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History

The Sledge Patrol

Greenland was only on the fringes of the Second World War. But the changes it brought continue to have a profound impact



CULTURE The forerunners of a vanguard (Photo: Arktisk Institut)

March 6, 2017 - 1:35pm - By Iben Bjørnsson, Arktisk Institut

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The Second World War takes up significant space in Danish consciousness, because Denmark proper was under Nazi occupation from 1940 to 1945. Most Danes are not aware that the war not only cost lives in Greenland, it also altered society.

The occupation of Denmark, starting on April 9, 1940, put a halt to all shipping traffic between Denmark and Greenland, and since Denmark maintained a trade monopoly, Greenland was now cut off from the world.

At this time, Greenland was run by the Greenland Administration in

*This is the ninth article in a series published in collaboration with **Arktisk Institut/The Danish Arctic Institute**, which seeks to inform the public about Danish-Greenlandic history.*

*The articles are based on the institute's **Arctic Stories** podcast series, which is produced by the author.*

*The original version of this podcast (in Danish only) can be heard below. All of the episodes in the series are available on from most podcast platforms, including **iTunes** and **Soundcloud**.*

Copenhagen. Two local – Danish – governors ran the colony on a daily basis. The governor of North Greenland was Eske Brun. In South Greenland it was Aksel Svane.

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Denmark responded to the occupation by forming a government that collaborated with the Germans in the hope of keeping the country out of open fighting. Most domestic policy remained intact at the outset, but, obviously, Denmark no longer had sovereignty in its foreign policy and the war made many of the usual dealings impossible – including contact with Greenland through waters controlled by Great Britain.

Perplexity

Greenlandic historian Jens Heinrich, who specialises in modern history, says about the first reactions in Greenland to the occupation of Denmark: “The initial reaction in Greenland was somewhat perplexed. There had been some preparations made and most knew it was coming. Still, it was something of a shock suddenly to be without a connection to the metropole. People were worried about what was to happen and where supplies would come from.”



Nuuk Local Council, 1943. Eske Brun in the middle of the picture, wearing coat and tie (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

Initially, no one really knew what was going to happen. Legally, in case the connection between Denmark and Greenland was severed, the governors were to rule Greenland temporarily. But not everyone agreed on the degree to which the connections were severed.

Danish historian Bo Lidegaard: “Within the first few hours of the occupation, it was clear that Denmark and Greenland could not maintain the connection. Or rather, it was clear when viewed from Greenland and the US. In Copenhagen, the Danish government built their policy on the fiction that Denmark was still neutral and sovereign. So, the government thought saw no need to alter its Greenland policy.”

What’s the US got to do with it?

American interest in the fate of Greenland is a matter of simple geography. Greenland was covered by the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, according to which the entire Western Hemisphere was declared an American area of interest and European powers were warned not to interfere with its business. According to the doctrine, colonial powers holding sovereignty over territories in the Western Hemisphere were accepted, but they were not to add new colonies or transfer sovereignty to other powers. Hence: if Germany gained control of Greenland by way of having occupied Denmark, it would be in clear violation of

the doctrine. This option was unacceptable for the US.

Hence, the American view was that Danish sovereignty had been compromised, and that any dealings regarding Greenland had to be done with Greenland directly, ie the governors. Shortly after the occupation of Denmark, the US turned to Greenland with a proposal of setting up an American consulate in Greenland, which the local Greenlandic Councils accepted. Also Canada set up a consulate.



Nuuk, sometime during the war. From left to right: an American lieutenant, the American vice consul Gray Bream and Danish-Canadian botanist Alf Erling Porsild (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

Another factor in Greenland's turn towards the US was the simple reality of the situation: the Danish government and the German Wehrmacht could sit in Copenhagen and claim sovereignty over Greenland as much as they liked, but they couldn't enforce it. They had no access. In practice, the US was the only country with which Greenland could trade for continued supplies. To negotiate the working relations between Greenland and the US, Brun went to Washington in the summer of 1940.

