand. The Norwegians had fallen into a trap. This news made us even angrier and more belligerent than we already were, and if we had found any Germans then, they would have fared very badly. We climbed aboard the buses again and continued on in a southerly direction at full speed, but before we had come a very long way, we met a vehicle with ...

⁷ Translator's note. This was Dr. Curt Bräuer (1889-1969). He was initially in favor of negotiating with the Norwegian government, but he received orders from Berlin to deliver an ultimatum to King Haakon. The title of the Norwegian film "Kongens Nei" (2016), English title "The King's Choice", is based on this meeting between Envoy Bräuer and King Haakon. The film has dramatic scenes of the Battle of Midtskogen.

22.

... soldiers who told us that the Germans had passed Minnesund and were continuing southward. We stopped and took up positions near the Nedre Strandløkka farm, not far from Strandløkka⁸ station, and we immediately began scouting out sites for machine guns, and for heavy machine guns. We spent the entire day working on building a fortified position and preparing sites for the machine guns and camouflaging them. Ottestad, Thue and I prepared a fine machine gun position on top of a manure pile, but moved it later because we began to reek of the foul odor ourselves.

We blocked off the road with three trucks, which we filled with sand and positioned sideways across the road with their front ends pointing toward the ditch. In addition, we found a large roadgrader blade which we put lengthwise across the road behind everything else. Finally, we added a barrier of barbed wire bound together with cord. — First to arrive ...

23.

... from the south and intending to pass through the roadblock was a large black hearse. It was the vehicle that carried the German military attaché⁹ in Oslo who was killed by some of the first bullets fired in the Battle of Midtskogen. We found this out later. The military attaché was supposed to lead those who were to capture the King and the Norwegian Government, who were in Elverum.

On 11 April we were in our positions at Strandløkka. Many vehicles began coming up the road, and we created a gate through the roadblock so they could pass through. But we had a truck ready to “darn” the hole as soon as anything seemed suspicious.

Now we heard that a Norwegian battalion of neutral Royal Guard soldiers had been in a battle with the enemy at Eidsvoll, but had had to retreat north to around Minnesund. General Hvinden ...

24.

... Haug drove through our roadblock at Strandløkka and did not appear to be in a particularly good mood.

Here at Strandløkka we were paid a visit by Captain Rognes, who had been part of the Inspector General (Ruge) staff and who had now come into the General Staff. He was a fellow who commanded respect, was on the faculty of the Military Academy, and when he realized it was cadets he saw here, he came over to have a chat whenever circumstances permitted. He told us that a large battleship had been

⁸ Translator’s note. On the east side of Lake Mjøsa, north of Minnesund. The battle here lasted from the 14th to the 17th of April.

⁹ Translator’s note: Eberhard Spiller (1905-1940).

sunk in the Oslo Fjord¹⁰, two large ships on the south Norwegian coast, and one in Trondheim Fjord (they thought it was the “Bremen” that had been sunk here, but later we discovered it was not the case).

He told us that the Norwegian mobilization operation had suffered a serious blow with the occupation of Oslo and Trondheim; otherwise, he said, things around the country were going better ...

25.

... than expected. From Gardermoen¹¹ they were still able to take out weapons and supplies, as much as they needed, and in the fjord country of West Norway the mobilization was going as planned. He hoped that the Norwegian people would endure this test that the war provided and he felt that times would be better for everyone afterwards. He also said that we had been promised assistance by the British and French, so everything ought to turn out well, he thought, if only the enemy could be thwarted long enough for the mobilization to be completed. Then we could begin to push “him” south, surround and completely destroy him.

While Captain Rognes stood chatting with us over by our roadblock, the German envoy¹² arrived and wanted to pass through. He was returning from Elverum, where the negotiations had gone poorly, and traveling to Oslo to deliver his report. Captain Rognes walked over to the car; but the German envoy had already got out and was coming ...

26.

... toward him with outstretched hand. Rognes did not “see” the proffered hand and only responded with an ever so slight nod. We just stood there gaping. We knew that Rognes had backbone, but that he refused to shake the hand of the German envoy was more than we expected. Most astonished of all was the German envoy, who stood there with his outstretched hand rising higher and higher until it was right under Captain Rognes’s nose. Then he took his hand with a faint smile and said: I hope that the good relations that have existed between Norway and Germany will continue. He put special emphasis on the word good. Then the German envoy passed through the barricade looking neither to the right or to the left. But when he passed a group of cadets, he scrutinized us. We stood ...

