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CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

THE LIBERATION CONVOY 2025



The Norwegian Maritime War Effort

During World War II, thousands of men, women, and children perished due to enemy actions, both at sea and on land. Several Norwegian vessels played a significant role in the Allied resistance against the Nazis during the war. Norwegian civilian and military ships were a crucial part of many operations and initiatives throughout the conflict, and their contributions are described as the most important Norwegian efforts towards the Allied victory.

Five of the Norwegian vessels that served during World War II have been restored and will arrive in Lerwick, Shetland, by 8 May 2025, as a tribute to the shared wartime history of Norway and the United Kingdom and to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe.

Participating vessels in the 2025 Liberation Convoy:

- KNM Hitra
- D/S Hestmanden
- M/K Andholmen
- M/K Erkna
- M/K Heland

These historic vessels will sail from Bergen in early May 2025, with a celebration in Lerwick, Shetland, on 8 May 2025. By 17 May 2025, the convoy is expected to reach Liverpool to celebrate Norway's Constitution Day with our British allies. During the visit, the vessels will offer a range of attractions for visitors. The ships will be open to the public with free entry at the various ports, providing a unique opportunity to explore the vessels and experience exhibitions, guided tours, films, and lectures.

The Shetlands Bus



The Shetland Bus and the Shetland Group are an important part of Norwegian war history. This was a secret Norwegian naval unit that, during World War II, transported resistance fighters, agents, and refugees back and forth between Shetland and Norway. The crew of these vessels was popularly known as the "Shetland Group." Later in the war, the group became part of the Royal Norwegian Navy and was renamed the "Royal Norwegian Special Naval Unit."

Special Operations Executive, Norwegian Section

SOE was established in the autumn of 1940, with a base in Shetland for operations against Norway. The aim was to create resistance groups, mainly composed of Norwegians, who could identify economic targets for the British, such as factories and power plants. These groups were tasked with sabotaging enemy communications, lighthouses, ferries, observation posts, and airfields. Additionally, they were involved in minelaying and provided assistance in connection with air and sea raids, as well as establishing radio communication.

To carry out these missions, fishing boats approved for Allied service were primarily used. Other fishing vessels were designated for fishing to supply food to the island region. Alongside the SOE, there was another special force known as Combined Operations (CO), led by Commander Ian Fleming, which was tasked with carrying out pinprick operations against the enemy. In March 1941, CO conducted a raid in the Lofoten Islands named Operation Claymore.

Following this, Fleming was assigned to assemble a group of boats from various countries to carry out several operations during Christmas 1941. These operations involved the Royal Norwegian Navy, the Norwegian Independent Company No. 1 (later known as Kompani Linge), and the Shetland Bus.

The mission was to procure 12 small fishing boats, referred to as the Small Vessels Pool, with a strong recommendation to use Norwegian naval personnel to crew these vessels. A few days before Fleming received the assignment, the leadership of the SOE had a meeting with a Norwegian naval officer in "The Marines Motorboat Flotilla" in the English Channel. This meeting laid the foundation for the

