

NORSO and the Norwegian connection

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Office of Strategic Services' Operational Groups, NORSO, and the Norwegian Connection



Photo: Signal Corps
Major Colby's Salute over the NORSO and Carpetbagger men lost in the mountain.

Erik Brun
99th Battalion Educational Foundation

In the November 7 issue of NAW, [we brought you the first half of a story about NORSO](#). The following is its long-overdue conclusion.

As the Allied front stabilized in northern Europe in the fall of 1944, the Norwegian Groups members returned to their bases and continued training in preparation for their next operation. Due to the rapid advances of the summer and hope for an early capitulation, the allied planners were rethinking the use of the Groups. Their type of mission was considered unwise in Germany proper, without an organized resistance movement to leverage. Norway still seemed to still be a viable target, but would not require both Groups.

So a hard call was made to select the members that would continue to train for Norway. The remaining Operational Groups (OG) members in the UK were offered a choice of being turned over to the replacement system or to volunteer for new OGs being formed for operations in China. Many of the Norwegians felt that the British would continue their monopoly on operations in Norway. In all, 29 of the Norsk OG men were on their way back to the States before morning. They enjoyed 30 days leave and then onward movement.



Photo: Erik Brun

The 99th Infantry and NORSO monument at Tennessee Pass, near ski Cooper on Highway 24.

A new officer had joined the Norwegians, Major William Colby. He was a wiry Irish Catholic, born in Minnesota but raised on the ski slopes of New England. He had led a successful Jedberg team after D-Day, one of the three man liaison cells who parachuted in to occupied territories to work with the Resistance. He would lead the Norwegian Operational Group now simply referred to as NORSO, as an extension of the original staff section, in a new operation that was planned to insert a team into central Norway. The plan would be called RYPE, Norwegian for "grouse," and was to interdict traffic along the highly channelized rail corridors that provided support to the dispersed German garrison of 400,000 in the country.

Colby began to mold the reformed Norwegian Operation Group into the initial force and a follow-on force that would remain in the United Kingdom. Operation Rype jumped into Norway on the night of March 24-25, 1945. Delivered by Carpetbagger B-24s, they dropped into the mountainous areas of Central Norway along the Swedish border.

The initial mission delivered four of the eight aircrafts' payloads in Norway successfully, one stick of the group landed in Sweden, and three aircraft returned to Scotland with their cargos. Despite this setback, the Rype group proceeded to attack the rail lines, severing a key land route for the Germans and entering the Americans into the Norwegian game. Those who did not get delivered in the second jump, and the interned team members, entered Norway via Sweden.

With the end of the war, the long-separated NORSO veterans were joined in Norway by their 99th brethren. The 99th, now acting as the third Battalion of the newly formed 474th Infantry Regiment (Separate), welcomed the Norwegian Royal Family to Oslo in June of 1945. As fate would have it, the 474th had been cadred by over a thousand members of another unit with Norway in its history, the First Special Service Force (the Devil's Brigade), including over 300 of General Darby's Rangers.

Tragically, in the subsequent sorties of the Rype mission, two fully loaded B-24s crashed in the bitter northern winter. With the exception of one flight officer, all aboard the aircraft were lost. As a somber memorial to those men and to the original ethnic source of the Operational Group, here is the NORSO Honor Roll of those aircraft:

Anderson, Robert N., T/3

Berge, Trygve, T/Sgt

Falck, Knut J., Cpl

Iverson, Bernard N., T/5

Jones, Blain C., 1st Lt

Kjelness, Edward E. S/Sgt

Meland, Leif E., T/5

Ottersland, Gerald, T/5

Rorvick, Johannes S. T/5

Sondeno, Eddie O., T/5

Seven of these ten OG members had originally volunteered from the 99th Infantry Battalion (Sep) at Camp Hale.

The remaining Member of the NORSO Honor Roll is Captain Harold J. Larson, who was killed in action leading Operation Percy Red OG members in an attack on an armored train near Limoges, France, on Aug. 11, 1944. He was also at Camp Hale with the 99th.

Camp Hale is a fitting place for a memorial to these men, some of the first among a proud tradition of American Fighting Men to refer to themselves as Special Forces. Would you like to help honor their service? If you would like to learn more, visit the 99th Webpage and Facebook group, or join our private Facebook group with the descendants and friends of NORSO.

References:

- OSS video clip filmed at the Congressional Country Club containing many of the Norwegian OG members: www.youtube.com/watch?v=veMVDEodFCY
- Operation Rype, 99th Infantry Battalion Educational Foundation Website: www.99battalion.org/index_files/rype.htm
- OSS Operational Groups: www.ossog.org

Recommended Books:

- The OSS Norwegian Special Operations Group in World War II, *Bruce H. Heimark, Forward by William Colby*
- You're stepping on my Cloak and Dagger, *Captain Roger Hall, NORSO II Commander*
- The 99th Battalion, *Gerd Nyquist, 2014 edition*

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