

A  
COAT  
DYED  
BLACK

A NOVEL OF THE  
NORWEGIAN RESISTANCE

---

Don Puggnetti Jr.



LEGACY HOUSE  
PRESS

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Copyright © 2022 Don Pugnetti Jr.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher.

Published by Legacy House Press, Gig Harbor, Washington  
[www.donpugnnettijr.com](http://www.donpugnnettijr.com)



Edited and designed by Girl Friday Productions  
[www.girlfridayproductions.com](http://www.girlfridayproductions.com)

Cover design: Emily Weigel  
Project management: Sara Spees Addicott  
Editorial production: Jaye Whitney Debber  
Image credits: cover © Shutterstock/Iakov Kalinin, Shutterstock/  
Melissa Madia, Shutterstock/Benoit Daoust

ISBN (hardcover): 978-1-7375953-0-4  
ISBN (paperback): 978-1-7375953-1-1  
ISBN (ebook): 978-1-7375953-2-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021920749

*To all the courageous Norwegian resistance fighters—men and women—who risked and gave their lives for the cause of freedom from Nazi tyranny*

# CHAPTER 1

**April 8, 1940**

From five miles off the Norwegian coast, Anders Kongsgaard cast a wary glance from his wheelhouse window. Odd shapes bobbed on the sea ahead. He stroked the stubble on his unshaven face. His trawler was too far away for him to identify what was out there. What he could pick out were objects scattered in jagged heaps across the rolling waves of the North Sea.

The captain of the *Hildur VI* had seen debris of all sorts on these waters since he was a small boy fishing with his father and grandfather. But this morning was a first. Never had he come across what appeared to be a large floating junkyard at sea.

Rotten for fishing, he thought, but the peculiar sighting had to be checked out. The skipper adjusted the wheel and pushed the boat's course a touch more on a north-northwest heading.

Behind him, thick fog enshrouded Norway's south coast and his home port of Lillesand, a fishing town of about 750 people. The dense white air hung wet and heavy when he set out before daybreak. The conditions kept most of the fleet in port. Now, the fog was dissipating, the sun was rising, and seas were calm. If only, Kongsgaard thought, he could combine such a glorious day with a good catch.

As the trawler chugged closer toward the mess, Hans Martensen, the lone crew member, stood at the bow and spotted the debris, too. He pointed forward, turned back toward the wheelhouse, and shrugged his shoulders. The captain grabbed binoculars and shouted back, "Take the wheel, would you?"

They traded places. From the foredeck, the captain aimed the glasses dead ahead where sea swells jostled the unfamiliar objects.

The *Hildur VI* closed in, handing Kongsgaard a better view. His eyelids flickered, clearing his vision. There were bodies riding the waves. Not human bodies. Larger than human. The four-legged kind. Horses.

Bloated horse carcasses were entangled in a wide swath of floating wood debris. He counted ten horses. Then a dozen. He stopped counting at twenty-one. A long piece of a ship's rail drifted among the rubble.

He motioned for Martensen to throttle down. Dead horses thudded against the hull as the boat chugged forward.

As the trawler broke clear of the gruesome carnage, muffled shouts reached Kongsgaard over the drone of the engine. He raised the binoculars and scanned across the boat's path. After a couple of swipes, he spotted men in a listing lifeboat waving their arms and yelling. He stuck one arm high to acknowledge them.

When *Hildur VI* pulled alongside, the lifeboat rode low in the water with waves splashing over the rail. The skipper wondered what kept it afloat. Inside, five men sat waist deep in sloshing seawater, three moving and two still.

One by one, the captain and his mate pulled three men up onto the trawler. The men's long military coats shed steady streams of water onto their boots. They collapsed to their knees on the deck, folding their arms across their shivering bodies.

Kongsgaard pointed at the two still in the raft. "Are they alive?"

One of the rescued men shook his head. “*Nein.*”

The captain nodded. The bodies would be left behind.

The survivors were taken belowdecks. The skipper looked them over. Swastikas on uniforms beneath their coats identified them. German soldiers. These were not the grizzled battlefield faces of Third Reich warriors he had seen in newsreels. These were the youthful faces of boys who looked like they belonged in a classroom.

The soldiers received heavy blankets. Kongsgaard pulled a pack of smokes from his pocket, gave each man a cigarette, and struck a light. The soldiers nodded their thanks but said nothing.

Curiosity about the accident filled the captain’s head. Why was the wreckage of a ship carrying German soldiers so close to Norway’s coast? War in Europe created military skirmishes on the North Sea, though usually much farther out. He also wondered about the horses. The captain wanted to ask, but language was a barrier. So, he refrained from questioning the soldiers. One of the men, however, did volunteer a word the two Norwegians understood: “Torpedo.” As the man in a soggy uniform said it, he lifted his arms up and out.

“Makes sense,” Kongsgaard muttered. He surmised that an Allied submarine must have chased a troopship into Norwegian territorial waters and launched a torpedo that blew it apart.

The *Hildur VI* turned back to port, and the captain radioed on his ship-to-shore to alert the harbormaster’s office that he was returning with shipwrecked German soldiers. The fishing was over before it had begun.



