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A WWII Epic of Escape, Survival, and Adventure

# THE SHETLAND BUS

David Howarth, author of *We Die Alone*



# **THE SHETLAND BUS**

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David Howarth



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# FOREWORD

DURING THE GERMAN OCCUPATION of Norway, from 1940 to 1945, every Norwegian knew that small boats were constantly sailing from the Shetland Isles to Norway to land weapons and supplies and to rescue refugees. The Norwegians who stayed in Norway and struggled there against the invaders were fortified by this knowledge, and gave the small boats the familiar name which is used for the title of this book: 'to take the Shetland bus' became a synonym in Norway for escape when danger was overwhelming. This record of the adventures of the Norwegian sailors who manned the boats is offered as a tribute from an English colleague to Norwegian seamanship, and as a humble memorial to those who lost their lives.

D. H.  
Scalloway

## Approximate Pronunciation of Some Proper Names

Aalen, Ove	<i>aw'len, 've</i>	Klausen	<i>Klow'sen</i>
Ålesund	<i>aw'-le-soond</i>		
Andalsnes	<i>an-dalz-ness</i>	Larsen, Leif	<i>lar'sen, lf</i>
Aursund	<i>or-soon</i>	Leroy	<i>l'roi</i>
Averö	<i>ah'ver-</i>	Lerwick	<i>ler'wik</i>
		Lofoten	<i>lo'ft-en</i>
Baalsrud, Jan	<i>bawlz'rood, yan</i>	Lunna	<i>l n'a</i>
Berge	<i>ber'g</i>	Maaloy	<i>mawl'oi</i>
Björnöy	<i>by r'noi</i>	Mosjön	<i>m -shy n</i>
Blystad, Per	<i>blees ta, p r</i>		
Brekke, Ivar	<i>brek'e, ee'vahr</i>	Naeroy,	<i>n 'roi,</i>
Bremnes	<i>brem-ness</i>	August	<i>ow'goost</i>
Bueland	<i>boo- -land</i>	Nipen, Nils	<i>nee'pen, neelss</i>
		Nordsjön	<i>nor(d)sh-y n</i>
Edoyfjord	<i>'doi-fyord</i>		
Eide	<i>'d</i>	Øklandsvaag	<i>k-lands-vawg</i>
Eidsheim	<i>dz'h m</i>		
Enoksen	<i>e'nok-sen</i>	Reine	<i>r -n</i>
Faeroy	<i>f'roi</i>	Siglaos	<i>sig-lowss</i>
Fagerlid	<i>fahg'-er-l</i>	Sjö	<i>shy</i>
Feie	<i>f'y</i>	Skeia	<i>sk-ya</i>
		Smölen	<i>sml-en</i>
Gjertsen	<i>yert'sen</i>	Svinoy	<i>sveenoi</i>
Griphölen	<i>grip-h -len</i>		
Grotle, Bård,	<i>grot'l, bord,</i>	Traena	<i>tr-na</i>
Ole	<i>-l</i>	Tromsö	<i>trom-s</i>
		Trondelag	<i>tron'de-lag</i>
Hauge, Leif	<i>howg', lf</i>	Trondheim	<i>tron-yem</i>
Hovde			
		Utvaer	<i>oot-v r</i>
Iversen, Kaare	<i>ee-ver-sen, kawr'-</i>		
		Vika	<i>vee-ka</i>
Kaafjord	<i>kaw-fyord</i>	Vinjesfjord	<i>vin-ye-fyord</i>
Kilpisjarvi	<i>kil'p sh-yar-vi</i>	Vita	<i>vee-ta</i>



# 1. THE BEGINNING OF A SAGA

SAGA IS an old Norse word which originally meant simply a story. But from its association with the kind of story which ancient Norsemen liked to tell, it has come to mean a story of heroism and endeavor, and of adventure at sea.

This story is a modern saga, but it has a strangely ancient setting; for it tells of voyages in small boats, in the dark winters of the far north, from the Shetland Islands to Norway. The seamen who made the journeys were descendants of the Vikings who sailed those same seas, in boats of about the same size, just a thousand years before. The journeys were even made for a similar purpose; for in both the tenth and the twentieth centuries Norwegians who were living in exile, and who believed power in Norway to be in the hands of a usurper, used Shetland as a base for expeditions to the Norwegian coast.

