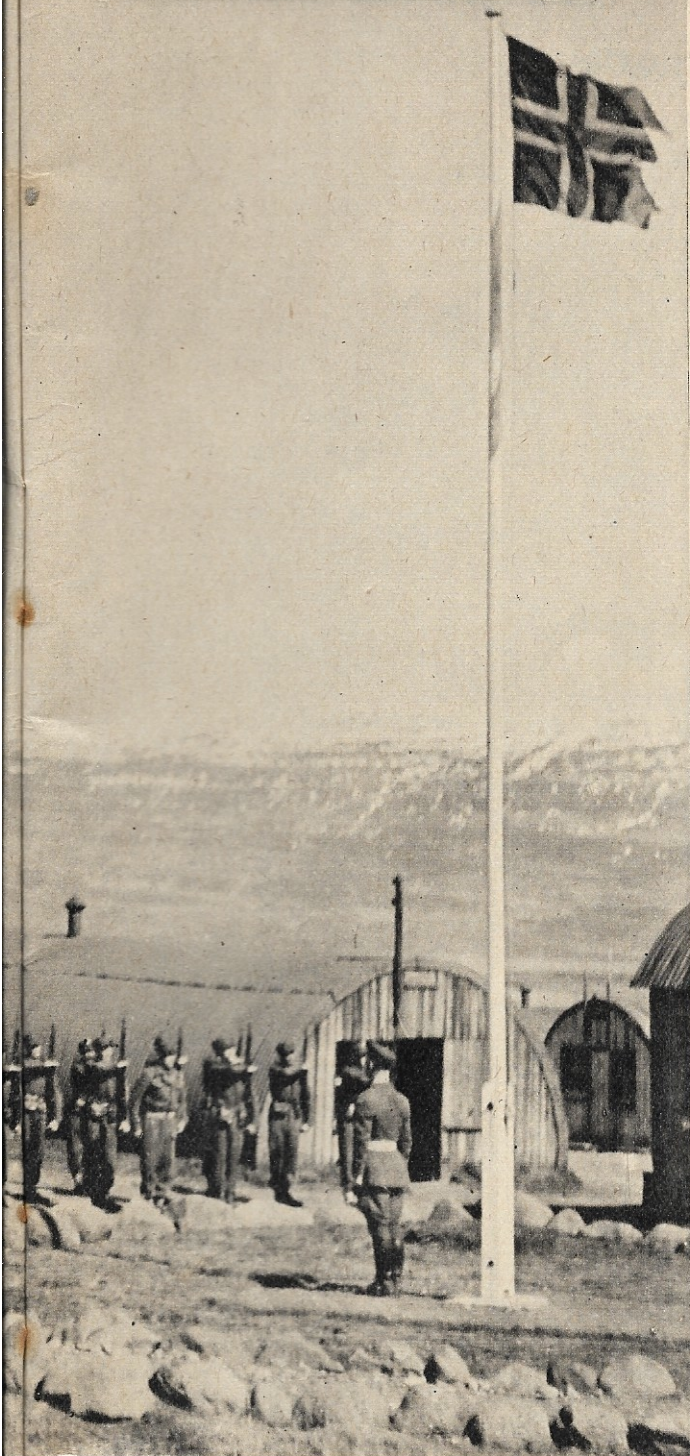


Arctic War



Norway's role on the Northern Front 1^s net

ARCTIC WAR



**Norway's role on
the Northern Front**

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Norwegian scientists, soldiers, sailors, airmen and merchant seamen are serving in all parts of the Arctic—the roof of the world.

GREENLAND

SPITSBERGEN

JAN MAYEN

ICELAND

FAROE ISLANDS

SHETLAND

SCOTLAND



IT WAS ONLY AFTER NORWAY was occupied by the Germans in 1940 that the Arctic came into the war news. And with it the names of such places as Iceland, Spitsbergen and Greenland.

First Iceland, that rugged island mantled with snow and ice, yet bubbling with springs of hot water. British troops were rushed there to guard vital sea-lines which would be imperilled by a German occupation of Iceland.

Then came the thrilling chase across the grey and stormy Arctic Ocean of the German battleship *Bismarck*, which culminated in her destruction.

Spitsbergen, the Norwegian archipelago only 600 miles from the North Pole was evacuated and everything of use to the Germans was destroyed.

Thrilling convoy battles were fought across the length of the Arctic Sea with the Merchant Navy, the Royal Navy and the Air Force winning laurels under terrible conditions.

There was the news of the re-occupation of Spitsbergen by Norwegians, with its resultant clashes with the Germans; of the Norwegians' heroic stand when the German battlefleet, including the *Scharnhorst* and *Tirpitz*, raided the islands. And it was in the Arctic Sea that the *Scharnhorst* was ultimately sunk, whilst *Tirpitz* was struck half a dozen times and more in her lair in the fjords of Arctic Norway before she was finally sunk in Tromso fjord on November 12th, 1944.

The salient points of these stories

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARCTIC

have been told. But the full "inside" story of the Arctic war has until now had to remain a closely guarded military secret. The islands, small continents and seas that stretch across the roof of the world have been more than just a battleground in which the enemy has been German.

