

Chance encounter unlocks boat's secret

By Marit McBride

Salt Spring resident Nils Christensen was taking his morning walk through Ganges on Sunday, October 14, 2001 when he spotted a sailboat named “*Duen*” that looked to be of Norwegian design.

He introduced himself to the owners, Michael and Manon Hobbis of Brentwood Bay, who confirmed that the 72-foot *Duen*, (Norwegian for “Dove”) was built in Norway in 1939.

Christensen told them he had a map that may be of interest to them. He went home and collected what was probably the only copy in Canada of a map entitled *The North Sea Traffic between Norway and Shetland/Scotland, 1940-1945*, and returned to the boat.

When Hobbis unfurled the map on the chart table they were astounded to see the name of their *Duen* listed as one of about 80 boats which were used to ferry Norwegians escaping Gestapo from occupied Norway in 1941.

Christensen is a former merchant marine who was involved in the liberation of Norway during World War II, and his brother is a map-maker in Norway.

Christensen has since spoken with the map's creator, who knows one of the passengers from that 1941 trip and was very interested to hear the fate of the *Duen*.

Apparently there were 38 refugees on board when the *Duen* sailed from Øklandsvagen, on the island of Bømlo, Norway on October 22, 1941. All were members of a resistance group that had been discovered and needed to flee for their lives.

Duen, skippered by Petter Draegebo, was headed for Lerwick on the Shetland Islands but unfortunately ran aground on Sumburgh Head. The boat was not seriously damaged, though, and all passengers made it to safety.



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Christensen also learned that in the 60 years since that covert operation, *Duen* has sailed extensively around the world, including Iceland, Hawaii, Venezuela, Galapagos, the Caribbean and Canada's Northwest.

The boat was purchased by the Hobbis family in 1986, was involved with the Coast Watch marine environmental program at Lester B. Pearson United World College from 1990-1997 and has been operating along the coastal waters of B.C. since 1998 where the Hobbises offer outdoor adventures with an emphasis on wildlife viewing, and natural and cultural history.

The Hobbises now have a little more history to offer about their stately sailboat and its clandestine activities, that if not for the chance encounter with Christensen, they may never have known. ❁

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