The circumstances which caused the modern journeys to be made arose from the German invasion of Norway in 1940, and their object

was to land men and cargo in Norway without the knowledge of the Germans, and to rescue refugees. Nothing but war would have made seamen attempt such dangerous journeys. Some were two thousand miles in length, and lasted three weeks, and all of them, for three years, were made in the depth of the sub-arctic winter, in fishing boats from fifty to seventy feet long, which sailed alone.

The North Sea and the north-east Atlantic were a no-man's-land at that time, deserted by shipping but patrolled by aircraft. Small boats are no match for aircraft, except in calm water, however heavily they are armed, and the fishing boats crossing to Norway or returning were sometimes attacked and sunk in a few minutes, hundreds of miles from a friendly ship or shore. Their crews had no hope of being saved.

But such dangers of war were a commonplace, and those journeys were more memorable for the danger of wind and sea which were overcome. The journeys were made in winter, because in summer, so far north, there is continual daylight, and the crews needed darkness to make their secret landings in Norway. In this the journeys differed from the voyages of the Vikings, which were made in summer weather. The seas between Shetland and Norway in the winter are among the stormiest in the world, and it is possible that in all the history of man's seafaring no other series of journeys has been undertaken deliberately in such bad weather and in such small boats. Certainly it is centuries since men sailed in such an empty ocean. In the last four winters of the war the boats on these journeys steamed for ninety thousand miles, and in this vast distance only four strange ships were sighted. To bring such small boats through hurricanes, fogs, extreme cold and continuous darkness, to make landfall on a distant, unlit and guarded coast, sometimes put to severe tests our modern knowledge of the ancient crafts of seamanship. So the record of these voyages is a story of the sea rather than a story of the war.

The work was carried out from a small base in Shetland, of which I had the honour to be second-in-command. My own part in the work

of the base was quite unheroic, and I can therefore write of the work as a saga without any lack of modesty. But in writing of events in which one has taken an intimate part, it is hard to avoid making too much of one's personal experiences, opinions and impressions, and if any of my colleagues should read this account of our mutual adventures they will think me too self-centred. I hope they will forgive me and understand that to write impersonally of a matter which absorbed our whole interest for five years of our lives would call for unusual literary skill.

It was in the spring of 1941 that I was first sent to Shetland. I was a sub-lieutenant at the time, but the job I was to do in Shetland was not a naval one, and I had orders to report there to an army officer, Major L. H. Mitchell. I had known for some time who Mitchell was and what he was doing, and had asked to be detached from naval service and sent north as his assistant. I thought his work promised excitement, and a degree of independence and a chance to use one's wits which are seldom granted to a junior officer in wartime. I had a slight knowledge of the Norwegian language and a more thorough knowledge of the Norwegian coast, because I had spent my holidays in Norway for many years; and I knew something about small boats. I was very fond of Norway and the Norwegians, and felt I wanted nothing more than to help them in some small way.

So I was delighted, after months of delay, when my request was granted and I was flying at last to Shetland. As the plane, after leaving the mainland of Scotland near John o' Groats, skirting the balloon barrage over Scapa Flow and passing the last of the Orkney Islands, flew low over a grey turbulent sea, I looked forward eagerly to see the gaunt rock called Sumburgh Head, and beyond it the narrow line of bare brown hills where our adventure was to begin.

Mitchell met me at the airport: a thin young man in an army officer's uniform, with the slight forward stoop and anxious expression of short-sightedness. In wartime some people are obscured by their uniform, so that on seeing them one thinks, there is a major, or there

is an airman; but others continue to appear as individuals, and one says, that is a pleasant or intelligent-looking fellow, and only notices later his rank and service. Mitchell was the latter kind. He was always himself, and never primarily a major. He had a wise, kindly face, which did not accord well with brass buttons, and he had too much sense of the ridiculous and of his own fallibility to be a good parade-ground officer. But he had in plenty the much more valuable qualities of sympathy and humour, and freedom from prejudice and false pride.

