

The Shetland Bus

The Shetland Bus was an undercover operation that took place across the North Sea between Norway and Shetland during the Second World War. Every trip was an effort in helping the resistance in Norway. The Shetland Bus wasn't actually, a bus that drove around Shetland; it was boats that went across the sea to Norway, as the 2 places are only 200 miles apart. It wasn't called the Shetland Boat because that would be too obvious about what they were doing so they named it the Shetland Bus, if the Nazis found something, they wouldn't suspect a thing.

The Shetland Bus took refugees, ammunition and weapons from Norway to Shetland and Shetland to Norway. Most of the crossings were made in the winter when daylight was limited and the weather conditions were poor. The boats were disguised as fishing boats with machine guns hidden in fish barrels. They didn't use lights to avoid being spotted by the Nazis. Trips from Shetland and Norway happened of often, the operation name, The Shetland Bus was made.



In 1939, at the start of the war Norway was a neutral country and was not allied with anyone. Nazi Germany thought that the occupation of Germany would be useful to their cause so they invaded Norway and seized power. German forces imposed their rule on Norway. The media was censored only to say good things about the Nazis. The Norwegian people could not travel freely, public gatherings were banned and people could not criticise the Nazis in public without being punished. People were even discouraged from stopping and chatting in the streets. Many

people wanted to escape Norway. In 1940, 30 boats brought over 200 refugees out of Norway to Shetland.

The invasion of Norway, which is only 200 miles East from Shetland, led the people in charge of defending Britain to believe that an attack on Shetland from Norway was possible. The British government strengthened Shetland's defences and Shetland became a restricted area. People could not enter or leave Shetland without an official pass. Sandbags were provided to keep buildings safe from bombs. Anti-aircraft guns were scattered across strategic points around the island and Lerwick. RAF bases were made in Sumburgh and Scatsa. Sullum Voe became a base for flying boats.



There was also a volunteer Home Guard. Shetland's population was almost doubled to 20 000 when troops were stationed on the islands during the war.

Britain realised that supporting Norway's undercover operations would be helpful in their efforts to defeat Germany. The Norwegian men who escaped were trained with the British military and units were set up in Norway. A secret base in Luna was setup in 1941 on the Shetland mainland and the small fishing boats that had brought Norwegian refugees to Shetland carried out the first missions back to Norway. Luna, was an isolated place, all alone did not have any repair facilities for the boats so the operation moved to Scalloway and a slipway was built to service the boats. As many as 40 boats left the Alesund district in the first year of operations. In Berlin, at the Nazi headquarters, they wanted these trips to stop so they strengthened the Nazi forces in Norway to

make it hard to escape. If someone escaped, their family would be arrested. Harald Torsvíg was one of the key organisers of the Shetland Bus trips. He was in great danger of being caught by the Nazi police, the Gestapo. A boat was sent to go and get him from Norway, when the boat got here he refused to leave. Him and his group were caught by the Gestapo and were sentenced to death.



Leif Larson is the most famous of all the Shetland Bus men. He was known in Norway as 'Shetland's Larsen.' He escaped from Norway in February 1941 in a fishing boat and trained with the military unit called the Linge Company. During the war he made over 50 trips to Norway in some bad conditions. One of the worst was to an undercover group in Traena in 1943. On the way back his boat was attacked by 2 German planes. 6 of the 8 men crew aboard were hit. The surviving crew made it to the Alesund area and were picked up by a ship that took them back to Shetland. Leif Larsen is now known as a legend a huge part of the Shetland Bus. He became the most highly decorated Naval Officer of World War 2

At the end of the war the Shetland Bus had taken 383 tons of weapons and 192 agents across to Norway. Many refugees and agents were brought out of Norway. The Shetland Bus is remembered for the bravery of the men who took part in the operation. A memorial to all the men who were involved was unveiled in Scalloway, and another in Burghead in 2015. Alesund, in Norway, has its own memorial.

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