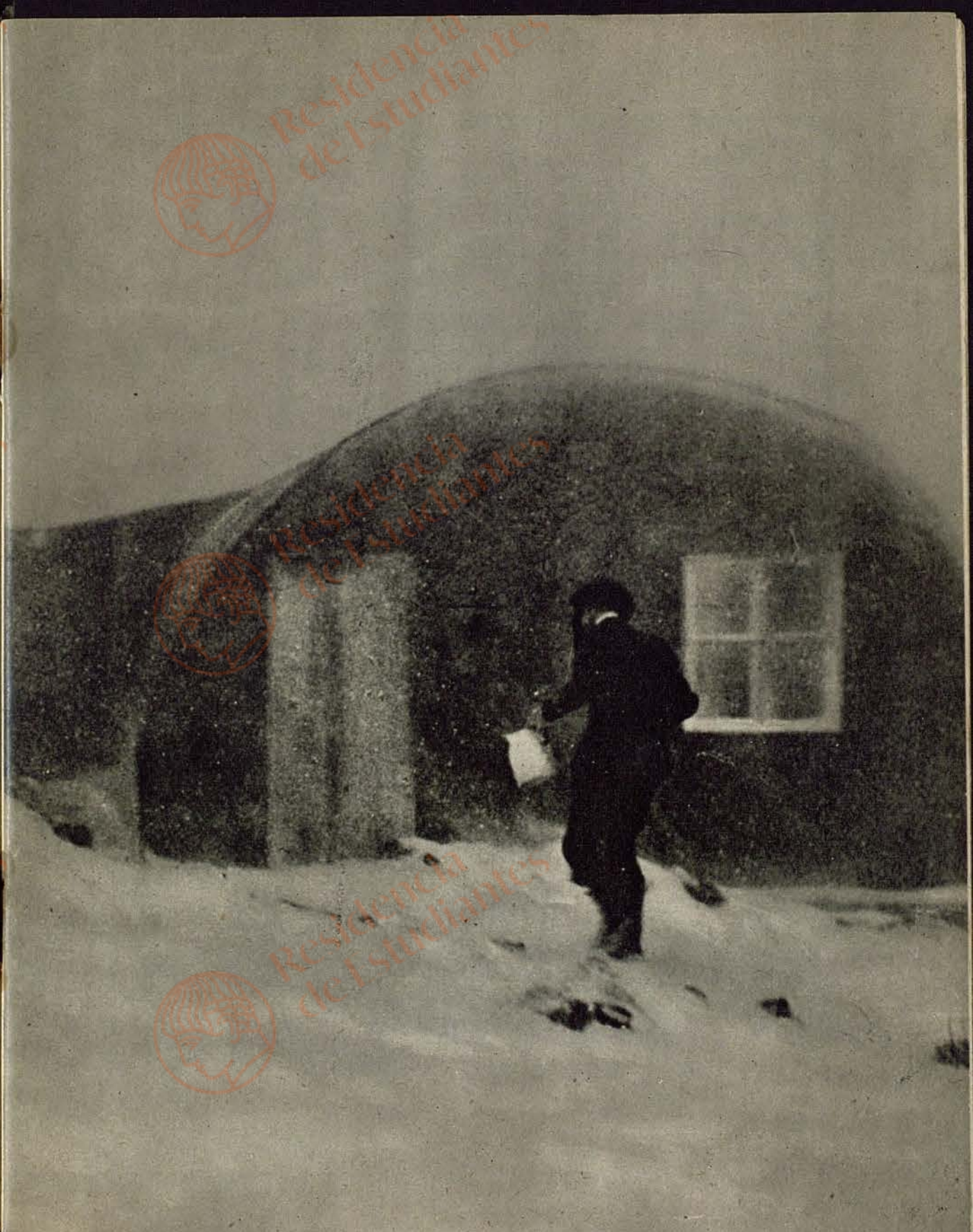


# Arctic War



Norway's role on the Northern Front 1<sup>s</sup> net







**O**N August 5th, 1940, 12 Norwegians whom fate had thrown together in a Salvation Army hostel in Iceland decided to form their own private "Army" in order to continue the fight against Nazism. They called themselves "Norwegian Company, Iceland," and began collecting equipment suitable for ski-troops.

Six weeks later, still unrecognised officially by either the British or Norwegian authorities, the force, which had by now increased to 18, hoisted the Norwegian flag in Iceland for the first time in the name of the Norwegian Army.