In London I had been told that Mitchell would tell me everything when I arrived; and he began at once, as we drove away from the airport, to share an encyclopedic knowledge of Norwegian politics and psychology, and of German and British strategy in the north, as well as to tell me what we ourselves were able to do and to discuss how we should do it.

It was just over a year since the king and government of Norway had left their country and brought to an end the struggle in Norway itself against the Germans. The thoroughness and efficiency of the German preparations for the invasion of Norway, and the lack of Norwegian preparations for defence, had made the battle hopeless; but brave actions by both British and Norwegians had delayed its inevitable end; and when the end came the fighting had aroused in Norwegians an intense national emotion. I had known well before the war the complacency which decades of neutrality had induced in Norwegians. Mitchell, who had been in Oslo when the Germans arrived and had followed the whole of the campaign, had seen this complacency change to a strong positive loyalty to their king, a conscious love of their country and a hatred of Germans which far exceeded the feeling of most Englishmen.

Many thousands of Norwegians had found themselves in exile with the king, and thousands more had followed him, escaping from Norway in fishing boats, yachts, small steamers and even rowing boats across the North Sea, or crossing the border into Sweden and

traveling through Finland and Russia eastwards round the world. But in Norway there still remained a large army, disorganized and disbanded and only partly trained, but still ready to risk a lot to drive the Germans out of the country. It had become the first duty of the exiled government to get into touch with potential leaders of this army, and under British direction to reorganize, train and equip it.

The first necessity in attempting this task was a means of regular transport between Great Britain and Norway for sending messengers, leaders, instructors, trained radio operators and saboteurs, and cargoes of weapons; and it was this transport which we were to provide.

It was the lack of any alternative which had first made the British and Norwegian authorities consider using fishing boats for this traffic. In 1941 British resources had still not recovered from the losses of Dunkirk, and neither aircraft nor naval vessels could be used for work which did not bring immediate results. Besides, it was questionable whether either would have been suitable. Unstable weather and the mountainous country made Norway a difficult place for landing by parachute, and aircraft at the most could only have carried a small portion of the traffic which was already planned. And no naval vessels at that time were both seaworthy enough to make such long voyages in winter and yet small enough to approach with a reasonable chance of avoiding detection a coast held by the enemy.

However, fishing boats had been constantly arriving from Norway manned by refugees. The best of them were certainly seaworthy: many had fished the Iceland and Greenland grounds in summer. Yet they were small; and above all, when they arrived in Norwegian waters it would be difficult for the Germans to distinguish them from similar boats which were still fishing there, so that they might, it was thought, be able to move about on the coast without causing suspicion.

In the winter of 1940, which was just past, several crews of fishing boats which had arrived from Norway were asked to sail back again, land a passenger and then return to this country. All these

return trips had been successful, and at the end of the year Mitchell had been sent to Shetland to organize a base for continuous traffic. A couple of dozen Norwegian fishermen and merchant seamen had been recruited as civilian volunteers, and six fishing boats had been requisitioned. In the early part of 1941 they had made several successful voyages; but by the time I arrived the increasing daylight had put an end to their operations till the following autumn.

All this I learned from Mitchell as we went about our work, or sat in the evening by the peat fire in a large farmhouse which he had taken as his headquarters. The name of this place was Flemington. It was a comfortable dilapidated house, famous in Shetland for the tree which grew before it; for it stood in the sheltered valley of Weisdale, and besides its one fully grown tree it was surrounded by plantations of stunted birches, oaks, conifers and rowans, the only ones of any considerable size in the islands. In this house Mitchell had entertained some strange visitors in the past winter: agents waiting for passage to Norway, refugees exhausted by a crossing of the North Sea, and parties of saboteurs in training, with their instructors. The saboteurs had already given the place a doubtful reputation among the Shetlanders, and the house and garden were full of their devices. They had a childish delight in entertaining visitors with incendiary bombs and booby traps. Soon after I arrived I noticed a suitcase under my bed, but I did not bother to open it; and it lay there for nearly six months before I found it contained three hundred small bottles of chloroform and some detonators.