¹⁰ Translator’s note. This was the “Blücher”, which was sunk near Oscarsborg Fortress.

¹¹ Translator’s note. Originally, a military base. The Germans transformed it into an airport during the war, and after the war Gardermoen was taken over by the Norwegian Air Force. Today it is the main international airport serving Oslo.

¹² See footnote no. 7.

27.

... there all of us with deadly serious expressions and looked at him with hateful eyes. Would hope he'll remember those eyes for some time.

Some women from the neighboring farms prepared dinner for us, beet soup, it was the first dinner since the war had begun. It was not really good in the usual sense of the word, but it vanished with alarming speed. In the course of the day a number of reconnaissance patrols were sent out. One headed for Minnesund to check the thickness of the ice on the Vorma River, and a number of others across Lake Mjøsa (on kicksleds) to investigate this and that over on the other side.

Toward evening there were very many vehicles traveling north on the road along Lake Mjøsa (Trondheimsveien). I counted from 15-20 in an hour, and in the course of the night there were many more. A patrol was sent out and it turned out to be ...

28.

...those who were hauling ammunition and equipment from Gardermoen, they had managed to haul out almost everything, and it was being driven up to Hamar. Later in the night (around 4 o'clock) I was on duty at the roadblock, and it was at that time that the blowing up of the bridges began. The hour I began my watch, I saw everything as a flash, like lightning or cracks and pops indicating a change in the weather, you saw something light up, and then it was a long time until we heard the sound. It was then so many of the bridges were blown up in East Norway that to date have not been rebuilt. At 5 o'clock I was taken along on a patrol over to the other side of Lake Mjøsa. We were to use kicksleds, as the ice was good and we had three kicksleds at our disposal. I was the leader of the patrol, and other members of the patrol were Alex Hagen and Svanø Hafstad. What we were instructed to find out was what ...

29.

... they were doing, those who were driving vehicles up and down on the other side of Lake Mjøsa. We had received a report that they were not Norwegian detachments on the other side, and the transports from Gardermoen had ended. We reached the other side safely, and Svanø Hafstad remained behind to guard the kicksleds. We agreed on the signal we would use, and then Alex and I stole off. The community we were in, or rather the one to which we were heading, was Feiring. It was a long way up from the shoreline to the first houses. After proceeding for awhile we clearly heard people moving about, but it was so dark that we could not see 10 meters ahead and had no way of knowing whether it was friend or foe. We took no chances and were extremely cautious ...

30.

... as we moved forward. The first house we came to was empty, but we didn't discover that before we had gone around it and rapped on the windows and doors for quite a while. Finally, I opened the door and went in, but there was no one inside, just an old clock ticking away on the wall. It confirmed that there had someone in the house fairly recently. We continued on along a footpath that led from the houses up to the main road, but that turned out to be quite a distance away, well over two kilometers. There were people in the next house we came to, but only women, and they were so frightened that it was almost impossible to get them to open the door. Finally, after softly rapping on the door, we saw a light coming down the stairway from the garret. It was the woman of the house with ...

31.

... all her children tagging behind in a line. They were all in their nightclothes and so frightened that they were trembling. We were sorry to come the way we did and frighten them in the middle of the night, but we needed to use their telephone to ring up others living along the road who perhaps could provide us with information as to who it was who had been driving along the road in the vehicles we had seen. It took some time for us to make clear our mission to the woman, and when she finally telephoned for us, our question remained unanswered.

19 December 1944 (continuation)

We continued on up the road to a place where we waited awhile, but nothing happened. Then we saw a blue lantern off down the road. It stopped at fairly regular intervals and blinked. This was suspicious. After a little while it came closer and I let ...

(32)

... Hagen know that he should cautiously take the person in question prisoner when the sign was given. Now he came closer and we saw that he was on a bicycle. When he was 3 meters away, we jumped up and aimed our pistols at him and ordered him to put his hands up. He seemed extremely surprised and began talking a mile a minute incoherently in broken Norwegian: "I don't have a weapon, I just have a knife, etc." He was so nervous and his behavior so strange that it seemed suspicious, and he farted loudly of sheer fright. We took him along down to Lake Mjøsa, transported him over to the other side, and delivered him to Lt. Holmsen, who undertook a preliminary interrogation. Later he was sent to Lillehammer and I heard nothing more about him.

(33)

During the night one of the cadets disappeared, and we believed he had fallen through the ice. We searched for him but did not find him. Later, we heard that he had taken off for Hvalsmoen and had reported in there. This was poor conduct for a cadet. His name was Granli and he was the eldest in the 1st class.