So began the first phase of the free Norwegians' participation in the war in the Arctic. It has taken them all over the Northern Hemisphere—Iceland, Greenland, Spitsbergen, Jan Mayen and back to Arctic Norway

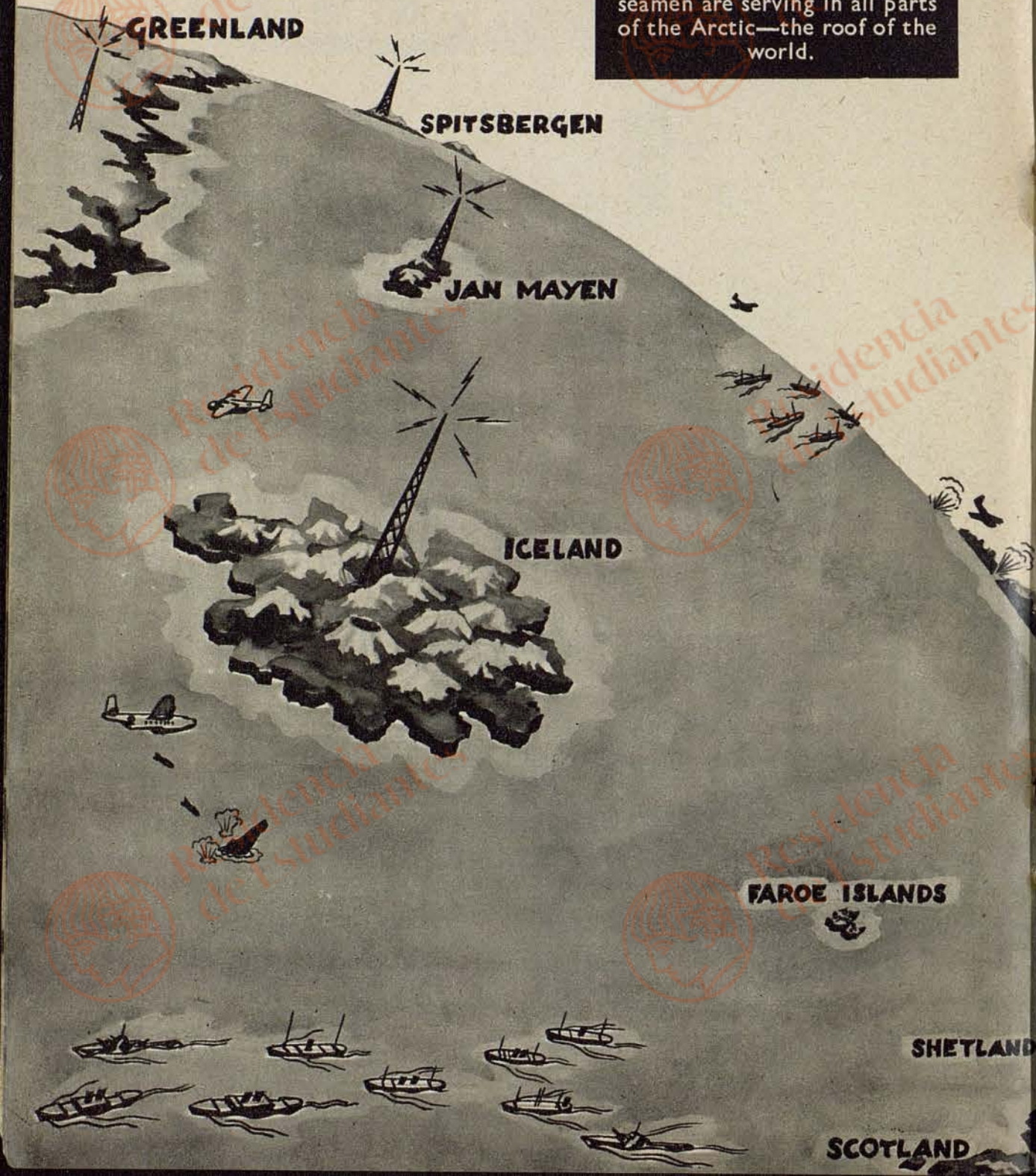
# ARCTIC WAR

## Norway's role on the Northern Front

Published by His Majesty's Stationery  
Office on behalf of the Royal Norwegian  
Government Information Office  
London 1945



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



## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARCTIC

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 Tromsø fjord on November 12th, 1944.

The salient points of these stories

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."