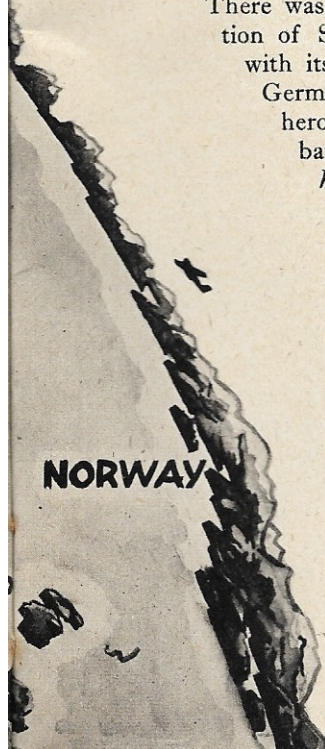
It has been a battleground in which the elements have often been the chief antagonist. Men of the United Nations have experienced the full violence of nature in the north. The blizzards, the gales, the fogs, the terrible cold and, probably worst of them all, the isolation.

It has been because of these storms, because of the extreme weather up there, that these men—principally Norwegians, because of their knowledge of northern conditions—have had to be there at all. For the Arctic, where much of the weather that reaches Europe is born, is all-important for meteorology.

Over the thousands of miles of desolation from Spitsbergen in the east to Greenland in the west the Allies have established a chain of weather stations which is the key to many of the vital air, sea and land operations which take place on the Continent. On small groups of men living in tiny huts surrounded by snow and ice and mountain has often depended the lives of thousands of men.

These "met men," as they are known, check the wind, the temperatures, the barometer, note all the vagaries of the weather, measure the intensity of the storms and assess the depths of the fogs. Their work is never done. Every three hours in the twenty-four, day in day out, month in month out, year in year out, they radio their reports to Britain. Every three hours—eight times a day!

From every possible point in the Arctic these reports reach the meteorological experts in Britain. They interpret them in terms of wind or calm, storm or sunshine, which might be expected either in London or Berlin.



Many of the lonely "weather men" are Norwegians. They are operating at Spitsbergen, Iceland, Greenland and at an island known until recently as "Island X"—Jan Mayen. It lies lonely and forbidding, in the centre of the triangle formed by Spitsbergen, Greenland and Iceland.

For nearly four years Jan Mayen, which is no bigger than Malta, has been occupied by Norwegian troops and meteorological officers whose reports have filled in what otherwise would have been a serious gap in the "met men's" chart in Britain.

It was to these men—to all the men who do meteorological work in the Arctic—that the following tribute was paid by one of the chief meteorological directors at the Air Ministry: "We owe a great deal to the Norwegians for the tremendous work they did in helping to build up the chain of Arctic meteorological stations. Their's has been a most important contribution and we have not lost sight of the fact that Norwegians also were the pioneers of this work in Arctic spheres before the war. We who remain in Britain to interpret their reports have a heartfelt admiration for all the men who operate lonely and exposed observation stations far away from civilisation. Their life is hard and arduous, but every one of them is deeply interested in his work and many are busily following other scientific channels.

"But it can certainly be said that on this handful of men a great deal depends and has depended in the past."

Jan Mayen and Iceland comprise two of the main keys in forecasting Britain's weather, as they are both almost continually within the low pressure circle thus enabling observations to be taken that have particular bearing on the winds and fogs and clouds which sweep southwards. And of the two places Jan Mayen is probably the most important, because, being farther north, observations of weather going south can be reported in advance of the stations at Iceland.

THE STORY of the Norwegian participation in the Arctic war begins soon after the fall of Norway, when some of the large numbers of men who escaped across the North Sea to continue the fight were driven to Iceland.

Others came to Iceland by various means—some on a small boat which had been returning to Norway from a polar expedition in Greenland and had put in at Iceland; one on a Finnish ship, on which he had escaped and which had been intercepted by the British; and another who had come from Spitsbergen.

Among them was one Norwegian Army lieutenant and a Dane who had volunteered and had served in Norway as a captain.

These men, without money and all in civilian clothes except the two officers, stayed at the Salvation Army Hostel in Reykjavik. They all wanted to fight, but they wanted to fight as Norwegians and not as part of the British Army which was at that time occupying Iceland.

With the exception of the Dane, who sailed to Britain at the first opportunity, all the Norwegians decided to stay in Iceland where they thought they could render the best service. For one thing, they knew that the British wanted to form a ski battalion and needed instructors in the use of skis. But they would not join the British Army. They said: "We will form a Norwegian Army of our own."

This "Army" consisted of twelve unarmed men, eleven of them in civilian clothing and with little military training. They had no resources, but after they had agreed to train British troops in the use of skis, the British paid for their keep. For pocket money this "Army" of twelve took odd jobs in Reykjavik, and the overalls with which they were provided were their uniforms.