Two governors and an ambassador

So far, everything seemed in order. Except it wasn't. A power struggle between the governors and the Danish ambassador in Washington, Henrik Kauffmann, was about to commence. Kauffmann was active in talking to both President Roosevelt and the State Department about the fate of Greenland, and, Mr Lidegaard says, adamant that the US should not accept the Danish government as the legitimate ruler of Greenland while occupied. Instead, he thought, he was the proper authority on that issue.

Initially, Brun helped to out-manoeuvre Aksel Svane, whom he and Kauffmann both considered to acquiescent to the Danish government. Svane went to Washington in the summer of 1941 to represent the Danish Greenland Administration, and he stayed there for the duration of the war without ever really gaining much influence.

Mr Heinrich: "The difference between Svane and Brun was that Svane wanted to stick to policies of the Danish government in Copenhagen; namely neutrality. Eske Brun, on the other hand, had determined that it was necessary to choose sides for the US and their help for the allies. As Svane ended up in Washington as a subordinate to Kauffmann, Eske Brun was free to define policy in Greenland."

With Svane gone, Brun assumed governorship over all of Greenland and set up headquarters in Nuuk (the governor of North Greenland was otherwise stationed in Godhavn, present-day, Qeqertarsuaq), thus creating the precedent for the future

arrangement of having only one governor. But if he had thought that he would now be the one with final say over Greenlandic matters, he was mistaken.



Eske Brun, right and Kauffman in bow-tie. Narsaq, 1957 (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

Mr Lidegaard: “Eske Bruun thought that he and Kauffmann had entered an alliance, and that the two of them would stick together. And in some ways they had. But, at the same time, Kauffmann succeeded in outmanoeuvring Brun as the American go-to guy, in matters of Greenland.”

Mr Heinrich: “Kauffmann was situated in Washington, and he had the diplomatic skills and contacts to further his own cause. Quite simply, he knew how to play the game.”

Wanted: bases

Kauffmann had won the power struggle, something that became clear with the 1941 Defence Agreement. It was a treaty granting the US rights to take over the defence of Greenland and establish bases there.

Mr Lidegaard: “The pretext was the dramatic turn of events in the winter of 1940-41, when it looked like Great Britain could lose the war and be occupied by Germany. The more realistic this scenario became, the more it was imperative for Roosevelt to strengthen Great Britain. If the US could help Great Britain hold out, then they wouldn’t have to enter the war themselves.

Practically, some of this help consisted of planes that were transported to Britain to reinforce the Royal Air Force. However, as shipping routes became more and more vulnerable to German submarines in the North Atlantic, flying became the preferred option. For this, the Americans needed a stop on the way between Canada and Iceland. This stop was southern Greenland.”



Bluie East 2, Ikateq. Sometime during the war (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

So the Americans wanted air bases in Greenland. One issue remained though: who had the authority to issue permission for this? Copenhagen was out of the picture for obvious reasons. So the choice was between the local governors and Ambassador Kauffmann. And as it had already recognised the governors' sovereignty over Greenland, the State Department initially leaned towards making the deal with them. But then they realised something.

Mr Lidegaard: "The governors would obviously do what every state official would do: make the agreement only for the duration of the war. But maybe the US could have an interest in extending base rights beyond the war? These reflections were stimulated by Kauffmann, who made it clear early on that he was willing to make an agreement without an end date. That was instrumental in the American decision to make the deal with him instead of the governors."

Basically, the Americans changed their minds about who had the right to govern over Greenland. They did so, because Kauffmann's offer was more attractive than the governors': by making unclear termination arrangements it secured American base rights in Greenland beyond the war.

The Defence Agreement

The treaty granting the US the right to establish a military presence in Greenland was signed on April 9, 194, exactly one year after Denmark was occupied. Kauffmann signed on behalf of the Kingdom of Denmark, only he didn't tell the Kingdom of Denmark until afterwards.