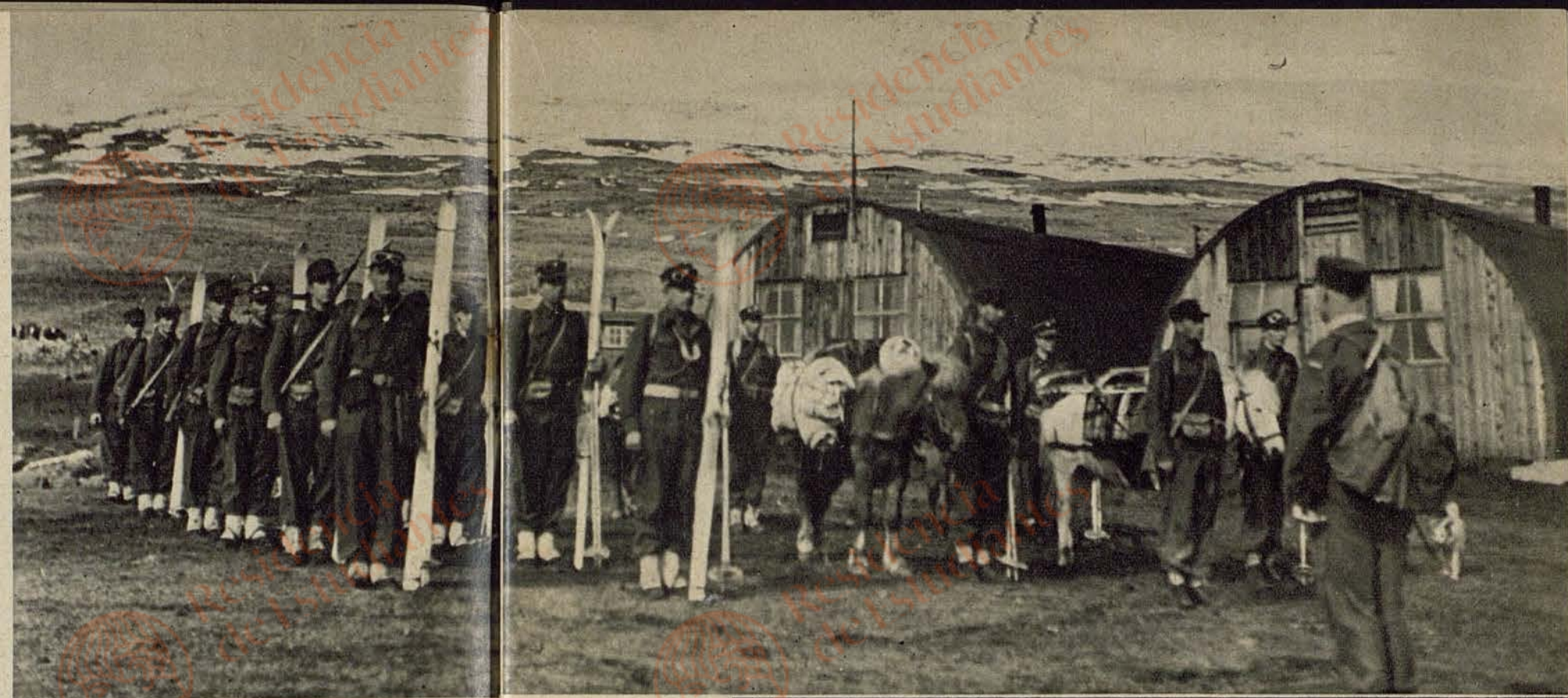
## POLAR "WEATHER" STATIONS

DURING ALL THIS TIME the Allied military authorities were busy with plans to establish a more efficient and comprehensive meteorological service in the Arctic. And one of the first places which was named on these

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



The first ski-troops on Iceland were given the job of teaching British, and later American, soldiers the art of Arctic warfare. They wear white camouflage cloaks and hoods, and use Icelandic ponies for transport.







Norwegian ships in the pack ice off Jan Mayen waiting to unload men and supplies.

first class polar and radio equipment and a small force of men. These men—Norwegians—were to occupy Jan Mayen and keep the Germans off.

The northern seas were at this time almost clear of ice, and *Fridtjof Nansen* made good progress. Soon the high snowy mountain of Beerenberg came into view, its peak shrouded in the clouds as usual. The ship cruised round among the underwater reefs of lava rock searching for a passage to a suitable landing point on the island.

Jan Mayen is of volcanic origin, the mountain itself being an extinct volcano. And when it had erupted æons ago the lava had streamed out into the sea and patterned the ocean bed with tremendous reefs.

On one of these treacherous reefs *Fridtjof Nansen* foundered. There was just time to scramble into the lifeboats before the ship sank. All equipment and supplies were lost.

The men went ashore and joined the four "weather men" who for so many months had lived alone. A radio message for help was sent out and a few days later a rescue ship arrived to take the men off. The

island was to be evacuated until such time as another expedition could be organised. Before they departed the radio station was destroyed. Nothing which might help the Germans was left.

It was now known almost for certain that a German expedition would be sent to occupy Jan Mayen before the Arctic winter set in and a watch was kept. Before long patience was rewarded.

A small ex-Norwegian hunting vessel, which had been seized by the Germans in Norway, came steaming up to Jan Mayen from the south. She cruised along the jagged coast looking for a suitable landing point. Then the British Navy came—a destroyer. The skipper of the German ship did not wait. He knew he had no chance. He simply drove the ship ashore and while he and his men floundered in the icy water—their lifeboats had been swamped immediately they were launched—the ship, complete with all its equipment and supplies went to the bottom.

The Germans scrambled ashore and stood on the rocks shivering in the cold waiting

for the British to take them off, and transport them to the inevitable prison cage.