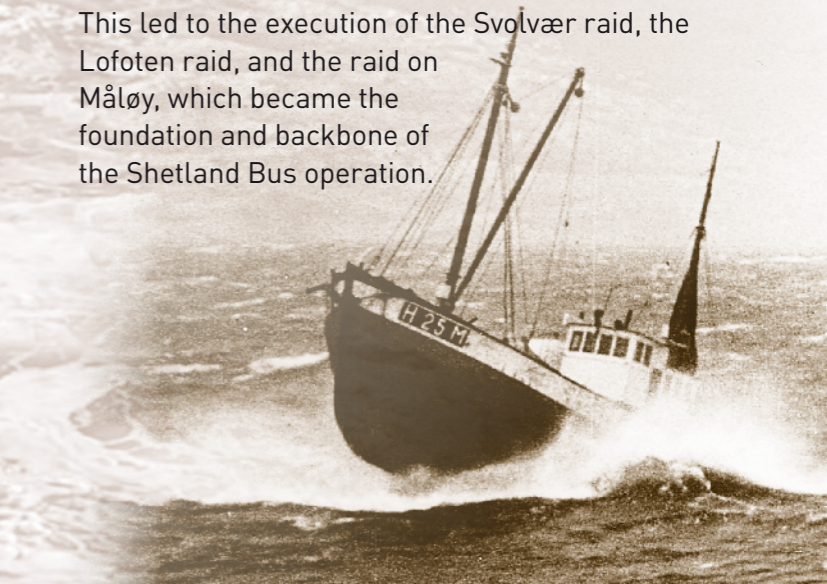
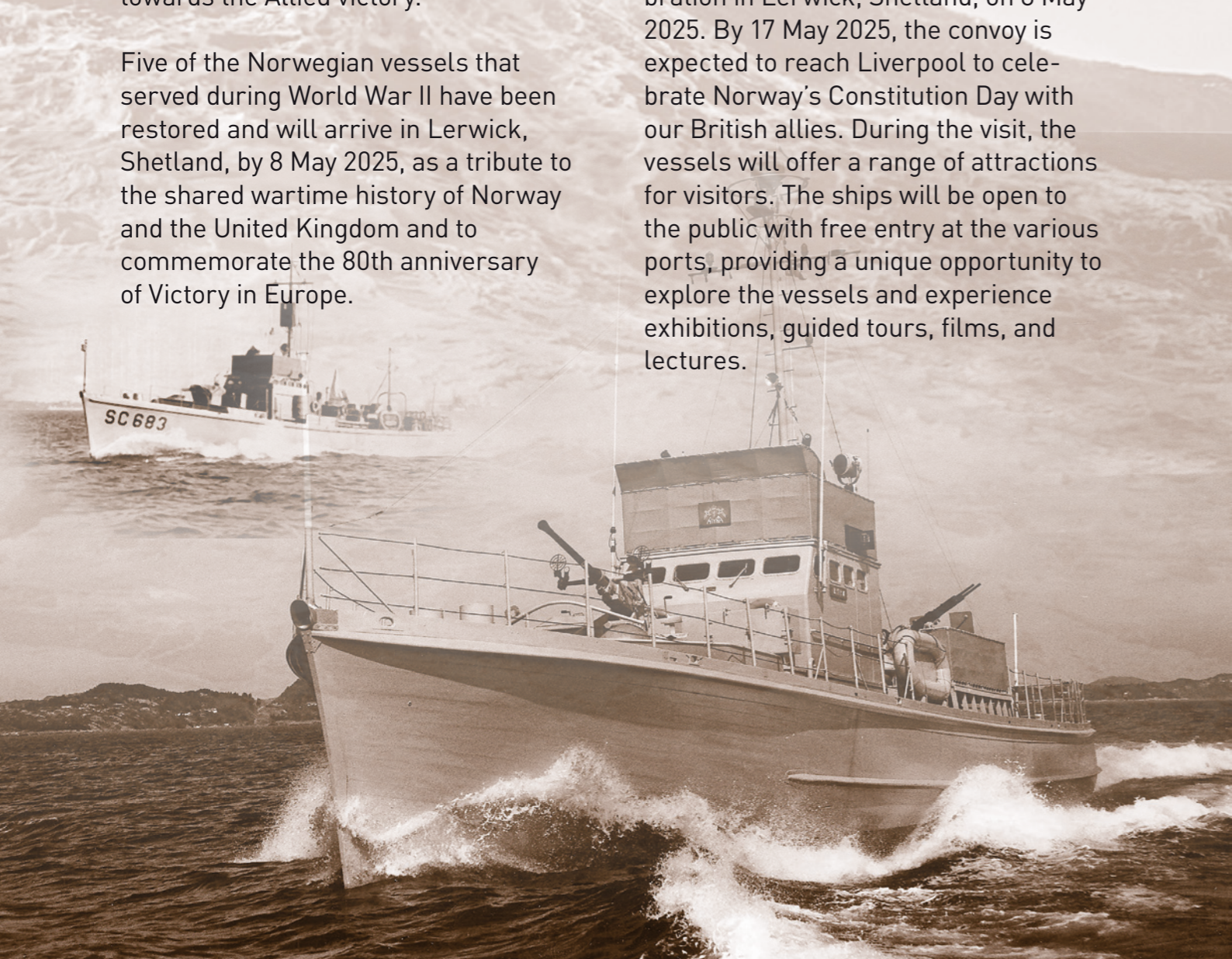
Norwegian MTB flotilla (motor torpedo boats) and involved training Norwegian personnel to attack German shipping using camouflaged, heavily armed boats. At the same time, fishing boats were to attack various ports.