The following day there was an alarm and we lay in position for an hour waiting for the enemy, who did not appear. So we had a quiet day until Captain Pran (Phran?) took over as our commander, but it was just for the moment.

Nothing of importance happened the next few days, and then on Saturday we were relieved by an entire company. All the cadets were withdrawn back to Hamar and put up in civilian homes. Otterstad and I found lodging in the home of a railway conductor. This was the first Saturday of the war, ...

(34)

... making it 14 April 1940. We walked through the streets and there always had to be two of us together. At the railway station I wrote a short letter home to my family.

Sunday, 15 April 1940¹³

In our quarters we are provided bread and butter for three days, for which we must fill out a requisition. We are issued a helmet and underwear.

In the afternoon, vehicles are requisitioned and we leave, with Brandbu as our destination. The route leads over frozen Lake Mjøsa. Before reaching Brandbu we are stopped by some civilians who report having seen a "suspicious man". After having made inquiries at a hotel he had checked into, we discovered he was a seaman who had hiked a long distance with a suitcase and a duffel bag to reach his home.

We arrived in Brandbu late in the evening around 11 p.m. After reporting to ...

(35)

... the senior officer (Colonel Mork¹⁴), we were shown our quarters and went to bed. The next day, the 16th of April, I met several students from the Student House who had hiked through Nordmarka. (Their

¹³ Translator's note. The calendar for 1940 shows 15 April as a Monday. Writing this at a later time, he may have been mistaken about the day of the week for that date.

¹⁴ Translator's note. I found online these excerpts from Henrik Lunde's book *Hitler's Preemptive War: The Battle for Norway, 1940*, p. 313: "... and Colonel Carl Mork's 6th Inf Regiment covered the area between Lake Mjøsa and Randsfjord. [...] The Germans encountered stiff resistance [...] As they moved into the interior, they also encountered deep snow that made movements off the roads very difficult. [...] Norwegian defenses fell into a pattern that would characterize the rest of the campaign in central Norway. They were based on a series of barricades and cuts in lines of communications, supported by flanking fire that made German clearing actions

names were, by the way, Telle, Niels Martin Lunde, Per Reiste.) The formation of detachments was now underway. Major Hertzberg, Sr. was one of them who was busy dividing everyone into groups according to competence. Good heavens! A difficult job!

In the course of the day, my platoon is delivered to me, and from now on I am platoon leader in Rødberg's Brandbu company with 40 agile fellows who are at my beck and call. I give them some instruction in how to choose a firing position and how to observe and specify a target. After two hours of practice, the training is over and we fall in and begin marching, our present destination being the dining hall (of the Brandbu Youth Center).

(36)

After a hasty meal (bread and coffee), I receive orders from the Company Commander to march to Røykenvik and help prevent a possible landing of paratroopers on the shore of Randsfjorden. A man named Mons Røykenvik is supposed to arrange accommodations for us. We arrive there after a 3-hour march and everything goes according to plan. Mons is a congenial fellow and does what he can for us. I reconnoiter and immediately post sentries at the best vantage points, while also dividing up the watches. My platoon consists at present of 3 squads. They are:

1st squad: G. B. Dreyer, sl. (= 'squad leader') law student
 G. Slettmoen
 O. Bukvæld
 L. Hovde
 P. Flåten

(37)

T. Groven
G. Flatåker
A. Silnes
E. Jørgensen

2nd squad: A. Buer
 J. Granheim
 L. Henrud
 J. Gresslien
 K. Koppervik
 O. Skaugen
 R. Jørgensen
 O. Engebretsen

difficult. [...] they attempted to break the Norwegian lines under heavy supporting fires, while ski troops worked around the defenders' flanks."

T. Torgersen

3rd squad: Erik Vibe, sl. law student
J. Krestoffersen
P. Paus
L. Haugen
K. Rønning
F. Aasen
J. Haug

(38)

G. Mekren
H. Håkenstad

4th squad: (arrived the following day)
Scott Andersen (sl.)
Bjarne Johansen
Georg Fjeld
Alf Sunde
Odd Sunde
Bjarne W. Paulsberg
Finn Singdalsen
Rolf Christiansen
Bjarne Seiersted
Tank Nielsen

This was then the 1st Platoon of Capt. Rødberg's "brave" company.