But my own main concern was not with such gadgets but with the boats. The Norwegians who had sailed on the winter journeys were mostly on leave in Scotland. One crew, to fill up the time, made a weekly trip to Aberdeen, taking fish on the southward journey and bringing back cabbages for the army—a profitable trade which continued throughout the summer. The other boats were being repaired by a local firm.

Norwegian fishing boats are a delight to a connoisseur of small seaworthy craft. To a casual observer they all look the same: two-masted wooden vessels, unusually high in the bow, and with a very large wheelhouse aft. The bulwarks and upper works are white, and the hull is not painted but treated with linseed oil. But to a fisherman there are many differences between boats from different parts of the coast. Those built in the south are what British yachtsmen know as the Colin Archer type, with a curved stem, a canoe stern and an external rudder. North of these are found the Hardanger cutters, fast straight-stemmed craft with a high sheer, a very low freeboard amidships and a long fine counter. Next is the Møre type, also a cutter, but more compact in its lines and with a wheelhouse of more elaborate construction. Within these three main types there are endless small variations, and in recent years the Norwegian government has helped to evolve a design which combines the Møre bow with a cruiser stern, and in profile resembles the modern craft on the east coast of Scotland.

Of all fishing craft the Møre cutter is the queen. The south Norway boats are slow in a head sea, the Hardanger type is not so well or so strongly built; but a good Møre cutter is fit to sail round the world and will stand any storm in nature.

The most noticeable feature of all these Norwegian craft is their engine, for with only a few exceptions it is a single-cylinder semi-diesel machine with a large reverberant exhaust pipe which comes out of the top of the wheelhouse and emits a slow, solemn, very loud tonk-tonk-tonk. This tonk can be heard miles away in calm weather, and it is a nostalgic sound to all who have happy memories of the Norwegian coast.

To a British shipwright these boats seem strange, for their construction breaks most of the traditional rules by which boats are built in Great Britain. There is usually no hardwood in them at all, except in some cases the stem. Keel, frames and planking are all of fir. The

frames of the boats are double, each part six inches square, and they are spaced so closely that they form almost a solid block of timber. The outer planking is from two and a half to three inches thick, and the whole of the hull is lined or ceiled with an inner skin of from two to two and a half inches. Both these skins and the frames are through-fastened with trenails, that is to say, wooden pegs which are driven through and then tightened with a wooden wedge at each end—a form of construction which has been little used in this country since Nelson's day. Iron nails are only used in the garboard strake and the butts, and they do not hold well in the soft wood.

This method of building is enormously strong, but has one disadvantage: there is very little ventilation between the two skins of the boat, and the little there is becomes a matter of chance; and therefore dry rot often arises in the frames. This is a most insidious as well as a dangerous fault. More than once when we were overhauling our boats and took out a deck plank or stanchion which showed a suspicion of rot, we found we had to rebuild a large part of the ship before we were sure we had got rid of the trouble.

Most of the vessels we used were of fifty to seventy feet in over-all length, with a beam of about eighteen feet and a draught of eight feet, six inches. They had bunks for six or eight men in the fore-castle, and for two in a small cabin aft. The hold amidships could carry eight or ten tons of small arms and explosives, and the wheelhouse, which was built on top of the engine casing, usually had a small chart-room opening off it, and a galley behind. There were few comforts aboard them, and with a speed of seven or eight knots they were absurdly slow by wartime standards. But for ability to keep the sea few boats of a similar size could rival them.

Mitchell's explanations, and my own memories of the Norwegian coast, soon made it clear to me what a powerful weapon these fishing boats could be. In Shetland we were a little over a hundred miles north-north-east of the mainland of Scotland. The islands lie strung

out for sixty miles north and south, and a hundred and eighty miles to the eastward lies Bergen in Norway. From Bergen the Norwegian coast runs north for a hundred and twenty miles, and then north-north-east for nearly a thousand miles into the Arctic zone. Any part of this coast would be accessible to a fishing boat fitted with extra fuel and water tanks, and the nearest point on it was only twenty-four hours' steaming away.