From June 1942 until the end of the war, the MTBs were organised as the 30th (N) MTB Flotilla, later renumbered to the 54th (N), and eventually based in Lerwick. The MTBs were also used for inserting and extracting saboteurs and agents to and from occupied Norway, along with the American-built submarine chasers, Hitra, Hessa, and Vigra, based in Scalloway, Shetland. The flotilla had at its disposal eight MTBs of the seagoing "Fairmile type D," with a top speed of over 30 knots. Norway operated a total of 21 vessels of this type during the war, though never more than 12 at a time.

From November 1942 to May 1945, the Norwegian MTBs carried out a total of 161 missions along the Norwegian coast, from Trondheim in the north to Kristiansand in the south. During the war, they sank a total of 27 ships, including seven warships.

Eight MTBs were lost due to fire, sea damage, explosions, or similar causes, and 20 crew members lost their lives in artillery battles, accidental explosions, bombings, or executions. The mission of SOE and Combined Operations (CO) gradually became more focused on supporting the local resistance movement, MILORG, and weakening specific targets, particularly in northern and western Norway. The task of training 40-50 Norwegians was assigned to Captain Martin Linge.

This led to the execution of the Svolvær raid, the Lofoten raid, and the raid on Måløy, which became the foundation and backbone of the Shetland Bus operation.



War Heroes

Lars Grotnæss

During World War II, Lars Grotnæss was the captain of the M/S Borgestad.

In February 1941, the ship was part of a convoy travelling from Freetown to England. Borgestad was designated as the convoy leader, and they sailed without escort. On 12

February, the convoy was attacked by the feared German heavy cruiser, Admiral Hipper. Grotnæss and his crew, all civilian sailors, demonstrated remarkable courage when faced with the superior enemy.

The crew must have immediately recognised the gravity of the situation. Grotnæss ordered the convoy to scatter, and ship after ship obeyed. He quickly realised that Borgestad had no chance of escaping. Determined to give the other ships in the convoy a chance to flee, he decided to sacrifice himself and his vessel. As a diversionary tactic, he steered Borgestad directly towards the cruiser while the gun crew loaded and fired at Hipper with their single small cannon as quickly as they could.

A close-quarters battle ensued, with Hipper using around 1,000 shells, several torpedoes, and projectiles to finally sink Borgestad. They came so close that the captain of Hipper could read the ship's name. Borgestad went down with all 31 people on board, including one woman and three individuals under the age of 18. Grotnæss had led his ship and crew towards certain death, but their sacrifice allowed 12 other ships in the convoy to escape.



Leif Andreas Larsen

One of the most famous members of the Shetland Bus operation was Leif A. Larsen (1906-1990), known as "Shetlands-Larsen." He helped train Kompani Linge in Scotland from 1940 and became the most highly decorated Allied naval officer by the end of World War II. Larsen and the Shetland Bus hold a significant place in Norwegian maritime history. In addition to Lerwick, the capital of Shetland, Scalloway was the most important port for the Shetland Bus operations.