The 4th squad arrived the following day. Their levels of training varied greatly. Some of them were "choir boys", with no experience, while others had served already for 10-15 years, and 3-4 had been Royal Guardsmen the past several years. One of them had just come from ...

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... winter exercises and handled his machine gun like a virtuoso.

The squad leader of the 2nd squad, Buer, had served for 30 days many years earlier, but his knowledge and conduct made him a natural leader. And there were no other gentlemen in the 2nd squad who had more military service.

On the 17th of April

we were inspected by Capt. Rødberg and given orders to reconnoiter new positions with a view to the south. This came as a surprise, as we did not know about any pull-back from Jevnaker.

There were a few small episodes in the course of the day. Among other things, a sentry (a double post who monitored the traffic along the main road) arrested a young girl who tried to slip by without being seen. Now she was brought ...

(40)

... to me and I was told that she was suspicious because she did not wish to say why she had attempted to slip past the guards.

After having examined her a bit, she blurted out the truth: "She was on her way to the midwife at Brandbu." And her appearance clearly bore "signs" of her condition. She was immediately given a pass and went her way.

In the afternoon we did some gymnastics and practiced taking up firing positions and preparing defensive positions. They knew pitifully little, but all were enthusiastic and eager to learn, so they did learn a bit.

On the 18th of April

we received marching orders, and at 7 o'clock everyone was ready, and together ...

(41)

... with the rest of the company coming from Brandbu we marched up along the shore of Randsfjorden. During a brief rest, Capt. R. gave a somewhat uninspiring speech, which was nonetheless vigorously applauded. Everyone shouted 'hurrah'; the mood was good.

When we reached some farms around 3 kilometers north of Røykenvik, we were ordered to assume positions and prepare them. In the course of the afternoon time was spent preparing defensive positions for every rifleman. Later half of the troops rested. At 3:30 p.m. we were suddenly awakened by the sound of an alarm. A report had come in that the enemy was coming up the road with 8 tanks and 20 truckloads of soldiers.

A barricade was set up across the road in great haste. In the meantime, we had acquired a field cannon mounted on a truck. Capt. Jahren (a few days later, Major Fahren) was in charge of it and had command over the rest of the company.

My platoon was positioned on the left flank of the company's front line where a small rural road followed along the fringe of a forest. Now everyone took up positions and waited for what was to come. We waited an hour, then two; but nothing happened.

Earlier in the day, Cadet Bjørstol, who was platoon leader of the 3rd Platoon (or maybe it was the 4th), had sent out half of his troops led by his second-in-command, but they had not returned. Now he returned himself without having found them, and he had to report half his platoon as missing.

In the course of the evening we continued to receive ...

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... reports that the Germans were on their way up toward our positions. These reports came from civilians who had seen them further down the road and who let us know how far they had advanced.

The situation was very tense, and as it was now almost completely dark and the field cannon could not be used in the darkness, it would soon be of no help. Capt. Jahren was bearing up well but clearly he seemed nervous. *Rødberg was worse; he suffered a bit of a nervous breakdown, threw himself into a vehicle shouting: 'The Germans are coming! The Germans are coming!', fired into the air a few times with his pistol, and drove away.

A little while later the field cannon was driven away, and, likewise, Capt. Jahren, without giving any further orders of any kind. Now, here we were, 4 cadets, each with his platoon. And ...

*I did not see this myself but was told about it by two of my fellow platoon leaders. I was with my platoon on the left flank.

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... two of these (1st and 2nd platoon) had only one machine gun each. The others in these platoons had only rifles and carbines. This was the force that was about to encounter 400 Germans with 7-8 tanks and artillery, according to the reports we had received.

The 4 platoon leaders now held a "war council", and two proposals were put forth: 1. (mine), offer resistance as long as possible, thereafter retreat up along a rural road that ended at a place called Bleiken; 2. (Ignasius) retreat immediately without any resistance along the main road that follows Randsfjorden, as the present position was deemed to be of little importance (owing to the very open terrain with wide views), and neither was the roadblock effective because of the flat fields on both sides. Ignasius was cadet second lieutenant ...

(45)

... and was appointed company commander in Rødberg's absence. The 2nd proposal was adopted and we immediately began our withdrawal. Now we received a report that the Germans were marching along the shore of Randsfjorden to circumvent our positions. This was possibly not correct; but for us who had just begun to march, it was certainly not good news. We had to proceed with utmost caution, and the entire time we sent out advance patrols and scouts on each side of us. We were enveloped by utter darkness and had no way of distinguishing between friend and foe. After a march of 2-3 hours, a vehicle approached, so the order was given for everyone to vanish into the forest. Two of us remained on the road to stop the vehicle. It turned out to be Capt. Rødberg, and we were not at all happy to see him, considering the manner in which he had abandoned us and left us in such ...