It seemed, in theory, that having once reached the enemy coast a fishing boat should be in reasonable safety, although if it should have the bad luck to be detected it would stand no chance at all of getting back across the North Sea to Shetland. The western part of Norway is a high plateau, which was eroded during the Ice Age into a series of great valleys, some filled by the sea and thus forming fjords, and all separated by high mountains which, at the time of year when our boats would be operating, would be thickly covered with snow. On the coast itself the erosion of the sea has been added to that of the ice, and has cut up the land into tens of thousands of islands.

The channels between these islands form a lead of sheltered water which extends along the whole of the coast, with only a few points at which coastal shipping is exposed to the open sea. This 'inner lead,' besides being very beautiful, is the principal thoroughfare of Norway for all kinds of traffic; and the minor channels which form a maze between the inner lead and the sea are constantly used by thousands of fishing boats of all sizes from rowing boats to seventy-foot whalers.

We could assume that it was out of the question for the Germans to prohibit either the coastal traffic or the fishing; but we were also sure that as soon as we and our passengers began to achieve our object of being a nuisance to them they would do their best to control the movements of even the smallest of boats. In fact, as time went on, they used every possible means to achieve control. All boats had to carry quantities of passes and get them stamped at each port of call. Patrol boats were stationed in the leads to inspect these passes and

search suspicious ships, and large numbers of observation and artillery posts were gradually established on shore. All lighthouses showing to seaward were extinguished or obscured. Fishing was restricted to a zone of fifty miles from the coast, and the limit of this zone was patrolled by aircraft. Arbitrary 'forbidden areas' were declared from time to time, and controls in general were varied with ever-increasing frequency in the hope, presumably, that our boats would give themselves away by showing ignorance of new regulations.

It would undoubtedly have been difficult to penetrate this hedge of controls had it not been for the stream of refugees which flowed from Norway to Shetland and Orkney. These refugees brought us the latest German orders almost as quickly as the Germans could disseminate them in Norway. We kept details of the defences plotted on large-scale charts and card-indexed, and one member of our unit used to boast that he knew every German N.C.O. in charge of a watchpost in Norway by his Christian name.

Since the job we had to do was to land men and materials in secret, it followed that our crews had to avoid the Germans, though they often wanted to try their hands in a scrap. We armed the ships as best we could against chance encounters, always bearing in mind that to appear as innocent fishing boats might often be their best chance of survival, so that the armament had to be invisible except at close quarters. In the open sea the chance of meeting a German ship was negligible, but aircraft were a considerable danger, particularly along the fifty-mile limit. Our aim was usually for the boats to approach this limit at night, so that dawn found them within the fishing zone. Here they could expect to be reasonably safe, provided they looked and behaved sufficiently like ordinary fishermen to deceive passing aircraft. They could approach the coast in the evening, so that the skipper could fix his position before darkness fell and thus be sure of making an accurate landfall however dark the night. Once inside the leads success and safety would depend on luck, bravado, and a good look-out.

Such were our expectations; but in the summer of 1941 we had a lot of administrative work to do, with no precedents other than those of fiction to guide us, before we could put these theories into practice. Such boats as were not undergoing repair in the harbour of Lerwick, which is the only town in Shetland, were anchored in an inlet called Cat Firth, which lay about ten miles north of the town, and three miles from Mitchell's house of Flemington. The coasts of Shetland are so deeply indented that it is said no point on the island is more than three miles from some arm of the sea. But most of the fjords, or voes, as they are called in the islands, are straight, and the gales, which blow from every direction in winter, drive steep and dangerous seas into each of them in turn. Cat Firth was the safest anchorage in the neighbourhood of Lerwick; but it was by no means ideal for our purpose. We thought we must keep our boats in a deserted spot so that their cargoes could be loaded without causing too much gossip. Lerwick itself was therefore ruled out as a base. But though Cat Firth was sufficiently deserted, the water alongside its pier was only deep enough for dinghies. Also we needed some kind of accommodation ashore, and there was none in Cat Firth. The crews of the boats had been living aboard, but this was too uncomfortable and too bad for their health. The very least we could do with ashore would be a canteen, a bathhouse and a drying room for clothes. Besides, as I was to look after the boats we thought I ought to live close enough to them to keep an eye on them at all times, so that I too needed some kind of shelter near the shore.