In October 1942, Larsen led an expedition to attack the battleship Tirpitz with "human torpedoes" in Åsenfjorden, near Trondheim. The attempt failed because the torpedoes malfunctioned during a storm. Larsen then scuttled the fishing boat and led the crew to Sweden, where they were sent back to Britain. He twice shipwrecked along the Norwegian coast but managed to return to Britain each time.

89 trips were made with fishing vessels before they were replaced by three American-built submarine chasers, which carried out an additional 116 missions along the Norwegian coast. When German surveillance along the coast intensified in 1943, the Shetland Bus was assigned three smaller American submarine chasers—KNM Hitra, KNM Hessa, and KNM Vigra—which the Royal Norwegian Navy had taken over.

The fishing boats and submarine chasers collectively rescued 373 refugees from Norway, landed 192 agents, and delivered around 400 tons of weapons and supplies to the Norwegian resistance.



The Effort ... and the Losses

The following vessels made up the Shetland Bus fleet:

- KNM Hitra
- KNM Vigra
- KNM Hessa

The Shetland Bus made over 200 trips in total. Unfortunately, ten fishing boats were lost, and 44 men lost their lives.

During World War II, the Royal Norwegian Navy operated 118 warships flying the Norwegian flag. Of these, 20 were lost. In total, 933 men gave their lives in the Naval service following the German invasion of Norway.

The losses in the merchant fleet were even greater, both in terms of ships and human lives. Even before 9 April 1940, while Norway was still neutral, nearly 400 Norwegian sailors lost their lives, and 58 ships were lost. By 8 May 1945, a total of 473 Norwegian ships were sunk, in addition to 199 ships in the domestic fleet.

Including passengers, more than 4,000 people died on board Norwegian ships, of which just under 1,000 were foreigners. In addition, there were deaths from other causes, such as suicide, illness, and other accidents.