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... a disagreeable situation. It is now 02:00

the 19th of April

and we are marching along Randsfjorden back to our own detachments.

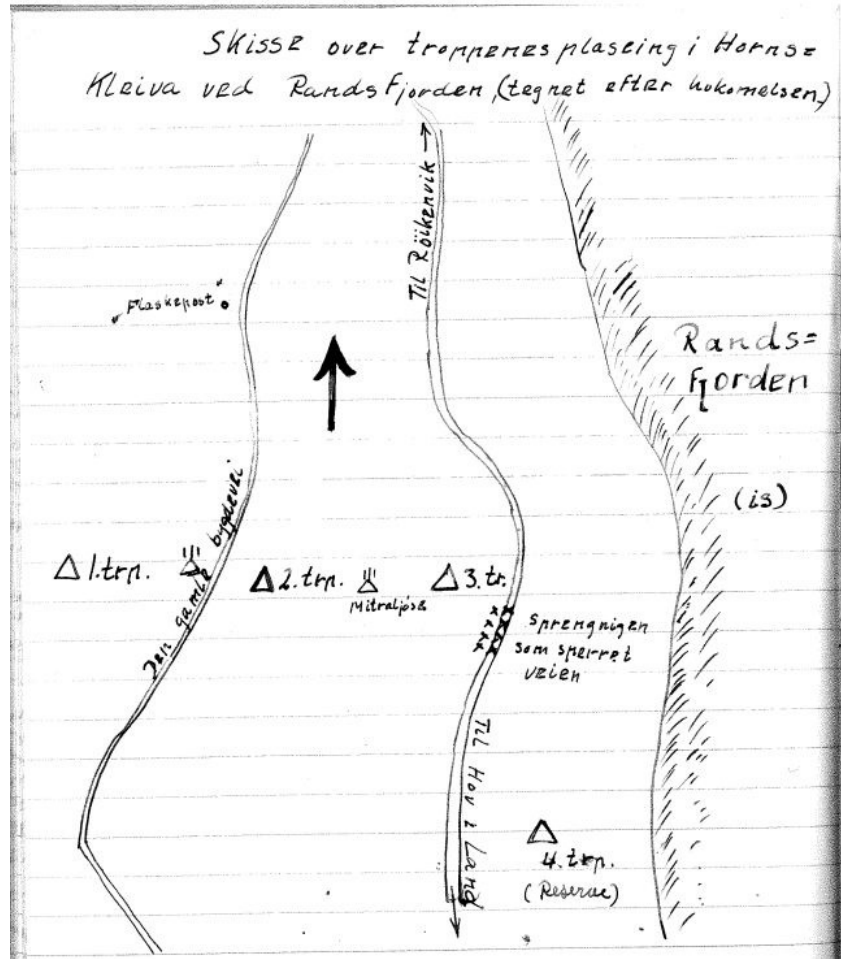
Capt. Rødberg told us that good positions had been prepared and fortified at Hornskeiva near Randsfjorden, but, he said, [we could be in danger] as they had not been informed that we were marching toward these positions. So I sent one of my squad leaders (Vibe) ahead as well as another soldier named Stomperud, and as they left the air resounded with verses of the popular Norwegian song "Gjest Bårdsen". In this manner we made it through their positions unscathed. The sentries said they had orders to shoot, and it was only our singing that had saved us.

After some waiting, our platoon was now shown a cottage where we could rest for a few ...

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... hours. There were 38 men in this small hut, packed together like sardines. I was fortunate enough to get the only bed, which I shared with another. We had marched around 15 hours, maybe 20, so we were tired and fell asleep at once. 2-3 hours later, around 08:00, we were awakened and had to go out immediately and take up our positions. This time, too, my platoon was positioned on the company's left flank. It was a wooded ridge that rose directly up from the main road. The rock wall there had been dynamited to create the road bed, and the rock precipice was almost vertical from the lake to the road, and from the road the wall went straight up another 50 meters. Here a crag had been blasted away and the road was effectively barricaded by enormous blocks of stone.