So Mitchell and I spent many of our evenings during June of that year looking for a better anchorage. It was a delightful occupation. At supper we would choose a promising place from the map, and afterwards get out the car and set off to visit it. In the calm and serene 'white nights' of the northern summer, which Shetlanders call the Summer Dim, the islands are very beautiful; and I have happy recollections of exploring deserted bays and coves, where the seals watched

us with inquisitive stares, and the seabirds swooped at our heads in protest of our intrusion; and of watching the yellow sunlight gilding the sea and the skerries and the barren hills till it faded into a gentle dusk which soon became dawn; and of coming back to the queer and sinister house at Flemington to make tea and talk ourselves to sleep. It was many years before I enjoyed again such carefree days in Shetland, and it was then that I first felt a fondness for the islands, which, through all the troubles which lay before us, I never lost.

But we did not find what we were seeking, and I began to make plans for rebuilding the pier at Cat Firth and putting up Nissen huts on shore. However, one Sunday in July, when I was just shifting the first lorry-loads of shingle to the pier, Mitchell went with one of the staff officers of our London headquarters to a place we had often considered on the map, but always turned down because it was twenty-seven miles from Lerwick, which we thought was too far. It was called Lunna Voe, and when they came back they told me they thought it was hopeful. I persuaded them to drive out there again the same evening, and as soon as I saw Lunna Voe I felt sure it was the place for us.

To get there, we had to drive north on the main road of Shetland for ten miles, as far as the hamlet of Voe. Then we turned to the right by a moor road, which ran down to the head of a firth after two or three miles, and there, at first glance, seemed to stop. But there was a gate, and beyond it the road, a little diminished, wound on along the side of the firth, and crossed a plain dotted with crofts. Then came the head of another firth, with a cluster of cottages, and again an apparent end. But again a gate gave on to a farther road, by now no more than a track with a grass-grown centre, which led by a rocky shore grown with yellow flags, up a hill and across a desolate moor. At a turn in the road we suddenly saw on our left the magnificent sweep of Yell Sound, and beyond it the northern island of Yell and Fetlar, and Unst, and the rocks called the Ramna Stacks pricking the sunset like monstrous fangs. At the next turn there was Lunna: a patch of

green in the midst of brown heather, a small landlocked bay with a quay and a roofless stone building at its head, and above, on the hillside, a large, gaunt, grey house.

I have always had a liking for bleak and lonely places, and perhaps it was on romantic grounds that I first determined that Lunna should be our base. I think Mitchell and our friend from headquarters were influenced in the same way; for the wild, desolate and deserted appearance of the place, and its remoteness, suggested perfectly the smugglers' haunt of fiction. But we had to support our romance with reason. Luckily that was not difficult. The house was to let, and it could accommodate thirty-five men. There were plenty of outhouses for stores and explosives and ammunition. The quay was built of great blocks of stone and had enough water for our boats to lie alongside for six hours of the tide. The only other buildings in sight were a farmhouse, a manse and an ancient church; and the bay was so placed that our boats could come and go on their errands without being seen by anyone, even the coastguards. The anchorage seemed to be safe, and when a few days later I brought one of the boats up to survey it I found that the depth was just right—from four to five fathoms.

All these advantages seemed well to outweigh the disadvantage of the distance from Lerwick, which was our only source of supply, and of the indifferent road. We reported to headquarters on the virtues of Lunna, answered the questions which convention compelled them to ask, and very soon leased the place furnished.

The acquisition of Lunna completed the material resources which we could foresee we should need during the coming winter. Lunna was to house the operational crews, with myself in charge, and the boats were to be anchored there. Our office remained in Lerwick, where communications were more reliable and the naval and army headquarters were close at hand, so that the ciphers and other secret documents we kept were under better protection than we could have given them outside the town. Flemington was retained as a place where

agents could be kept in seclusion while they waited for passage, and Mitchell continued to live there. Stocks of arms and explosives which we were to export were cached in a number of dumps throughout the islands, one of which was in the dungeon of the ruined medieval castle of the Earls of Zetland in the village of Scalloway. We had a lorry, a big shooting brake, and a small Ford.