Mr Lidegaard: "When the treaty was signed, Kauffman sent a telegram to Copenhagen, informing the Danish government about it. Copenhagen was more than shocked. They

were furious. The Germans were even more furious. They found it very hard to believe that the Danish government had had no prior knowledge of it."

Danish Foreign Minister Erik Scavenius raged against Kauffmann for not only undermining Danish neutrality, but also the authority of the Danish government. The Germans wanted Kauffmann sentenced to death and the Danish government accused him of high treason, fired him and told him to come home immediately – none of which had any result. Kauffmann was safe and sound in Washington, and neither he nor the US government recognised the independence and sovereignty of the Danish government.



Fire warden shift, Bluie West 1, Narsarsuaq (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

As opposed to the Danish government, the governors in Greenland was presented with the treaty before it was signed, if only at the last minute. In his PhD, Mr Heinrich writes that they were given just a few hours to make up their minds and that they felt – and probably were – pressured by Kauffmann with threats along the lines of, if they didn't accept, the Canadians would occupy Greenland (which Canada, apparently, had no plans to).

Both Svane and Brun were willing to make the agreement and accept American bases in Greenland, but the way Kauffmann did it rubbed them the wrong way. Not that they could do much about it either. They had been given an ultimatum, and they acquiesced.

What they might not have foreseen was the way in which Kauffmann would use the treaty to gain more power for himself in Washington. But nevertheless, that was the consequence: the Americans were obviously aware that the treaty had caused commotion in Copenhagen, and they now needed to prop up Kauffmann as a figure of authority, in order to legitimise the deal they had made with him against the will of Copenhagen.

Mr Lidgaard explains: When the Americans needed the deal, they also needed to make Kauffmann into a mini Government in exile, thus securing his position. They gave him right of disposal over any frozen Danish assets seized by the US, private and public. Furthermore, they gave him access to the Danish National Bank's gold reserve, which had been brought to safety in Fort Knox. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, they gave him control of Greenlandic cryolite exports, which was Denmark's most valuable export at the time. With these agreements in hand, Kauffman could tell other Danish diplomats around the world that if they broke off relations with Copenhagen and joined him in an independent foreign service of sorts, he would pay their expenses."

During the war, the US built 14 bases or stations in Greenland. Nine of them were located on the west coast and named Bluie West 1-9 and on the east coast were Bluie East 1-5. Bluie East 4 and 5 were manned by Danish and Greenlandic personnel. More about them later.



Jeep and plane at Bluie West I, Narsarsuaq (Copyright: Jette Bang Photo)

Breaking the monopoly

The fact that American diplomats and military personnel were now allowed into Greenland was a bigger deal than it might seem at first glance. Since 1776, Denmark had monopolised trade and shipping in Greenland and decided who could and could not go there. Now, that monopoly was broken.

The official reason for the monopoly had often been protection: the colonial argument that Greenlandic culture was susceptible to outside influence and would go under in the face of modern civilisation if it weren't protected by Denmark. Playing the devil's advocate, one could argue that the protection of Inuit traditions had more to do with Denmark depending on their skills to make money on blubber and hides. The truth probably lies somewhere in between, but regardless of the reason(s), Denmark wanted to uphold this policy of 'protection'.

This put them in the position of needing to keep Greenlanders and Americans separate. Something which was not easy. Mr Heinrich: "Eske Bruun was very much an advocate of this policy of isolating the Greenlanders from outside influences. Among the measures he took was the establishment of guards at the American bases. In the beginning, the Americans even asked for brothels with Greenlandic women, which he adamantly refused."



Bluie West 1, undated (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

Not everything was under Kauffmann's jurisdiction. One might say that Kauffmann had the upper hand when it came to Greenland in international politics, whereas Bruun shaped domestic policy – including the stern refusal to allow American servicemen to buy sexual favours from Greenlandic women. Not that anyone asked the Greenlandic women what they would prefer, obviously. And viewed more broadly, Greenlanders didn't seem as interested in being protected as Danes were in protecting them.