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A sketch of the positioning of the platoons at Hornskleiva on Randsfjorden (sketched from memory)

“Special sentry¹⁵”

To Røikenvik

Randsfjorden

(ice)

1st Platoon

The old road

2nd Platoon

Heavy machine gun

3rd Platoon

Blasted rocks blocking road

To Hov in Land

4th Platoon (Reserves)

(49)

¹⁵ Translator’s note. He uses the designation “Flaskepost” (in quotation marks). Normally, “flaskepost” means a “message in a bottle”, but here it refers to a dangerous special sentry post.

There was yet another company, besides the platoons (of our company) that are noted on the map. This company had a number of machine guns (probably 6), as well as two heavy machine guns. Later, the field cannon was added, our previous old acquaintance. On the far outer left flank where my platoon was positioned there was a force of about 70 men under the command of an older lieutenant. He was now put under my command, so that I now had all the platoons positioned from the old road and out to the left and up the ridge. It was the largest command I ever had during the war.

After some reconnoitering I placed the squads in position and kept one in reserve. Afterwards, I inspected the troops and at this time I gave the lieutenant a piece of my mind because ...

(50)

... he said he was going to go get something to eat. He said he had not eaten for many hours. I thought it was a sergeant or a squad leader, for that was my impression at first glimpse. I tersely ordered him to keep quiet and said that food was not the most important thing now with the enemy expected to appear at any moment.

It was not long before we received a report that he was advancing toward us. Everyone took their positions, ready to fire. We now had a total of 8 machine guns, 2 or 3 heavy machine guns, and a field cannon. We prepared to fire all the weapons simultaneously (a salvo) in order to take the enemy by surprise as best we could. All the positions were well camouflaged and everything seemed in good order. Vision from our position ...

(51)

... was poor and instructions to my squads were to limit their fire. I moved my one machine gun squad over near the 2nd platoon so that they could be part of the salvo. Now we heard the rumbling of the tanks in the distance, we were not to shoot at the tanks, but rather at the infantry that followed. The tanks would not get by the barricade, so that was not a danger. It was remarkable that everyone wanted a machine gun or heavy machine gun. I considered taking a heavy machine gun from one of the soldiers to man it myself. But I decided he would want to keep it for himself [**word 'himself' crossed out*], so I had to be content with "just" a rifle. Now the 1st of the tanks appeared in the curve in the road about 400 meters away, and right afterwards the 2nd and 3rd, followed immediately by two rows [** 'two rows' crossed out*] soldiers on bicycles in two rows, and at the end came some truckloads of soldiers. We let them ...

(52)

... come to within about 150 meters and then we let loose with all our barrels at once. We saw the bullets from the heavy machine guns as they plowed up the road beneath the bicycle tires. In a moment's time the road was littered with bicycles, with a few Germans lying still and others trying to

crawl into the ditches. The first tanks had just about reached the barricade as a bundle of dynamite with a fuse was thrown onto it. It did not turn around. The other two returned to the curve in the road, following the trucks, which had vanished in a hurry. Here they stood and opened fire on us with their small cannons, but their aim was poor and no one was hit. We continued shooting at those who had had to leave the road. Our fire was not answered, and after a while ...

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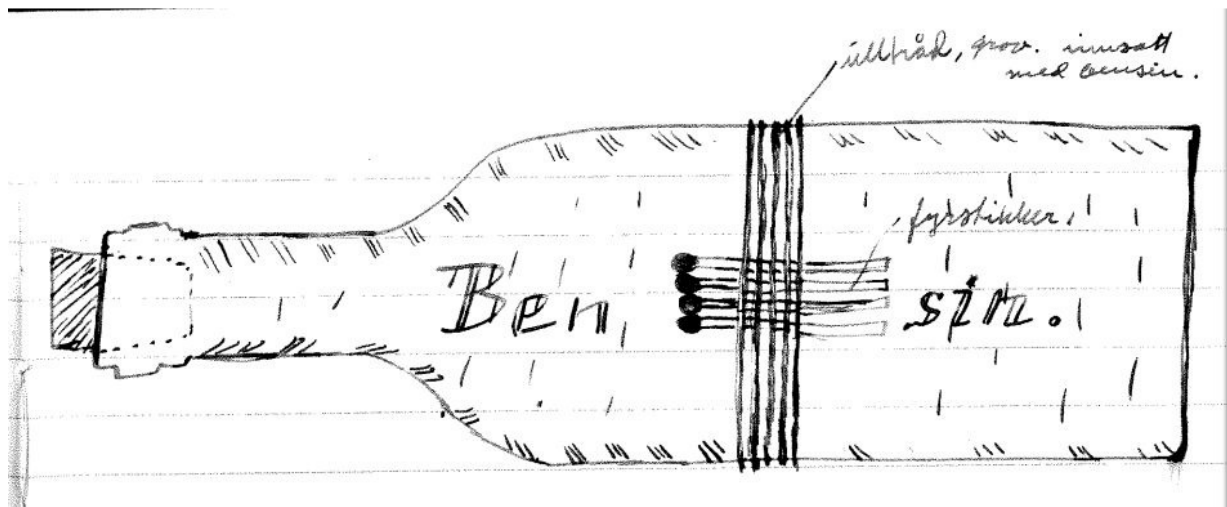
... it died away. But all our sharpshooters lay in wait and the moment someone appeared he found himself the object of aggressive rifle fire. As we lay there, a German suddenly emerged from the underbrush where he had been hiding, jumped on his bicycle and peddled furiously to get away. Bullets landed all around him, but he was not hit.