Our human resources were less adequate. We were a queer mixture of military and civilian. Mitchell and I were the only commissioned officers—he army and I navy. The forty-odd Norwegian seamen were civilians, paid a weekly wage of £4, with free food and lodging and a bonus of £10 for each trip they made to Norway. The shore staff consisted of three British sergeants, Almond, Sherwood and Olsen; a civilian British shorthand typist and cipherer, Mr. Norman Edwards; a Norwegian cook at Lunna; and two local girls as cook and housemaid at Flemington. It became obvious as soon as our operations started that this staff was much too small, but there was naturally a delay before it could be increased, and by the time help arrived, towards the end of the year, we were all exhausted.

But during the summer, although there was plenty to do, nothing was of immediate importance, and we were able to enjoy our work. I was particularly happy on the days I spent at Lunna, making preparations at the house and the anchorage for the arrival of the boats and their crews. There were inventories to be made, supplies of peat and coal and food and paraffin to collect, and much shifting of furniture. The pier had to be repaired and resurfaced. The installation of the telephone needed six miles of new poles and lines. Outhouses had to be adapted as stores for large stocks of arms, navigational equipment and ships' stores, and a small standing stock of saboteurs' implements—explosive, fuses and firing devices of different kinds, incendiary bombs, hand grenades, and such things as knuckle dusters, Benzedrine tablets, compasses, torches, maps and Norwegian clothes.

I chose for myself a small room on the first floor as an office and sitting-room, and a smaller one next to it as bedroom; and most of my idle moments were spent in admiring the view from the windows. Although Lunna was on the east side of the island, the house was built on the western slope of a hill, and its front windows overlooked an isthmus, two hundred yards wide, which joined the long narrow peninsula of Lunna Ness to the mainland. On the left or south side of the isthmus was a wide, open inlet called Vidlin Voe, full of skerries and reefs, where the last echoes of the Atlantic swell always broke in a slow, powerful rhythm. On the right was our anchorage. At one time it had been an open bay with two small islands in its mouth; but each of the islands had joined to the mainland with a spit of shingle, and in this way the bay had been nearly enclosed. It was four hundred yards in diameter, and almost a perfect natural harbour. In the prosperous days of herring curing in Shetland it had been used as a landing-place for fish, and to this fact we owed our pier, as well as the roofless stone building near it, which I was told had once been a curing station, and which I intended to turn into a workshop.

On the isthmus itself there were signs of more ancient buildings, which the Ordnance Survey maps marked as a monastery. There was also the very old, very small church, which perhaps had been built by the monks, for even before the eviction of crofters in the nineteenth century, Lunna can hardly have been the centre of a parish. No legend or record remained of the people who had built it; but I thought I could understand why they had chosen to build there, for the place had a remote and simple beauty.

Our anchorage opened north-west to an arm of Yell Sound, and from my windows I could see, beyond the island which guarded the entrance, a series of inlets—Swining Voe, Colla Firth, Dales Voe—in the mainland of Shetland; and out to the right the holms and rocks where the tides from the Atlantic to the North Sea swept through the sound in an eight-knot race. Beyond all were the Shetland hills, whose

colours and contours were always changing under the slanting sunlight and fast-driven mist and rain; and winding up and down among them the narrow rough road which led back, in the end, to Lerwick.

Such was the place where our saga was begun. To me it gave endless pleasure, even in darkness and storm and snow; but to tell the truth I met few other people who liked it; and as I made ready that summer I constantly wondered what the men of the crews would say when they saw it. I had met very few of them, and I had been told they were difficult people to please or control; so I waited with some foreboding for them to come back from their leave.