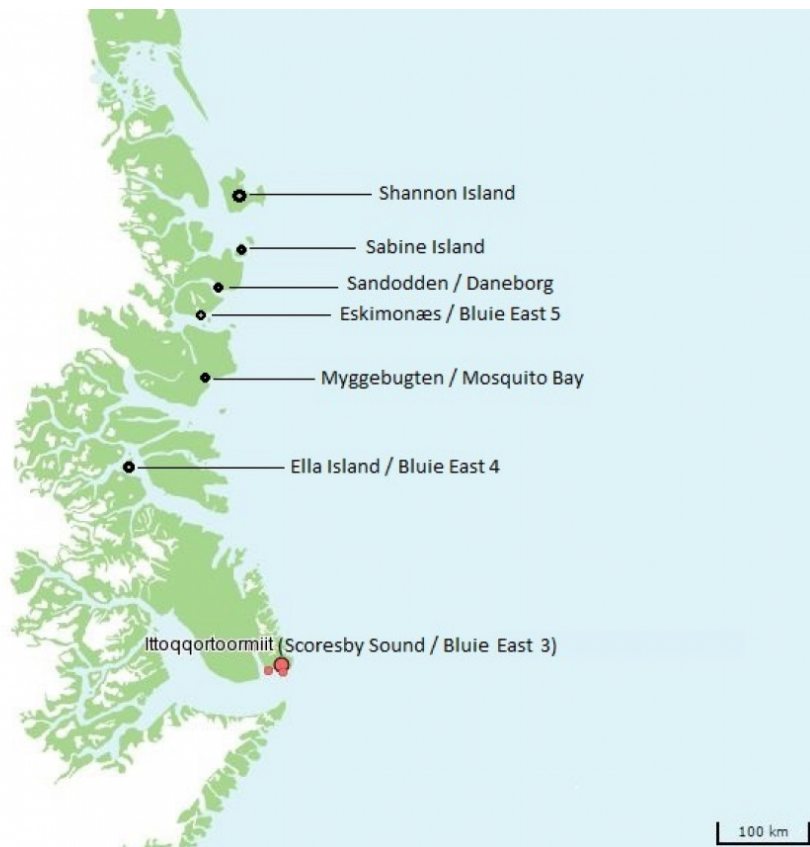
Mr Heinrich: “Many Greenlanders wanted to meet the Americans. The prospect of trading and meeting strangers was enticing. There was a divide between the governor and the population which also came to affect the further development of Greenlandic society. In many ways, Greenlanders felt they had been too isolated and wanted to be a part of the world around them. This was a catalyst for that.”

This would become even more apparent by the end of the war. For now, the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 meant that the US entered the war in full.

The weather war

From the very beginning of the war, it was clear that if Greenland had anything to fear from Germany, it would be in the northeast. Mr Heinrich: “The weather in Europe is created in Greenland and the waters off north-eastern Greenland, so if one is fighting a war in Europe, weather reports from this area are rather important. For instance, forecasts from Greenland played an important role in the planning of D-Day.”

Early on during the war, Great Britain started encoding their weather reports. Which meant that the Germans had to obtain their own. To do so, they needed their own Arctic weather stations. By way of having occupied Norway, Germany had access to the Norwegian Arctic islands of Svalbard, where they built some stations. But a weather station in north-eastern Greenland was also high on the list. To that effect, the Norwegian puppet government under Quisling dusted off some old Norwegian claims on eastern Greenland – claims that had been rejected by the International Court of Justice in the Hague in 1933. From the northern Norwegian port of Tromsø, the Germans set out to establish weather stations in Greenland in 1942. They succeeded in setting one up on Sabine Island.