For a long time thereafter we saw little of the Germans. We heard a constant rumbling of tanks and thought they maybe would return and try to get through on the old road. Special sentries were posted along the portion of the road where it was most winding. They had a dangerous job, and, wishing to be an example for my platoon, I volunteered for this task and stood there for almost 3 hours.

(54)

No tanks appeared, but I heard them close by the entire time, so they must have been there, but they didn't come close enough for us to "reach them". I [**the word "I" crossed out*]. Each special sentry had a bucket of bottles filled with petroleum. Wool thread drenched in petroleum was wound around each bottle. Tucked into the thread were 3-4 matches. You took the bottle in your right hand ready to throw it, and when the target was within "throwing distance", you rubbed the rough surface over the matches and the wool thread caught fire. When the bottle struck the tank it would then shatter, the contents would flow out over it, and [**the word "and" crossed out*], catch fire and burn it up. The method was awfully primitive, but it was said to have been used very effectively in the war in Finland.

(55)



[*Written above the sketch of the bottle the words "wool thread, coarse, drenched in petroleum", and written on the bottle the word "Petroleum", and pointing to the matches the word "matches".]

When I returned to the platoon after having stood as special sentry for about 2 hours, I made sure my men were all in advantageous firing positions with a place to rest their rifles. Each was covered with spruce branches and camouflaged. I ordered them all to remain prepared near their positions as we could expect an attack at any time.

Now my buddy Gausland, who was also a cadet and now battalion assistant, came up to look at the positions. As we stood there looking over toward the forest in front of my positions (the ...

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... very short line of fire, about 100 meters here), we heard something move. We lay down without making any noise and sent a sign to the others to lie down and keep still. And now a German soldier comes wading through the snow straight for our positions. Then another appears behind him (about 30 meters back), came wading through the deep snow. But then the first one must have discovered something, for he stopped suddenly 30 meters from where we lay. We shot both at the same time and he collapsed at once. But the few seconds before we could aim again at scout no. 2 were enough for him to throw himself down and wriggle away in the deep snow. We shot at him whenever he came a little into view above the snow, but he ...

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... got away uninjured. Afterwards, we inspected the pockets of the dead German, but he had nothing of importance. He lay on his side, curled up, his mouth wide open, and he had presumably died instantaneously from a bullet through his chest.

Now we knew that the Germans would be told that the ridge up from the old road was occupied and that we could be attacked at any time. I went down to the machine gun squad nearest the “old road”, and while I was there I suddenly heard a loud explosion right behind me. Very quickly [**the words “very quickly” crossed out*] I do say, we hit the ground in an instant and crawled in between two large stones, and now 12-15 powerful explosions followed in rapid succession. Explosives whined through the air with a ...

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... menacing high screeching sound. They struck the trees everywhere around us and sprigs and branches were scattered on the ground. When the bombardment ended, I immediately went to the other squads higher up, as the explosions had come from there. I was greeted by an unpleasant scene, three or four men wounded, one of them mortally, and most of the others, except for those closest, had vanished. Squad leader Vibe was also gravely wounded and we all helped lift him up and get him in position to be transported. He was very animated and talked and gesticulated, but he was extremely pale. He bled from his chest and he had no feeling in his arms and legs and could not move them. A private named Rudolf Jørgensen was mortally wounded. The right side of ...