Allied forces were strained to the utmost at this time, but it was still essential that Jan Mayen should be in Allied hands. Although it was becoming late in the year, it was decided that another attempt should be made to get a force on to the island, together with the necessary equipment.

This time a British expedition was sent. The ship reached Jan Mayen, but the weather was so terrible that it could not possibly approach the shore. For fourteen days the ship lay tossing in heavy seas, while everything froze. Then the venture was abandoned and the ship proceeded instead to Greenland.

As Jan Mayen was now in the grip of the Arctic winter, the Allies had the satisfaction of knowing that at least the Germans could not now seize the island.

Steps were taken immediately, however, to prepare a third expedition which was to be ready by the early spring. The Norwegians were called in at once again.

This was in January of 1941, and it was for this expedition that the twelve best Arctic-

trained Norwegians were selected from the new ski-training camp at Akureyri—although they did not know then where they were bound.

The British had requested the Norwegians to undertake the task because of their better knowledge of Arctic conditions. And, of course, Jan Mayen was also Norwegian territory. Indeed, British officers who had been to the island on an earlier occasion had declared that Jan Mayen was quite uninhabitable. This view is understandable, as nothing grows on Jan Mayen's 140 square miles of lava rock—except a hardy Arctic moss which is found in thin layers in the more sheltered parts; while the only natural life there comprises blue fox, Arctic birds, seals in the winter, and occasionally polar bears which arrive on the drift ice.

It was the Bergen sergeant who was put in charge of the small force, but the expedition at this time was under the command of the Norwegian C.O. of all Norwegian air, sea and land forces in Iceland.

The twelve men were told nothing other than that they were needed for a "secret



polar expedition," and that they must be tough, prepared to live in Arctic conditions, and devote themselves to the task in hand to the very end if necessary.

Eventually the expedition was ready—dogs, sledges, food supplies, tools, arms and ammunition.

Two little Norwegian ships arrived at Reykjavik. The first was *Vesle Kari*, a stout ship which was not unknown in peace-time Arctic ventures, and which was specially reinforced to stand the strain of pushing through the pack ice of the northern seas. The other ship was *Honningsvaag*, a Norwegian Navy patrol boat.

On February 19th, 1941, the two ships set sail. The only man on board who knew their destination was the Norwegian commander who had taken personal charge.

Up the east coast of Iceland they steamed, but soon they were enveloped in one of those sudden Arctic storms. The ships took a merciless battering and were so damaged that they could not continue the voyage. They put into Akureyri for repairs, covered in ice from bow to stern. *Vesle Kari* was the worst hit, with her bows smashed and considerable damage to her superstructure.

The commander was impatient in case the Germans forestalled him, but he realised that it would be foolhardy to proceed before the repairs were properly carried out.

On March 7th another start was made. This time the men were more fortunate, for the weather remained calm. For three days they cruised, and the general guess of the men was: Spitsbergen. Then the mountain of Beerenberg was seen beyond the horizon, wearing, as usual, a halo of cloud. Only then were the men called together and told the nature of the expedition.

To occupy Jan Mayen; to build up its defences from scratch; to keep the Germans out; to build and maintain a meteorological station; to build their own huts and cook their own food. And above all, to live in almost complete isolation. None of the

twelve men who were to constitute the occupying force had any illusions about the task ahead. They were old campaigners, and they knew something of the vagaries of Arctic weather and the uniformity of polar life. But to them Jan Mayen was something more than an inhospitable rock. It was part of Norway.

Soon the whole of the island came into view—the brown cliffs and rocky beaches; the dazzling white snow and the high mountain. Surrounding the island was a dense ice pack which stretched for miles. Through this the *Vesle Kari* would have to force a passage which would probably entail days of hard work. But on cruising along the edge of the ice belt a channel was discovered. The ice was cracked through almost to the shores of the island.

The month of March, however, is reputedly the worst of any month of the year in Jan Mayen, and although it was calm at the moment a sudden storm might break. And if that happened when the boats were in the middle of the pack ice the ships could be crushed to matchwood in a few minutes. However, the risk had to be taken and the ships steamed up the narrow sea lane without mishap. As they did so a German plane appeared, but at that moment *Honningsvaag* was hidden by fog, and the Germans made no attempt to attack the little *Vesle Kari* and soon disappeared.

The channel ended a little distance from the shore in a solid block of frozen water. This became the quay for the two boats.

The island was reconnoitred, but there was no sign of the Germans having got there in advance. The order was given to unload.

Here the Norwegians' difficulties began. Although it was easy enough to get the equipment overboard, it was not so easy to take it ashore. The frozen sea was covered with deep snow—too deep for the dogs to be used. So the men had to don skis and haul the material themselves. And when they reached



The original Norwegian occupation force—twelve men—arrive off the lonely Arctic island of Jan Mayen in March, 1941. To them, however, Jan Mayen was something more than an inhospitable rock—it was part of Norway.





the "beach"—a steep gradient of loose rock—they had to manhandle everything.