Map of locations mentioned in article (Map: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

Brun and the Americans were aware of the German interest in north-eastern Greenland. The large coastal areas were scarcely populated. A hunting company, Nanok, ran a few stations and then there were some geological and meteorological stations set up by Arctic explorers such as Lauge Koch, Eigil Knuth and Ebbe Munck. All of the stations were abandoned in 1941 and meteorological equipment brought to the station at Eskimonæs, which was given the American codename Bluie East 5. The evacuees were brought further south, to Scoresbysund (present-day Ittoqqortoormiit), code-named Bluie East 3. Bluie East 4 lay in the middle of those two, at Ella Island.

The Sledge Patrol

With American support, Brun created a patrol to watch the north-eastern coast and report any attempts by the Germans to land. The Americans had ships and planes, but that wasn't always enough to patrol the nooks and fjords where ice was packed thick and it was dark for the duration of the winter. The north-eastern coast also had to be patrolled from land. And besides, being done best by those who knew the land, setting up the patrol also held a personal, or perhaps patriotic, satisfaction for Brun.

Mr Heinrich: "For many Danes in Greenland, and certainly Eske Brun, there was some disappointment with the Danish war effort, or lack thereof. They wanted to do something to make up for it, to have Denmark fighting for the allies."

The Sledge Patrol, as it was aptly named, consisted of Danish and Greenlandic hunters. Its leader was named Ib Poulsen and its headquarters were set up at Eskimonæs, Bluie East 5. Seven men spent the winter of 1942-43 there, and it was from there that the most dramatic event in Greenland during the war unfolded. The following reconstruction is made from sources in the Danish Arctic Institute archives: reports from Brun and Poulsen, a taped interview with sledge patrol member Marius Jensen, and the journal of Kurt Olsen, another member.



The Eskimonæs station, 1933 (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

On March 8, 1943, Jensen and two Greenlandic patrol members, Mikael Kunak and William Arke, set out to patrol the area north of Eskimonæs. On Sabine Island, some 100km to the north, they knew there was a hut, but did not expect to see smoke coming up from its chimney. Footprints on the nearby ice confirmed that someone was there. As they drew closer, two men fled up the mountainside. Inside the hut they found sleeping bags, Nazi uniforms, daggers, supplies, coal and almost half a polar bear. The three men set out to return to Eskimonæs to alert the others of their findings, but Jensen found that the dogs needed to rest and the small company stopped for the night in a hut just eight kilometres south of Sabine Island. According to Poulsen, this was a severe error of judgment that was only made up for by Jensen's deeds later on.

So, there they were on the night of March 11, when they heard someone approaching their hut. But due to the darkness, it was impossible to know how many. There was no time to harness the dogs, so the three men fled on foot to Eskimonæs, where they arrived a day and a half later to alert the others that there were Germans at Sabine Island.

The escape had been quick and somewhat panicky and the three men had had to leave everything behind. Olsen wrote in his journal: "We have suffered a severe loss. Half of our dogs and three fully equipped sledges. Fritz [a derogatory name for Nazi soldiers, ed] also got his hands on Marius's journal, so he could not be better informed of our whereabouts."

Greenland's first army

The men dug in at Eskimonæs, but the American reinforcements hadn't shown up, so they decided to do something on their own.

From Olsens' journal: "The governor has telegraphed that the Germans can be shot or taken captive, but we have received no word as to whether help will arrive or we will have to handle the situation on our own. But we are actually at war now. The Germans are 100km away and there is no-one but us to throw them out. Well, we will get them."

Brun in Nuuk also realised that the men at Eskimonæs were at war, and that was a problem legally, since none of them were soldiers. He solved it by giving them military status and ranks and, in so doing, creating Greenland's first, and hitherto only, military unit – even though their uniforms consisted of mere arm bands. Poulsen was made a

captain and Jensen a corporal.