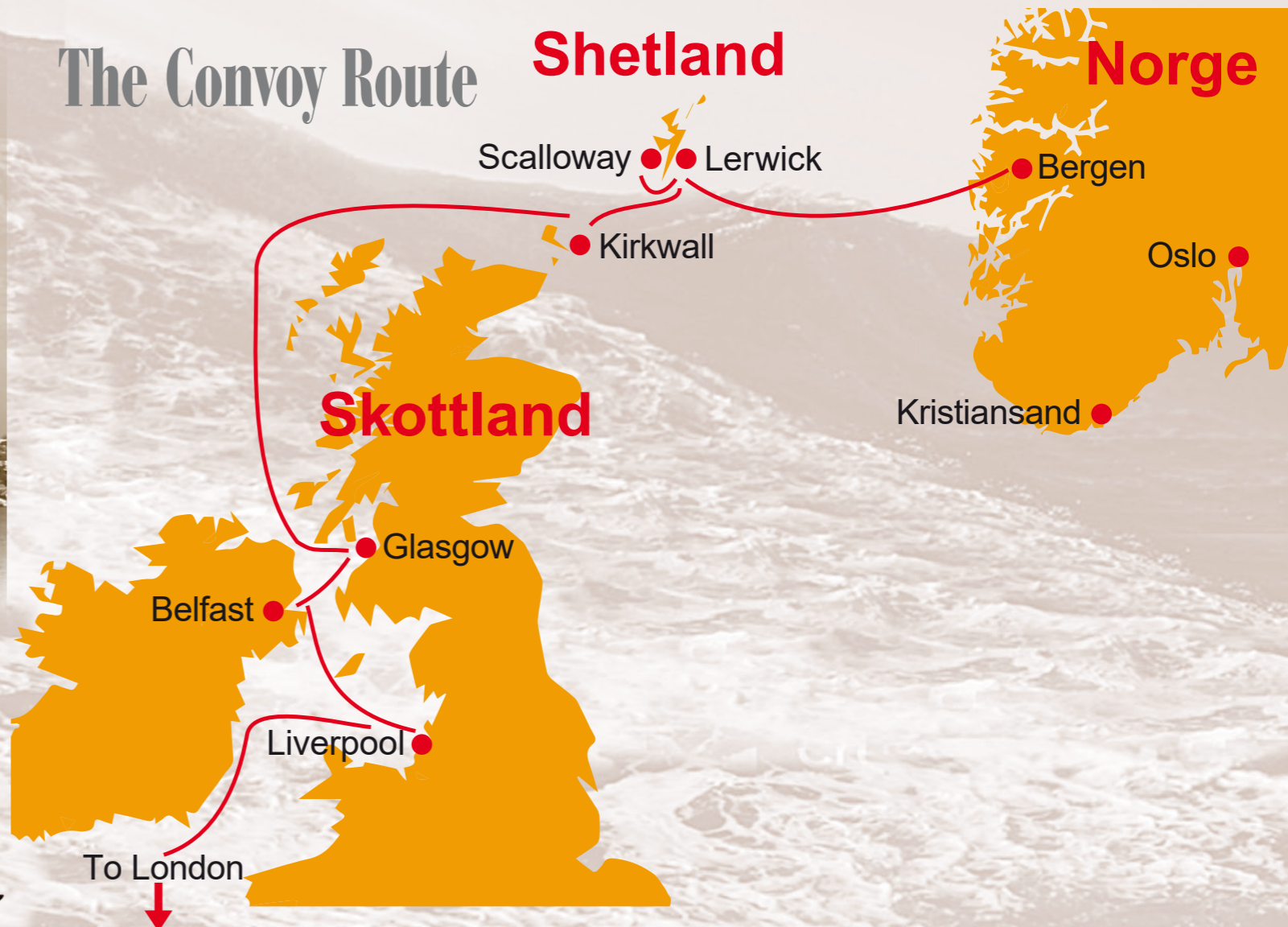
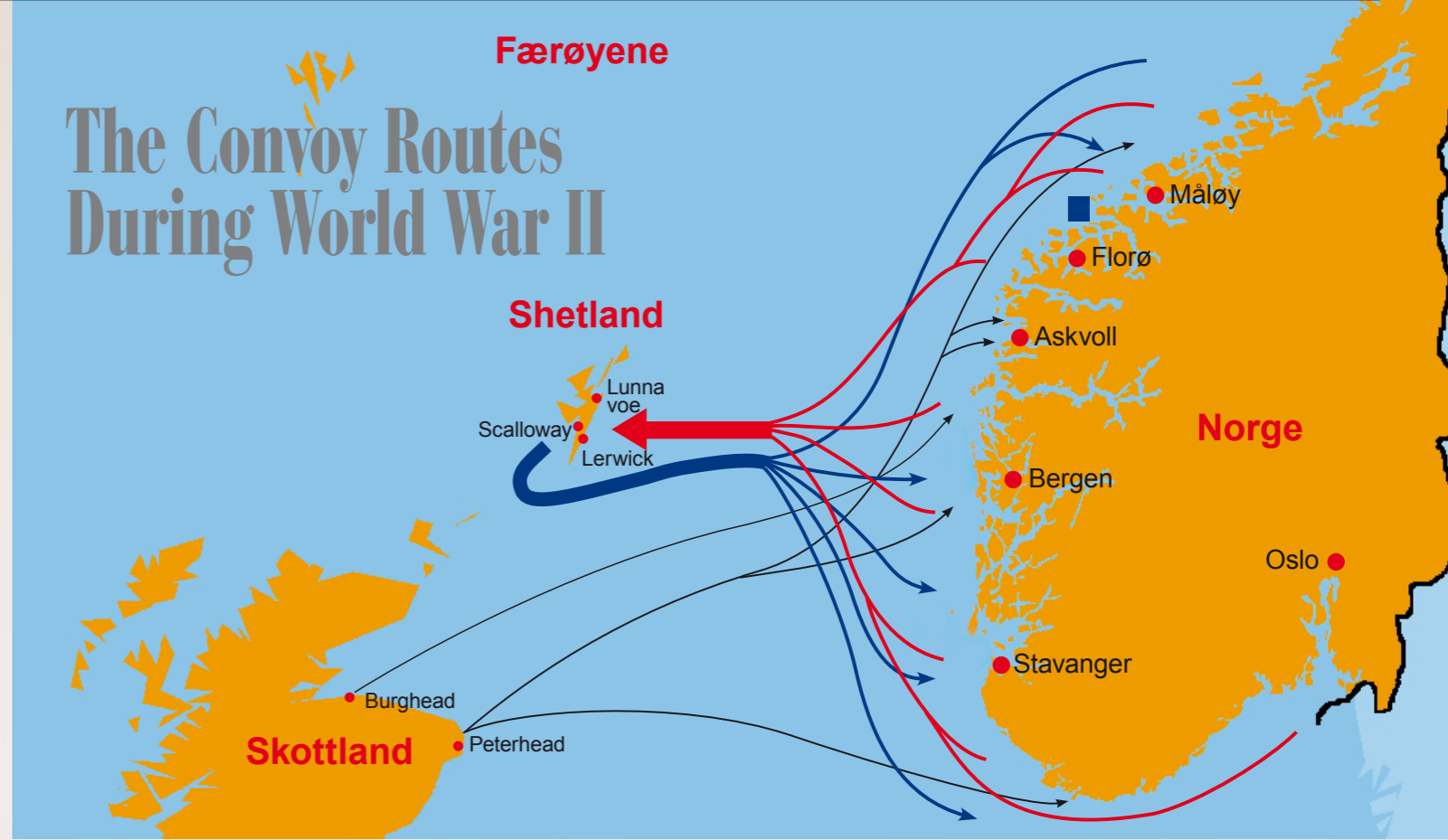
The Merchant Fleet at War

