



THE ST MARYLEBONE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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HEROISM AND SACRIFICE COMMEMORATED IN BAKER STREET



The Plaque unveiling – from left to right: Brigadier Tom Guttormsen (Norwegian Chief of the Defence Staff – Veteran Affairs), Donald Hunter (wireless operator on various Norwegian Merchant Navy ships during WWII) and Roy Hallan (Milorg – Norwegian resistance during WWII).



Six years ago a plaque was put up at 64 Baker Street marking the former headquarters of the Special Operations Executive (SOE). In addition to 64 Baker Street, SOE requisitioned space in a number of buildings in the area, including three flats in Chiltern Court for the use of SOE's Norwegian Section.

On 10th April 2016 a plaque was unveiled at Chiltern Court commemorating the Norwegian Section's work in planning what has become known as the "Telemark raid", a series of operations against a German-commandeered heavy water production plant in Norway. Sue Keane, co-sponsor of the plaque with the Anglo-Norse Society, gave a short introduction and welcomed the large number of invited guests, which included descendants of Arne Kjelstrup and Hans Storhaug, two of the participants in the raid. She was followed by The Norwegian Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff – Veteran Affairs, Brigadier (Air) Tom Guttormsen, who said a few words on behalf of the Second World War veterans. The plaque was then unveiled by the Chairman of The Anglo-Norse Society – London, Sir Richard Dales KCVO, CMG. After the ceremony afternoon tea was served at the Sherlock Holmes Hotel.

The story of the Telemark raid is one of extraordinary heroism and indeed sacrifice.

When the Germans invaded neutral Norway in 1940 they took control of Norsk Hydro's plant at Vemork in the county of Telemark. This plant was capable of producing heavy water (D₂O – water containing two atoms of deuterium, a heavier isotope of hydrogen) which was used as a moderator to control nuclear fission and hence vital for the German research programme to develop an atomic bomb.

SOE had decided that a commando attack was the most effective means of destroying heavy water production at the plant and, to this end, an advance party of four Norwegians were parachuted into Norway in November 1942. SOE also had an agent inside the plant, a Norwegian engineer, who supplied them with detailed plans and other intelligence.

The second phase of the plan was for thirty-four Royal Engineers to be landed by glider. They would then rendezvous with the advance party and proceed to destroy the plant. This ended in disaster when the two gliders involved crashed and the survivors were brutally tortured before being executed by the Nazis.

A second operation was mounted in February 1943 whereby a team of six SOE-trained Norwegian commandos joined forces with the four already in place and they succeeded in putting the plant out of action. Despite thousands of German troops being sent to



The Plaque unveiling at Chiltern Court.

search for the commandos, they all escaped, and most of them continued to work with the resistance.

The Germans attempted to restart production of heavy water at the Vemork plant but a US bombing raid in November 1943 put the plant out of action for the rest of the war.

As a postscript to the operation, in February of 1944 Knut Haukelid, one of the Telemark raid commandos, recruited a team locally that successfully planted a bomb that sank the railway ferry which was being used to transport the residual stockpiles of heavy water across Lake Tinnsjø en route to Germany.