Hunters at Eskimonæs, 1935. Second from the left (with pipe) is Niels Ove Jensen, later to become a captain in the Sledge Patrol (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

Another problem was not solved that easily: the patrol had a man, Peter Nielsen, north of Sabine Island, who was expecting Jensen, Kunak and Arke. And as they didn't arrive, the men worried that he would go south looking for them and run directly into the Germans. They had to get him, and Jensen volunteered for the task along with another newly appointed corporal, Eli Knudsen. Two others headed for Bluie East 4 on Ella Island, 200km to the south, to fetch the two men there to help defend Eskimonæs.

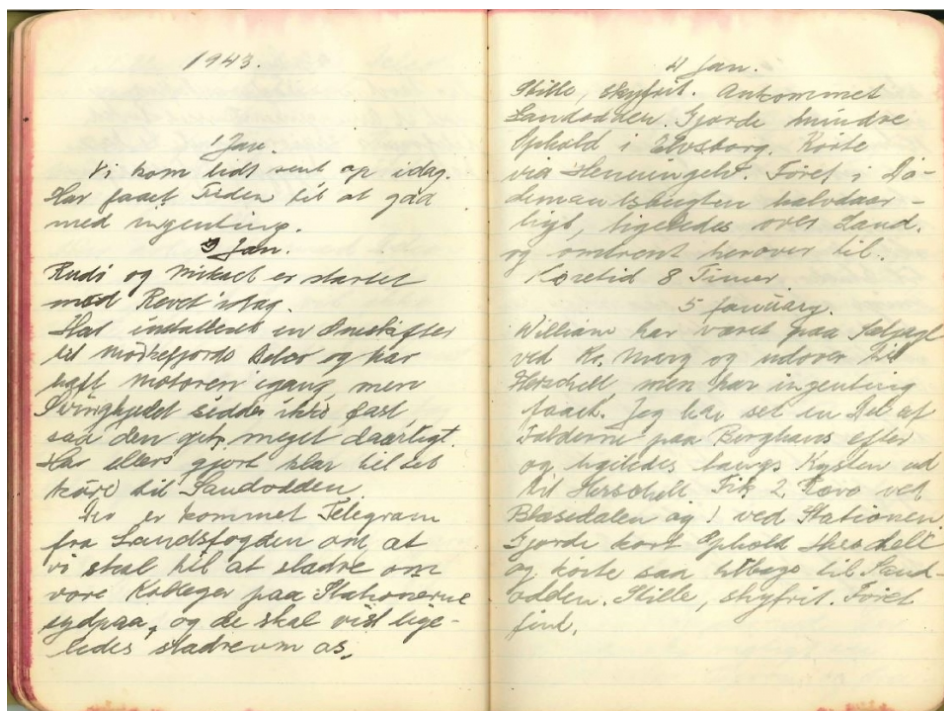
Line of fire

That left only five men and two dog teams at Eskimonæs. And then, on March 23, it happened. The dogs started barking and the men heard footsteps on the ice. Germans approached. Shouting, Poulsen demanded to know what they wanted. The Germans responded by demanding to talk to “Mr Poulsen, Mr Olsen or Mr Rudi” – the names of the three Danes present. They appeared to know a little too much. Poulsen gave permission for one man to approach unarmed. The Germans asked whether they could expect the use of force if they did not comply. Poulsen’s answer: “*Jawohl!*”

That was all the Germans needed: they started shooting. After initial attempts at response, the three Danes and two Greenlanders had no choice but to flee south. Resting in huts along the way, Poulsen reached Ella Island by foot 11 days later.

In his report, Brun wrote: “The excellent endurance of the men, and their familiarity with the conditions served to avert the catastrophe that would doubtlessly have befallen someone with less experience.”

The Germans torched the station at Eskimonæs. And they took along Olsen’s journal, which ended up in the Gestapo archives before being returned to Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute.