Whilst the work of unloading the most important equipment proceeded, other men went into the interior to find a suitable camp base. As luck would have it they found a hut which a British demolition party had overlooked. It was only a tiny hunting lodge capable of sleeping four, but under the circumstances it was a valuable find. And it was situated in an ideal site, protected on three sides by high land. It was decided that this should be camp base.

Once again equipment and supplies had to be manhandled, this time across rough rocky country. And always a rifle or bren gun was kept handy—just in case.

For several days the men were kept busy carrying fuel, food, ammunition, etc. They broke off only to snatch a few hours' sleep either on board ship or in the tiny cabin. From time to time violent storms broke, but disappeared just as quickly as they came.

Their first task was to erect a small radio station from which they could transmit the weather readings which were taken right from the outset.

But the biggest job of all was to transport the pre-fabricated house, which had been shipped from England, to the inland site. Whilst some of the men were carrying the sections, others were dynamiting the rock in the hillside to make a level foundation. And no sooner would they clear the site than a sudden freezing storm would obliterate it once again and the frozen snow would have to be blasted away. Then when the time came to erect the hut it was discovered that the assembling instructions which had been packed with the sections had been destroyed by the water shipped during the storm off Iceland and by frost. Thus in a climate so cold that the building tools could not be held for more than a few minutes at a time, the Norwegians had to experiment until they solved what they called a colossal jig-saw puzzle.

Among the supplies unloaded were two not very modern field pieces—a two-pounder and a six-pounder. Not one of the men knew how to operate them, so for the time being they were merely taken ashore and left. Meanwhile they must rely on their small arms if the Germans came.

Within a month the bulk of the equipment and supplies were safely ashore, but on April 7th a third ship arrived with more supplies—the Norwegian ex-hunter *Bull*. An extra effort was made to unload her, because the spring thaw was setting in rapidly, and unless the ships got away almost immediately they would be held up by the breaking ice.

Within a short time—on Easter Eve—the ships were on their way. Twelve men wrapped in polar clothing stood on the frozen shore watching their last tangible link with the outside world disappearing, and not knowing what the future held for them.

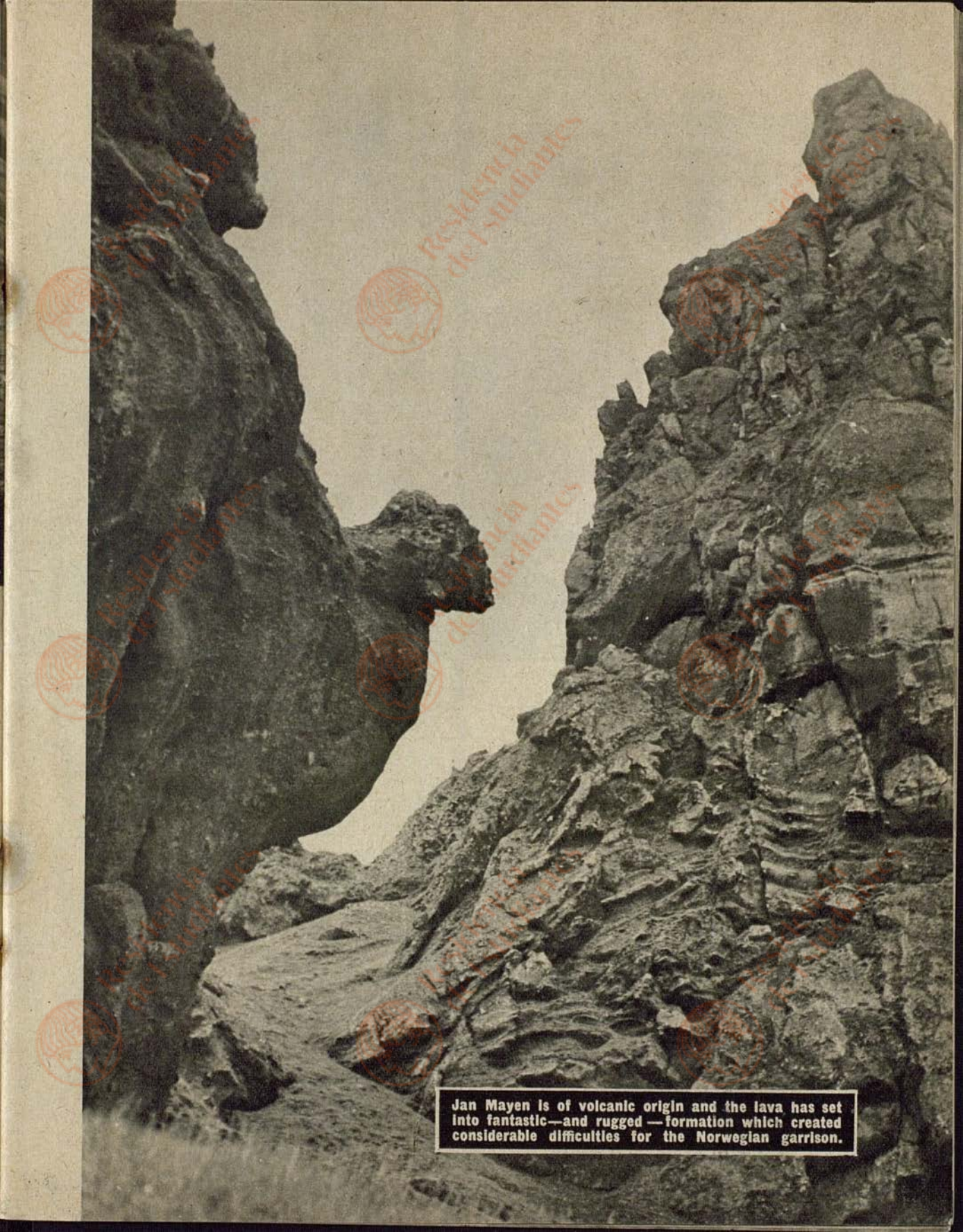
**WITH SUPPLIES** safely stored, with a house to live in and a radio station built, the garrison was more or less settled. German planes began to come over now that the weather was better, but at this stage had no more than nuisance value and the machine-gun and bomb attacks did no damage.