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... his throat was torn open so we could see his windpipe and esophagus, and blood gushed out with each heartbeat from arteries near the lower mandible (a.Mandibula?) [**in the parentheses a question mark written after a word that has been crossed out*]. His throat was peeled open all the way up to his right ear and toward the back of his neck. He was unconscious and there was no other way to move him than to drag him down. A soldier and I took him under the arms, lifted him up and dragged him like a sack. He was completely unconscious and very heavy. We dragged him down toward the old road and left him with a Sergeant Gran who was posted there. Then we returned to the spot where he had been wounded. I smelled of blood, a sickly sweet odor, and I was soaked in blood from my shoulder all the way down to my knees after trying to carry ...

(60)

... him. Among the others wounded was “Stomperud”, who had a splinter in the back of his head. He left under his own power. The others had only minor wounds. Back on the battlefield there were only 4 older men left, plus an entire squad (those who had been nearest the “old road” and had not been hit by the bombardment). I posted those who were left at vital spots and immediately sent a call for reinforcements. Gausland, who came while we were taking care of the wounded, also promised to send reinforcements for those who had vanished. And when some time had passed, Otterstad arrived with a squad and a half from the 2nd platoon, and then went ...

(61)

... on a patrol out to the flank to see if we were outflanked. Now the Germans launched a real attack, while at the same time opening heavy fire on our positions up on the ridge. We heard them above us coming down toward us, but we could not see them yet.

Their fire was not well aimed and did not harm us, but it was powerful and a number of trees were cut to pieces by the heavy machine gun fire, and soil and rocks splattered all around us. I went to report that the attack was coming in our direction and ask for new reinforcements. I did it myself because Otterstad was close by and I told him that I was leaving and that he would have supervision. I returned after a quarter hour — without reinforcements, ...

(62)

... but with orders for a phased retreat. The order had been given by Rødberg, said Gausland, who himself came up to us to see that we succeeded in our retreat. I had posted the four men who had remained after the first bombardment on the outermost left flank at a very dangerous spot. It was a protruding crag with a large rock. The crag was exposed to fire but had a good view, and for that reason I had posted them there. Now they had disappeared. As they said later, they thought that the others had retreated without letting them know. A while before we received the order to retreat, a soldier came from the squad nearest the road, completely out of breath, and says that there ...

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... is a machine gun aimed at us from behind us. We are finished, he adds, we can only retreat. He had seen a lot and was willing to show me where it was. As I understood it, he had to be wrong, and I followed him to where he had seen it. It was indeed a machine gun, but it was the 4 men on the outermost flank up on the crag whom he had seen. He received a vigorous scolding for his foolish mistake and was told that such reports are well suited for creating panic.

The phased retreat proceeded leaving 100 meters between each group. We returned rapidly to the old road and from there down to the main road. We had our machine guns in position during the entire retreat. Soon we were behind the first curve in the road and were safe.

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Otterstad's squad and a half plus my own were the last to leave their positions. Now we marched back along the main road as it grew darker. After marching several kilometers, we came to a curve in the road

where I found some of the men from my own platoon who had taken off. Later I found a few more, and by the end of the day I had found all of them, except for those who had been wounded or killed, plus a lad from Valdres by the name of Henrud, who was still shaking in his boots after the bombardment. I didn't see him again and can imagine that he took off for his home in Valdres.

Now we had arrived at Fall near Randsfjorden. Here I spoke with Battalion Commander Major Lauvdal and reported my losses to him. I tried to get some of them to return down to Hornskeiva in order to ...

(65)

... see how far the Germans had come, but only a few sergeants went along. We drove down to about one kilometer from Hornskeiva without encountering anyone. Then we got out and continued on foot to a curve in the road right before Hornskeiva, but we didn't see anyone. By now it was completely dark and we couldn't accomplish much, as we had no automatic weapons. After some reconnoitering we found out that we could very well take up a new position about half a kilometer north of Hornskeiva, where the terrain offered good opportunities for defending oneself. But when we returned to Fall, Major Lauvdal had decided that we would give up the territory and move further north. At midnight we were put up in the youth club in Hov, Land, after being given something to eat at the schoolhouse not far away. So on the ...

(66)

20th of April

at 2:30 a.m. we were awakened with news that the Germans had been reported 5 kilometers further south, and for this reason we had to head north. We began marching, and at 03:00 we were fully underway. Time passed, and at 8 o'clock we were able to ride in trucks over to Haslevollseter, where we stopped to find out if we could find lodging, and then we continued on to Mustad farm in Øvre Vardal, where we were able to sleep in a schoolhouse until well into the afternoon.

English Translation:
Jim Skurdall, Lørenskog, Norway