Bjørn Erliksen built a fire in the brick living room fireplace. He then brought a bottle of Hansa beer from the kitchen, poured a glass half full, and put them both on a small square table next

to his favorite chair. He had become a creature of habit. Each evening imitated the one before. He turned on his Huldra radio and set the lighted semicircular dial to NRK, Norway's national network, to catch up on the day's news. Finally, he nestled into an upholstered wingback chair.

Bjørn leaned toward the fire and stretched out his arms with open hands, savoring the warmth and listening to the crackle and snap of birch and fir. He knew how to build a fire. Growing up, he had risen early for an assigned chore to heat the house with a well-fed blaze. The responsibility was critical during those cold Norwegian winters. Electricity had come to his small farming village of Erlikvåg on Norway's west coast in the early 1920s, and, with it, increased use of electric heaters. But in his household, the central fireplace remained a primary heat source.

Bjørn glanced up at a framed photograph gracing the white wood mantel. The photo was a portrait of his parents. He thought of his mother, Kerste. As he had done so many times, he wondered what she was like. His eyelids softened. He had been told about her, but he never knew her. She had died in 1920 from complications giving birth to him.

Then six months ago, he had lost his father, Sigfried, whose heart gave out. His father's deteriorating health had forced him to retire at age sixty-four as the longtime district sheriff, and his death followed just months after. Bjørn dropped his head and stared at the leaping flames. He was glad the demands of farm-work helped him deal with the sadness.

Bjørn, at twenty, now owned the five-acre family homestead perched atop a hill overlooking Erlikvåg. Sigfried's will had deeded the farm to him, the youngest of three. Neither of his two siblings wanted to farm, and they had moved on. So he lived and worked there by himself, the latest of multiple generations to stake a livelihood from animals, crops, and hay.

Workdays were long, and Bjørn relished the evenings to sit back. The radio was his companion. That stylish square box of polished birchwood was his window to the outside world.

This night's NRK broadcast started just after he put his legs up on a cowhide-covered footstool and took a gulp of beer. The news led off with a British announcement that its Royal Navy had laid mines in the outer fjords leading to Norway's northern town of Narvik. Nazi Germany was mining iron ore across the border in Sweden and transporting it by train to Narvik's port, where it was loaded on German cargo ships.

"The British stated they took this action in concert with France to prevent Nazi Germany from using Norway's ports to obtain war resources," the broadcaster said. "The Norwegian government, along with Germany, protested the British mining of Norwegian territorial waters and demanded the mines' removal."

Bjørn scowled. He didn't like hearing that the war waged across the southern sea in Europe was reaching Norwegian shores. He wished Great Britain, France, and Germany would fight it out in their own backyards and leave his homeland alone.

He was confident Norway could stay out of the fight. The Norwegian government of Prime Minister Johan Nygaardsvold had formally declared the country's neutrality just like it had during the Great War. After two decades of peace, the new conflict had broken out seven months ago when England and France declared war on Nazi Germany after Hitler's blitzkrieg invasion of Poland.

Public sentiment in Norway after the Great War had called for peace at all costs, and the government acted accordingly. Its budgets consistently focused on providing for the nation's social well-being over defense. Norway's military armament and troop strength had fallen to bare bones.

Bjørn's opinion that war wouldn't come to Norway was no different than what he heard from his fellow villagers. To them,



Hitler was simply a cartoon character appearing on the newspaper editorial pages of Oslo's *Aftenposten* and the *Bergens Tidende*. They didn't see him as their menace.

Yet disturbing reports invaded Bjørn's living room with increased frequency. Weeks earlier, there had been news about warship movements on the North Sea, ship sinkings by submarines, and the British navy chasing a German tanker into Norwegian waters to rescue three hundred English prisoners and seamen on board.

When the radio announcer moved to the final item of the news broadcast, Bjørn looked at his watch. *Right on time*, he thought. He intended to stay tuned after the news for one of his favorite serials, *En Feil Swing* (*A Wrong Turn*).

"This morning, a fishing trawler rescued three men floating in a life raft on the North Sea off the southern coast," the newscaster said. "They all were taken to Lillesand, where the local sheriff interviewed them with the assistance of an interpreter.

"The men were German soldiers who said their transport ship, the *Rio de Janeiro*, was sunk by a torpedo presumably fired by an Allied submarine. The ship reportedly carried hundreds of German troops, military equipment, munitions, and horses.

"The soldiers told the sheriff they were on their way to Bergen to save Norway from a British and French invasion."

Bjørn lurched to the edge of his chair and leaned in closer.

"The trawler captain reported seeing many horse carcasses among the wreckage," the broadcast continued. "According to the soldiers, the horses were kept in an enclosure on the ship's deck. Most of the troops were belowdecks, and there were few survivors.

"In Oslo, government cabinet members, the Storting, and military officials met behind closed doors to discuss the report. But the government made no further comment."

He put his hands to his chin. Why would a German military ship be sailing to Bergen, Norway's largest urban center on the west coast, only thirty-five miles south of Erlikvåg? And for such a far-fetched reason? Perhaps the German soldiers were mistaken, or their explanation had been misinterpreted in translation. He dismissed the news item as another unsubstantiated rumor. He poured the rest of his beer into his glass and listened to the radio serial before turning in for the night.

Bjørn went to bed a little unsettled by news of British mines and rescued German soldiers. He couldn't worry about it. He needed sleep. Tomorrow, farmwork had to begin early.