



# Kompani Linge & the real heroes of Telemark

## Did you know that the 'heroes of Telemark' trained in Glenmore Forest Park?

Just outside Glenmore Visitor Centre you'll find a memorial to a company of Norwegian resistance fighters who were based in Glenmore during the Second World War. They trained in the mountains, forest and on the shores of Loch Morlich for daring raids against the Nazi forces occupying Norway.

### The plaque reads:

#### "Kompani Linge

This stone was erected by the people of Badenoch in honour of the gallant company of Norwegian patriots who lived among them & trained in these mountains 1941-1945 to prepare for operations in occupied Norway.

By skilful & daring raids on military & industrial targets they harassed the enemy & denied them vital supplies.

These dangerous missions were not carried out without losses, 57 brave men of Kompani Linge gave their lives in our common cause."

## Norwegian resistance fighters join the SOE

When the Germans occupied Norway in 1940 many Norwegian military personnel, volunteers and members of the Norwegian resistance fled to the UK. They wanted to train to fight the occupying Nazis in their homeland.

The training was conducted by the British Special Operations Executive (SOE), whose aim was to create agents highly skilled in 'irregular warfare' and survival techniques. These agents could then drop behind enemy lines to hit the Nazis in guerrilla attacks on industrial plants and railway lines.

Although the Norwegian training school was originally based near Henley-on-Thames in England, the terrain proved to be unsuitable for the outdoor training needed. In 1941, the Company moved to three sites in the Scottish Highlands near Aviemore, collectively known as STS 26. These were at Drumintoul Lodge, Forest Lodge and Glenmore Lodge (now Cairngorm Lodge Youth Hostel), near to Glenmore Visitor Centre.

## A perfect training ground

The vast alpine landscape of the Cairngorms and surrounding forests offered the ideal place to train the Norwegian volunteers in mountain survival, bombing and sabotage. As well as vast forests and lochs, they were also close to the imposing Cairngorm mountains. The harsh mountain plateau of the Cairngorms was the most similar landscape to the vast Hardangervidda plateau near the Vemork power plant in Rjukan, Telemark.

You can still find evidence of the training the Norwegian resistance fighters did here. Remnants of disused railway lines they practiced blowing up can be seen in the sand near the shore of Loch Morlich. Look out for sparkles in the sand at the beach – these are particles of glass from explosive devices.

## Why 'Kompani Linge'?

The Norwegian unit of the SOE was officially called STS 26 but has become known as Kompani Linge in honour of the unit's inspirational early leader, Captain Martin Linge (1894-1941).

Although wounded from earlier fighting, Captain Martin Linge arrived in Britain from Norway in 1940 ready to fight for his country's freedom. He understood how vulnerable the occupying Nazi forces would be to sabotage attacks by specially trained men who knew the country, the language, and its customs.

Sadly, Captain Linge was killed in action in December 1941, as he led his troops during the joint Norwegian and allied troops attack on Maaloy known as 'Operation Archer'.

Captain Linge's death was a heavy loss for the company, but his outstanding contribution as a soldier and a leader became a great inspiration for members of the company, which became known as 'Kompani Linge'.



## Stopping Hitler's atomic ambitions

The Vemork hydro plant in the remote area of Telemark, Norway, was the only place in the world that produced heavy water (deuterium oxide), the key ingredient in the German atomic research programme.

The Allies were rightly worried that they would lose the war if Hitler developed an atomic bomb before them.

A daring plan was hatched to sabotage the remote hydro plant and stop the production of heavy water before it could be used to create an atomic bomb.

## A 'Most Secret' plan

'Operation Gunnerside' is renowned as one of the most important and daring acts of sabotage in all of WWII. You can see some of the plan details in the original 'Operational Instruction' from 1943 included in the information panel at Glenmore Visitor Centre.

A small group from the Kompani Linge unit was chosen to carry out the mission, led by 23-year-old Joachim Rønneberg.

## Surviving in the wild

Before the planned raid on the heavy water plant could be carried out, a four-member advance team parachuted into the area, landing on the inhospitable Hardangervidda plateau in October 1942. Their role was to make local connections and gather as much information as possible about the target. Their training around Glenmore was vital – they survived in secret in the extreme winter conditions for four months before meeting up with the members of Operation Gunnerside.

## A stealth attack

The six-man team of Operation Gunnerside parachuted in to meet the advance party on 16th February 1943, but they missed their landing site and took a further five days to meet up with the team already on the ground.

They skied by night, rested by day, and reached the dramatic gorge late on the dark wintry night of 27th February 1943.

The hydro plant was perched on a ledge halfway up the side of a steep gorge. The usual route into the plant across a heavily guarded suspension bridge was out of the question, so the team planned to climb the steep gorge instead.

## An enduring legacy

Five hundred and thirty men were in Kompani Linge during the war, and they carried out many sabotage missions behind enemy lines in Norway. 57 men lost their lives to the cause.

Their bravery and commitment to freedom played a huge part in the Allies' success, and the heroic story of the brave Kompani Linge soldiers who trained in Glenmore Forest Park has gone on to become the stuff of WWII legend.

**Tusen takk!**  
**(a thousand thanks)**



They climbed down the steep rocky walls in the dark early hours of the 28th February, crossed the icy river and climbed up the opposite side, before sneaking into the Vemork plant and setting off explosives deep in the heart of the heavy water production.

The saboteurs completed their mission – blowing up over 500kg of heavy water – and fled Vemork before anyone knew what had happened. Incredibly, not one shot was fired; not one person was injured and all the men escaped to safety across the inhospitable Hardangervidda plateau, five of them by crossing 400km (250 miles) to Sweden on skis.

Although heavy water production did start up again, Operation Gunnerside had a huge impact in slowing Hitler's progress and became known as one of the most famous acts of sabotage in the war.

## Want to know more?

### Online

You can find out more about the efforts of the Norwegian resistance fighters at:

<https://www.nia.no/the-operations/>  
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/winter-fortress-neal-bascomb-heroes-of-telemark-nazi-atomic-bomb-heavy-water>

### Books

- The Real Heroes of Telemark by Ray Mears, 2003.
- The Winter Fortress: The Epic Mission to Sabotage
- Hitler's Atomic Bomb by Neal Bascomb, 2016.
- Kompani Linge (book in Norwegian) by Erling Jensen, Per Ratvik and Ragnar Ulstein, 1948.
- Hunting the Nazi Bomb, by Damien Lewis.

### Film & TV

The 1965 film 'The Heroes of Telemark' starring Kirk Douglas, Richard Harris, and Ulla Jacobsson gives a fictionalised account of the raid. The raid was also the subject of the 2015 television mini-series, 'The Saboteurs' (also known as 'The Heavy Water War'), broadcast in the UK on Channel 4.

### Visit

The Vemork Hydro Plant in Rjukan, Norway is now the Norwegian Industrial Workers Museum and is a popular visitor attraction. You can find out more about the heroes and the mission that changed the course of history and even go inside the heavy water cellar. [www.nia.no/en](http://www.nia.no/en)