**12 MEN  
PREPARE FOR  
INVASION**

Guards were posted in case the expected German landing was attempted, while the dogs soon learned to announce the approach of enemy planes by howling dismally long before the drone of the engines was audible to the men.

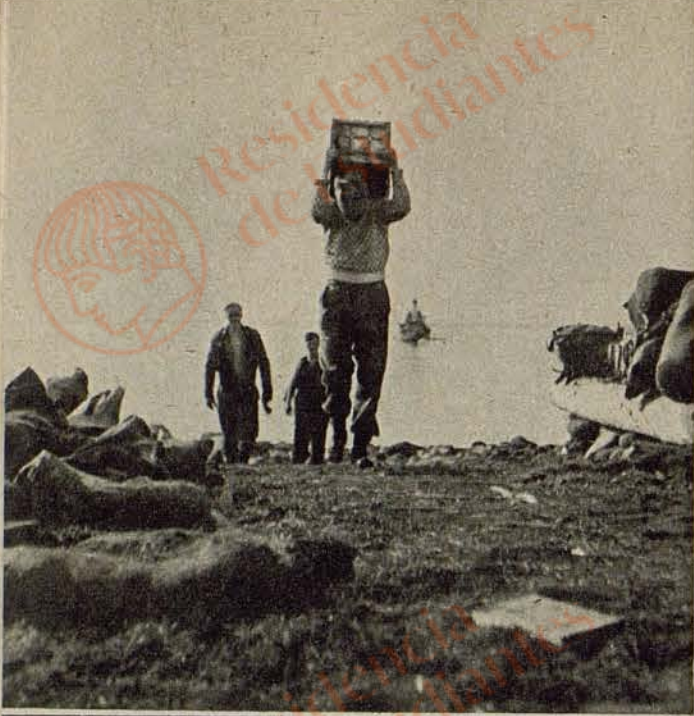
Although twelve men were obviously too few to deal with a determined enemy attack, they had great faith in themselves and they also knew that they had an ally in the storms and fogs, in the reefs and the jagged coast.



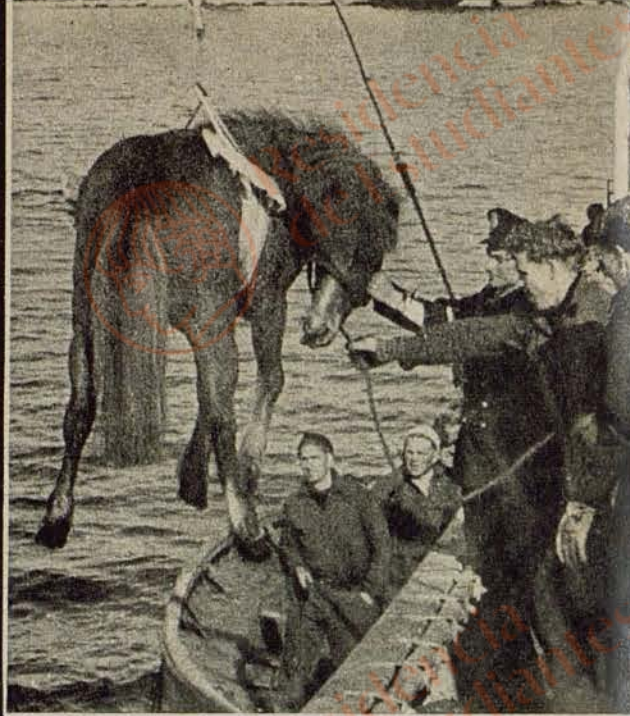


Jan Mayen is of volcanic origin and the lava has set into fantastic—and rugged—formation which created considerable difficulties for the Norwegian garrison.