Pages from Kurt Olsen's diary (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

Meanwhile, up north, Jensen and Knudsen had located Nielsen, and the three of them began their journey back to Eskimonæs, not knowing what had happened. Knudsen's dogs were fitter than the others, so he was ahead and alone when he arrived at a hut at Sandodden, halfway between Sabine Island and Eskimonæs, on March 26, 1943. While the small party had taken good care not to be spotted passing Sabine Island, they had not expected to find Germans at Sandodden on their way back from destroying Eskimonæs. Their commander was a lieutenant named Hermann Ritter. He ordered his men to open fire on Knudsen's sledge. Ritter later explained that he only meant to shoot the dogs, but nevertheless, Knudsen took a bullet to his left lung.

"He fell off the sledge and lay behind a small snowdrift, while the dogs continued across the ice, dragging dead and wounded dogs along in their harness."

The Germans tried to treat Knudsen's wound, but he died half an hour later. He was the first, and only, Dane to die in Greenland in the war.

Jensen and Nielsen had set up camp some way back, and did not know what had happened. When Jensen approached the hut, he was met by a hail of gunfire as well, and he and Nielsen immediately surrendered. They were taken to Sabine Island as prisoners of war. But Jensen succeeded in making Ritter believe that Nielsen was a horrible musher and had no sense of direction. The result was that Nielsen was given six dogs and permission to go to Sandodden to bury Knudsen. It was a short trip, and Ritter was convinced Nielsen would not be able to make it all the way to Ella Island and come back. He was wrong, and that was the last the Germans saw of Nielsen, who arrived at Ella Island eight days later.



The Ella Island station, 1932 (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

Prisoner of war

That left Jensen alone with the Germans. They played cards and went hunting – after Jensen promised his German hunting partner not to shoot him. But Ritter was restless. He wanted to destroy the radio equipment he knew to be at Ella Island and decided to head south. They left Sabine Island with two sledges and six men: Ritter, Jensen and four German soldiers.

On April 19, they were camped in a hut at Myggebugten (Mosquito Bay) from where Ritter sent the four soldiers out to raid Ella Island, while he stayed back with Jensen. The Germans then made the mistake of asking Jensen for the easiest route to Ella Island. He gave them directions for the most difficult route along the inner fjords. Jensen was now alone with Ritter, and Ritter had left his rifle on Jensen's sledge. Having disarmed Ritter, Jensen declared that he was going for a ride. And then he left for Ella Island to warn the others that the Germans were on the way. He was a better musher and he took the easy route (as opposed to the Germans), so he reached Ella Island first, only to find that the men had retreated south to Scoresby Sound. The most obvious thing would have been to join them. But Jensen did something else.

From Bruns's report: "The obvious thing under these circumstances would be to continue directly to Scoresby Sound. But as Corporal Jensen thought it would be inappropriate to arrive empty-handed, he first sledged 150km back to Mosquito Bay, declared Lieutenant Ritter, who was waiting for his command to return, a prisoner of war, and took him along to Scoresby Sound. They arrived after an adventurous journey, which took them close to Ella Island, where there were Germans, at a time of year when there was almost no night. It is probably not hard to imagine the strain of travelling for three weeks with a German prisoner you have to look out for at all time."



Men and dog at the Mosquito Bay hut, 1931 (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

They arrived on the night May 14. Jensen was promoted and received an American as well as a British medal for this accomplishment.

“Rather haughtily ...”

But while this meant the war was over for Ritter, it wasn't for any of the others. There were still Germans on the north-eastern coast. It still needed patrolling. Three men went back to Ella Island to assess the damage, repair what they could, and keep watch for German advances from the north.

Even if Jensen had secured a valuable prisoner, the whole ordeal gave rise to some severe criticism from Poulsen. The Sledge Patrol was poorly organised and some of the men had turned out not to hold up well under pressure. But, mostly, he criticised the Americans. Because, as he said, perhaps they would have trained more and organised better had the Americans not “in quite the grandiose fashion” stated that air support could reach the patrol within few hours all year round and that the patrol's only job was to locate German activity, then the Americans would take care of the rest.