A day came at the end of July when the house was ready, and the crews with five of the boats were waiting in Lerwick. Mitchell was away in England, but he had left orders for us to move in as soon as we could. So I told the crews to start on the three hours' sea passage to Lunna, and drove there myself with the Norwegian cook and Sergeant Sherwood. I spent the afternoon giving some kind of warning to the farmer and the minister of the church concerning the disturbance of their peace which might be expected, and asking them and others to help to foster discretion among the few local people who might pass by Lunna and see something of what we were doing. Sherwood finished the fifty-nine blackout shutters, and Harald Albertsen the cook, an amiable rascally retired ship's steward with a passion for photographs of the nude and of the royal family, pottered about in the kitchen. It grew late; the boats were long overdue (boats usually are), and I began to wonder how they would manage the entrance to the bay in the dark. Then at dusk, as if symbolic of our future at Lunna, everything happened at once; a pressure lamp started leaking and burst into flames, Albertsen complained that the supper was spoiling, and I pulled the plug of a water-closet which had not been used, and found a few minutes later a cascade of water down the stairs. As I ran for a mop and a bucket I heard the tonk-tonk of our engines and saw the five ships coming into the voe.

We put out the lamp, and I gave Sherwood the bucket and ran down to the pier to point out the best places to anchor. When the boats were secured I brought the crews up to the house, and they took off their caps and wiped their feet, and went in on tip-toe, saying, 'But this is a palace,' and 'Does the king of Shetland live here?' I was pleased; but, I thought, you will soon get used to all this and want something better; and so they did.

There was still a month before the nights would be long enough for operations to begin, and that month gave me time to study the characters of the men of the crews and to discover the delicate nature of my own position. Most of the men were fishermen, and no fisherman of any nation can be driven; he is brought up to depend on nobody and to call nobody his master. Our men had been recruited among the Norwegian refugees in London, where it had been emphasised that they were volunteering for a dangerous job, and where they had been offered rates of pay which were much higher than those in the services. This had increased their natural unwillingness to be ordered about by anyone. Fortunately both Mitchell and I disliked doing anything without knowing the reason for it, and therefore had no desire to make other people do so; and, in fact, neither of us had any means of punishing a man or of enforcing our orders; we could only dismiss an offender from the unit, and that, as everyone knew, we did not want to do because it was difficult to get new recruits. I soon learned that unless I was able and willing to explain step by step the connection between any job at Lunna and the success of our voyages, it was better to leave the job undone. This principle was a strain on our patience and wasted a good lot of time. But it was both inevitable and fundamentally just; and it had its small triumphs in the end.

But petty troubles were forgotten as soon as our first operation was arranged. In the middle of August we were told to make ready to take a messenger to a point a little north of Bergen in order to

re-establish contact with a party of army officers who had begun to form an 'underground' force in Bergen itself. The messenger's orders were to find a certain lieutenant, hand him a good supply of Norwegian money, and tell him we had a cargo of eight tons of sabotage stores ready in Shetland to be shipped. They were to arrange a landing place for the stores, and we were to pick up the messenger again a week after landing him.

The boat which we chose for this first trip was the *Aksel*, a cutter of medium size, sixty-five feet in overall length, with a hundred-horsepower engine. Her skipper was a young fisherman called August Naeroy, who had done several trips before and had a high reputation as a seaman. His engineer was Mindur Berge, a gentle young giant who lived near Ålesund, and had an instinctive and loving understanding of machinery, together with a patent honesty and a quiet common sense which made him one of the leaders of public opinion in our gang. There were three others in the crew: Ivar Brekke, a quiet boy who was inclined to go on doing his job with so little fuss that he got less credit for it than he deserved; Andrew Gjertsen, a second mate from the merchant service; and Bård Grotle. Bård was one of our greatest characters, though at that time he had not begun to emerge as a leader, and I saw him only as a tall and untidy west-coast fisherman, with a shock of tow hair and a merry twinkle in a pair of bright blue eyes.

Fitting out the messenger himself was my first experience of dealing with an agent's needs, and like most novices I began with a childish enjoyment of the whole business which in time gave way to an admiration for the courage of the agents themselves, coupled with a cynical belief that much of the gear we supplied them with might have been invented by grown-up schoolboys playing at spies. This messenger's wad of Norwegian notes had to be hidden, and I spent a whole day unsealing a tin of Norwegian tobacco, packing the money inside it, and soldering it together again. I was rather pleased with the