When the war broke out in 1940, there were around 33,000 civilian Norwegian sailors on board Norwegian ships worldwide. Among them, 4,000 were between the ages of 14 and 18. For the sailors, several years lay ahead, marked by sailing under extreme conditions, fear of death, uncertainty, and life in exile, with many cut off from contact with home. Approximately 4,000 of them never returned.

The efforts of the Norwegian war sailors were the most important Norwegian contribution to the Allied victory. After the war, many of the survivors struggled with severe aftereffects and long-term injuries. They felt abandoned by the authorities and did not receive the help they needed or the recognition they deserved. The treatment of the war sailors has been described as the greatest shame in Norwegian history, and an official apology from the government did not come until 2013.

D/S Hestmanden – Norwegian War Sailors Museum

D/S Hestmanden is the only remaining Norwegian merchant ship that sailed abroad during not just one but two world wars. It is also the last surviving vessel from the Norwegian state-owned shipping company during World War II, Nortraship. Miraculously, Hestmanden avoided both bombs and torpedoes despite facing several hostile attacks. After extensive restorations, the ship was reopened in 2017 as the Norwegian War Sailors Museum and still sails today using its original engine. The ship now serves as a floating monument and national memorial to the war sailors.





The Liberation Convoy brings together both professionals and volunteers, including veteran sailors, historians, and other representatives from various Norwegian museums, media personnel, communications professionals, boat enthusiasts, and others. A prerequisite for the event's execution is financial support from the Norwegian government.

The following are already represented and have shown commitment: the Norwegian Embassy in London, the Royal Norwegian Navy, Norwegian companies active in the maritime sector, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the Norwegian-British Chamber of Commerce.

We welcome further engagement from individuals and organisations, including modern vessels that wish to participate in the Liberation Convoy.

Project Participants:

Vest-Agder-museet, KNM Narvik Foundation, Bergenhus Fortress Museum, Royal Norwegian Navy Band, Naval Museum.

Contributors:

Norwegian Ministry of Defence, Royal Norwegian Navy, Defense History Museum, Norwegian-British Chamber of Commerce.