It was on August 5th, 1940, that this "Norwegian Company, Iceland" as it became known was really formed. It had an officer



Arctic war is waged chiefly against the elements when storms and blizzards—like this one on Jan Mayen—descend with little warning.

in charge—the lieutenant—but an N.C.O. also was needed. One of them—an intellectual from Bergen—was “promoted” to the rank of sergeant. While the lieutenant made a tour of Iceland in search of any other Norwegians there might be, this sergeant took command and military training began. The small body of men marched through the streets of Reykjavik each day to a place on the outskirts of the town where they drilled. Afterwards they would return to the town to do their civilian work.

The lieutenant’s tour was quite successful. He found two youngsters of Norwegian parentage who were willing to join his force; a couple of fishermen who had landed in the northern part of the country, and another two elsewhere. After 14 days he returned with the new recruits and the Norwegian force now totalled eighteen men.

On August 20th they rented a small and not very modern villa on the city’s outskirts which they used as living quarters. Credit for food and other materials was obtained from Icelandic firms in the name of the Norwegian Army, and the British provided uniforms. These they took to a shop in Reykjavik where the name “Norway” was embroidered on the shoulders, with two Norwegian flags, with the staffs crossed, just below. This insignia, incidentally, remained the emblem of the Norwegian Army in Iceland for two years.

No communication had yet been received from the Norwegian authorities in London with whom contact had been made, but training became more thorough and more equipment was made available. By September they even had rifles—their first arms. When all was ready “Norwegian Company, Iceland” was inspected by a high-ranking British officer who afterwards invited them to join the famous Duke of Wellington Regiment. They did so and remained with this Regiment for a month.

At the end of that time it was possible to begin their own ski training, and the

Icelandic authorities placed a mountain hut at their disposal. With dog teams and additional equipment, which had come from a German meteorological expedition which had been captured when on its way to Greenland, the troops moved in to their new centre. There they hoisted the Norwegian flag, and each morning thereafter continued to salute their colours in true military fashion.

The unit consisted of men between the ages of 17 and 47 from all walks of life—scientists and schoolboys, hunters, seamen, fishermen and mine workers. Not all were good skiers but they soon became proficient, and at the same time they perfected themselves in all the technique of polar life—dog-team driving, bivouacking in the snow and so on.

When the unit returned to Reykjavik fit and fresh from their intensive training, they found that a Norwegian Naval Office had been set up. This Office, at its own risk, undertook the financial responsibility of the Company until instructions were received from London. But when word was eventually received from London it was to the effect that the unit was not formally recognised for the time being, but that the men were free to join the British Army.

This the Norwegians did not want to do, but agreed to a suggestion that the twelve best skiers should be attached in pairs to various British formations in Iceland, in order to teach the troops to ski and to live with a minimum of discomfort among snow and ice.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian lieutenant reported this to the Norwegian military headquarters in London, and pointed out that twelve men was a totally insufficient force to train “a whole British Army.” He requested that additional Norwegian ski-troops should be posted to the island. All this, of course, from an officer who, as far as the authorities were concerned, was commander of a private army—one which was not recognised officially by either the British or the Norwegians.



Despite all the hardships of the Arctic, weather reports have been radioed from Jan Mayen eight times a day without fail since early 1941. This is the chief telegraphist.

But the reply in November brought good news—"Norwegian Company, Iceland" could consider itself an established and official unit of the Royal Norwegian Army!

With this the British offered to the Norwegians a half-constructed camp at Akureyri on the north coast, to be used as a ski-training camp. It was in fact an ideal place, with first class mountain runs nearby and good firm snow.

In the New Year of 1941 the Norwegians moved in, and even while the camp was being completed each Norwegian instructor took fifteen or twenty British troops under his charge and began training them in the mountains. Each group of trainees remained in the mountains during the whole of the course, learning everything possible about the technique of life in the Arctic.

Meanwhile the British obtained considerable quantities of equipment such as tents, sleeping bags, stoves, ski-boots and proper winter clothing, with Icelandic ponies to transport it to the snow-covered training fields up in the mountains.

Then on January 19th "reinforcements" arrived in the form of twenty-seven Norwegian soldiers who had done their recruit training in Scotland. Most of them were good skiers and they soon learned the best methods by which to train the British soldiers.

Then came a temporary setback in the plans. Twelve of the best men of the small company of instructors were needed for a "secret mission."

POLAR "WEATHER" STATIONS

logical service in the Arctic. And one of the first places which was named on these

DURING ALL THIS TIME the Allied military authorities were busy with plans to establish a more efficient and comprehensive meteorological



plans was Jan Mayen, hundreds of miles to the north of Iceland.

Before the war the Norwegian State maintained a meteorological station at Jan Mayen as it did at Spitsbergen and in Northern Norway. Four men were at the observation post on Jan Mayen when Norway was attacked in 1940. Cut off entirely, except for radio, they could do nothing. They continued their work and beamed their reports to Britain instead of to Norway.

Their relief was planned as soon as possible, but it was the late summer of 1940 before a little ship, which had been a fishery inspection boat in Norway but which had succeeded in escaping to Britain, left Britain for Jan Mayen. She was the *Fridtjof Nansen* and she had on board ample supplies of