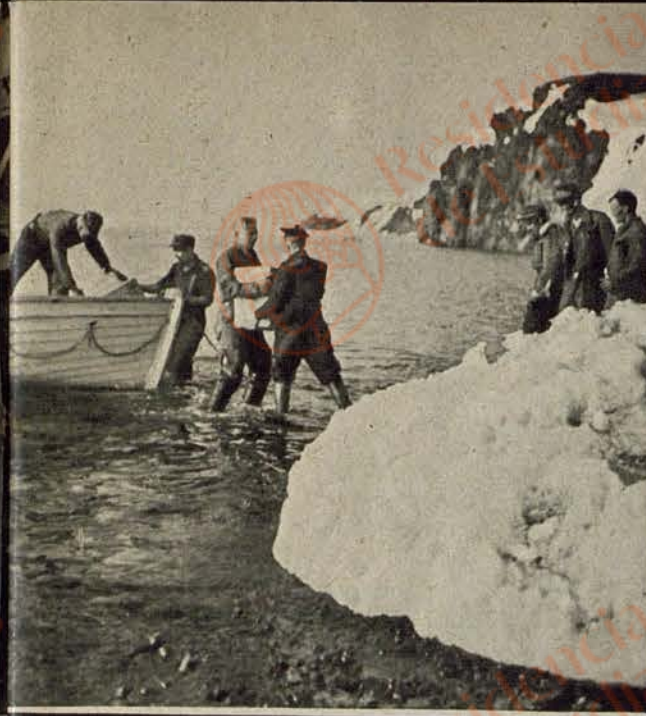




(1) *Above* All supplies are landed on the island in small boats and then carried ashore by hand.



(2) *Above* Icelandic ponies which were used at one time to relieve island transport difficulties had to swim ashore from the supply ship.



(3) *Above* No time is lost in getting stores ashore because a break in the weather may hold up unloading for weeks.



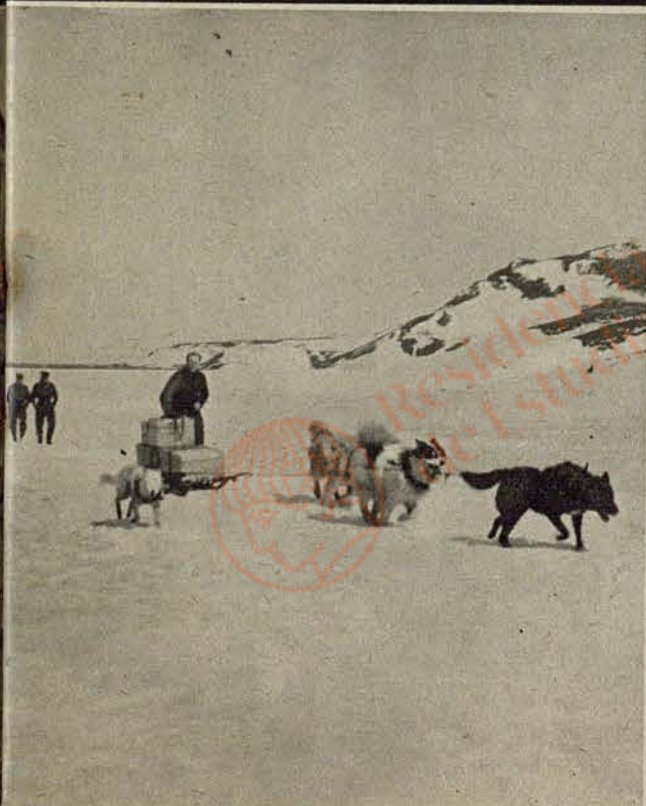
(4) *Above* Although fish abound in the Arctic they are difficult to catch, so fish from Iceland is included among the summer supplies.

(5) *Below* Something warm is needed during the six or eight months of bitterly cold polar winter.

(6) *Below* Big stocks of ammunition were built up, for the threat of a German invasion was never absent during the early years of the occupation.

(7) *Below* Dog teams and sledges are used for inland transport—where the rough terrain allows.

(8) *Below* The Greenland dogs, or huskies, are man's best friend in the Arctic.





As soon as they could they transported the two guns to vantage points on the island, and after numerous experiments finally succeeded in erecting sufficiently strong mountings for them. And with practice they learned how to fire them—with good effect too.

The Luftwaffe attacks continued, but remained ineffectual. The bombs merely pitted the hillsides and machine-gun bullets bounced harmlessly off the lava rock or buried themselves in the snow.

