

**Commando Raid in Norway - III**

**Lead: To stop the Germans from developing an atomic bomb, the allied command in World War II determined to destroy the Norwegian plant that produced heavy water, a substance essential to nuclear research.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: The Norsk Hydro factory near the town of Vemork was located high on one side of a valley surrounded by minefields and treacherous cliffs. Aerial bombing was considered too dangerous. Local Norwegians still**

**worked there for the Germans who occupied the country in 1940.**

**The first attempt, a British commando raid, ended in disaster. In November, 1942, two gliders towed by Halifax bombers filled with explosives and soldiers got lost and crashed in the snow-covered mountains. The survivors were eventually captured, tortured by the Gestapo and shot. It was then decided that an advance team of Norwegians sent in to prepare the way for the first raid and which had not been captured, should become the core of a much smaller all-Norwegian attempt to blow up the plant, its invaluable electrolysis equipment, and the existing stocks of heavy water.**

**In late January, 1943, five Norwegians led Joachim Rønneberg parachuted into southern Norway. They hooked up with the advance party, which had only barely survived one of the bitterest Norwegians winters in memory, scaled the previously thought impassable slopes and attacked the plant from below. Taking the German guards completely by surprise they destroyed the equipment and all escaped with no loss of life on either side.**

**However, in August, 1943 word came from Norwegian underground agents employed in the factory, that the Germans, through repair efforts night and day, were once again producing heavy water at the plant. In**

**desperation, a huge raid involving nearly 500 Allied bombers attacked the plant and did considerable but not fatal damage, but the bombing raid convinced the Germans that they could not rely on the Norsk plant.**

**After the war German scientist Kurt Diebner testified that the elimination of Norwegian heavy water production was the main factor in the failure of the German atomic research. The sacrificial service of the raiders had paid off.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## **Resources**

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**Hinsley, F.H. (et.al.). *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1981.**