



## What happened in Skjelfjord 1940?

- from the locals' point of view.

The information is based on material or interview with Hartvig Sverdrup (Snow Drop), George Harlow, Konrad Johnsen, Stan Hart, John Johnsen, Ella Myklebust, Aud Holst Sandnes and others.

*Written by Frid Arntzen / Photo: Bill Harlow*



Skjelfjord in April 1940.

The population is approximately about 200 persons. The population consisted of fish farmers. The village had a sheriff and a port for the local liner.

The inhabitants know little of the war's development in their immediate areas.

9. April there were rumors telling it was seen warships in Vestfjord. 10. April came the first two British ships into Skjelfjord. Hostile and Hotspur, one seriously injured.

*Photo: Hartvig Sverdrup*



11. April came HMS Penelope, with a long gash under the sea line after having run aground near by Tennholmen lighthouse outside Bodo.

*Photo: Hartvig Sverdrup*



Gradually, many boats - somewhere between 30 and 40 filled the fjord and a hectic activity occurred. Supply vessels came and went.

*Photo: Alstrup Adolfsen*



The inhabitants did not know what happened. No information was released. The presence of an allied fleet made the possibility of a German air attack likely. Not only life was in danger, but fish boats and livestock, to provide livelihood was in jeopardy. Among the locals the feelings about the allied was probably mixed.

*Photo: Bill Harlow*

We got some stories about the naval soldiers from the ships: These three guys photographed by Alstrup Adolfsen from Skjelfjord, came from the Polish ship ORP Blyskawica.

A large amount of soldiers came ashore only bringing tobacco and a ball. They played soccer on crusted snow.

The Holst family had contact with British from the ships in the fjord. Probably officers. They enjoyed supper together. One called Paddy the family was well acquainted with. They sent letters after Paddy left Skjelfjord, but the family never got any answer.

Stories tolled about soldiers suffering from bomb shock. They yelled and screamed - the local people witness one

falling down and got killed, after several ran up the steep mountains. Many children were afraid of these strangers with the strange behavior.



*Photo: Alstrup Adolfsen*



Keith Batchelor tolled us about his father serving on HMS Cossack, he was among those who held tea party for local children. Nobody in Skjelfjord has confirmed this, but on Lungaard school (3 km from Skjelfjord) British soldiers came to visit. They sang and played piano. Maybe the tea party was held here?

*Photo: Hartvig Sverdrup*

Bill Harlow, 19 years of age, served on HMS Penelope. Penelope got repair assistance in Skjelfjord for about a month.

During this time, Bill came ashore once. During the trip that lasted for about one hour, he met a boy 5 years of age. He gave him chocolate.

After 70 years, Bill learned that the boy is still alive and living in Skjelfjord. His name is Magnus Johan Pedersen, he is 75 years old today. They met again during the unveiling ceremony in Skjelfjord 28. August 2010.

*Photo: Bill Harlow*







In the Pentecost weekend in May the attacks from the German planes started. The aircrafts had flown over Skjelfjord many times without discovering the Allied fleet.

Boy messenger Stan Hart on HMS Penelope says; that day when the air attacks began, a new ship came into Skjelfjord. All ships had orders not to attack aircrafts, to avoid being discovered. The new ship opened fire and shortly after the attacks began. In the Pentecost weekend the attacks was massive.

After the first attack the parish priest came in head of a delegation and asked Hartvig Sverdrup convey the request to the British to leave Skjelfjord, in sake of the local population. Sverdrup (nicknamed Snowdrop by the British because the name was difficult to pronounce) was the contact person between the government and the Allied fleet. He was the one who requested the rescue vessel, food etc. He refused to convey the message. Some of the inhabitants was evacuated. Those who did not leave the village were taking shelter in a cave. Both elderly people and families with children stayed in the cave.

*Photo: Frid Arntzen*



None of the civilians were killed during the attacks. Several were on there way to feed the animals or gather seaweed when the attacks came and the impact was very close.

On HMS Penelope 5 men was killed and 7 injured. Among the killed was Paymaster Commander Sharp. Hartvig Sverdrup and the crew of the rescue vessel named Staerkodder was also present during the attack but was unharmed from the events.

*Photo: Hartvig Sverdrup*



Even today you can see the wounds in the ground after impact from German bombers in 1940 in Skjelfjord.

*Photo: Ranveig Myklebust*