American military and civilian personnel at Bluie West 1, Narsarsuaq, 1945 (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

When the patrol was created, there had been no shortage of American promises of enforcing the stations with anti-aircraft batteries and even a small plane. But, when push came to shove, the Sledge Patrol had been left alone. Poulsen criticised the Americans for not spotting the Germans despite having had a ship, the *Northland*, at Sabine Island. He also mentioned an incident in which another ship, the *North Star*, had anchored at Eskimonæs. The Americans had been particularly uninterested in the work of the men on that occasion, and, when asked for some extra ammunition for the station, the deputy commander had, “rather haughtily” asked Poulsen what on earth for. It was obvious that Poulsen felt let down by the Americans.

When the Americans finally reached the German headquarters at Sabine Island, they found it empty. The Germans had retreated back to Tromsø. The Americans supplied new equipment to replace what the Germans had destroyed. And a new headquarters for the Sledge Patrol was built a few kilometres from the remains of Bluie East 5 at Eskimonæs.

The Germans didn't give up their designs on weather stations in north-eastern Greenland. It was too important for them. So, in the late summer of 1943 they set up a station at Shannon Island, where Ejnar Mikkelsen and Iver Iversen had once spent a year and a half, stranded on the *Alabama Expedition*. The Germans even lived in the hut Mikkelsen and Iversen had built from *Alabama's* wreck.



The 'Alabama hut' at Shannon Island, 1909 (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

The Germans were, once again, spotted by the Sledge Patrol, and once again the patrol waited in vain for American reinforcements. There was a short battle in April 1944 in which a German soldier died. Once again, the Germans retreated. In 1944, they tried setting up stations twice, but were spotted by American ships both times.

A new reality

On May 5, 1945, Denmark was liberated and its connection to Greenland was re-established. But if anyone had thought that things would go back to normal in Greenland, they were in for a disappointment. And according to Jens Heinrich, some actually did: "The Greenland Administration in Denmark had no idea of what had taken place in Greenland during the war. There was a struggle between reformists in Greenland and traditionalists in Copenhagen during the post-war years."

For Greenland, the monopoly was broken. And they were in no mind to go back to colonial isolation. Bo Lidegaard: "The American presence, the opening of Greenland to the world, meant that leading personalities in what had hitherto been an isolated Danish colony, demanded change."

According to Mr Heinrich it was also a question of having experienced being on their own. "Greenlanders found out that they had the resources, both human as well as financial – the cryolite and fisheries which had been prosperous during the war – to stand on their own. It gave them a new confidence in being able to do things on their own, not having to be guided in every little step on the way. It renewed their interest in having an influence on the future in Greenland, and in being a part of its future."

The war, then, war had been a catalyst for major changes in Greenland, including a change in the Danish constitution incorporating Greenland in the Kingdom of Denmark and giving

it representatives in the Danish parliament. But that's another story.

World war also gave way to a Cold War in which Greenland would gain strategic importance. The Sledge Patrol continued patrolling the eastern coast as the Soviet Union became the new main threat. It even exists today as the Sirius Patrol. Their headquarters is the weather station Daneborg, at Sandodden where Eli Knudsen is buried.



Eli Knudsen's grave at Sandodden (Photo: Arktisk Institut/the Danish Arctic Institute)

The Cold War also meant that the Americans were far from done with Greenland. So it was convenient that their treaty with Kauffmann permitted them to stay indefinitely.

Mr Lidegaard: “Bluntly speaking that agreement meant that Denmark gave over her military sovereignty over Greenland. Legally that might not be the case, and many lawmakers and legal experts might protest, but the reality is that, since then, the Americans have been in Greenland and have had fairly unimpeded access to do whatever they deemed necessary – and they have done it. Denmark has not really been in a position to say no.”

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Kurt Olsen's diary
Taped interview with Marius Jensen. 2001

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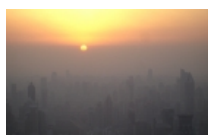
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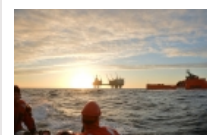
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