Meanwhile, however, the twelve Norwegians made plans—just in case. Food supplies were cached at various points on the island so that in the event of their being pressed back by the enemy they would have food at hand. And on one of the mountains they built a “reserve” radio station. This mountain top was to be their “last ditch,” because it was only easily accessible by using a rope which the Norwegians would cut if driven there by the Germans. And they reckoned that they could hold on until reinforcement could be sent from Iceland in reply to their radio S O S. Fortunately they were never required to do this.

On May 18th more supplies arrived. But more important still, there were reinforcements bringing the total force up to thirty men.

There were no huts for the new arrivals so timber was collected from the shores—wood that had drifted right across the roof of the world from Siberia. With axes and saws the logs and planks were cut and shaped. And with this material sufficient rough but cosy huts were soon available for the additional force.

Although there is not a single tree on Jan Mayen there was never any shortage of wood. In fact, the sea proved to be a very useful source of supply, casting up anything from raw rubber to articles of clothing; from barrels of oil to radio parts. On one occasion an unspoiled barrel of Norwegian biscuits from a Tromsø bakery was the prize found on the foreshore.

Jan Mayen at this time—May—was looking

at its very best. There were as many as three days of unbroken sunshine at a time, and when the weather is good in the brief summer the Arctic is beautiful. The sparse moss blossomed with a tiny pinkish-red flower and seemed to grow right up Beerenberg until it was lost in the cloud. And daylight reigned the whole time. At midnight the sun shone behind the mountain peak and glittered brilliantly on the snow of the highlands.

But the troops could not relax and idly contemplate the beauty of the scene. There was a tremendous amount of work to be done before winter came with devastating suddenness.

A new radio station was built and additional defence and observation posts were erected at various strategical points on the island. Defence sectors were allotted to the men, and a full guard was mounted. All the time the troops had to be on the alert, and from the cook to the smith each had to be ready to undertake a specific fighting job at a moment's notice.

By July the defence of the island was fairly complete and so far no Germans—other than airmen—had come near. Then, on July 22nd more reinforcements arrived, including gunners equipped with a number of modern anti-aircraft guns. Jan Mayen was now a formidable fortress.

The “weather men” were now posted at a number of different points on the island, as the climatic conditions are so variable that there can be a storm on one side of the island whilst the sun shines on the other. Each of these huts—which were given colourful names such as Foxhole, Home of the Fog, Walrus Alley, etc.—together with the huts in which the guards were mounted were connected by telephone. Miles and miles of cable had been laid during the summer, always just a foot or two above the ground where it was least exposed to the storms.

At the original base camp was the radio





After seven months of isolation on Jan Mayen the men wait eagerly for the mail to be distributed.





**"Met" officers on Jan Mayen "read" one of the weather instruments . . .**

hut from which the various meteorological reports were transmitted eight times a day. And here also were the main camp quarters—the mess which both officers and men shared, the sleeping quarters, kitchen, store and sick bay. And below was a deep cellar in which the perishable foodstuffs were kept safe from frost and hungry foxes.

The community was completely self-contained now, and prepared for the winter. The last supply ship left at the end of July, and the garrison would now be on its own until the next ship came six or seven months later.

There was not a radio for every hut on the

island, however, but news broadcasts and other features of interest were relayed by telephone from the main station to the outposts.

The last signs of summer rapidly disappeared, and the "fog season" came. Thick, clammy fog blotted everything out for miles, and it was always accompanied by a biting cold. Then came the darkness of polar winter unbroken except for the lights of the aurora borealis. And the storms began to descend in their full fury. Bags filled with sand—or, rather, powdered lava rock—were piled round the huts to prevent them from being blown away, and some were





... and their findings—upon which important sea and air operations often depend—are radioed from this lonely radio hut on a bleak mountain-side.

given added strength by propping drift-logs against the walls.

Air pockets were built in the hut entrances to prevent the cold from entering when the doors were opened, and the combustion stoves were kept going day and night.

Although only two or three hundred yards separated the telegraphists' hut from the meteorological headquarters, it was discovered that at times it was impossible for a man to cross from one to the other without facing the danger of being swept away by the wind. Because of this a wire hauser was stretched between the two buildings so that if it was essential for someone to reach

the other hut when a storm was at its height, he would be able to crawl over the snow holding tightly to the wire guide. During one of these storms a husky which left its hole in the snow was carried away together with the stake to which it was fastened, and was never seen again. That gives some idea of the ferocity of Jan Mayen weather.

But the weather was not always bad—although it is generally reckoned that storms lash Jan Mayen for 260 days of the year. Whenever possible a patrol, complete with dog team, sledges, skis, tents and rations, set out to make the round of the island.

When the men were off duty they held



"national" skiing competitions, or went hunting.

Hunting in the winter time was very popular, for not only did it help to vary the diet but it kept the minds occupied. The first polar bear to set foot on the island after the Norwegian occupation was soon shot and his skin, after being cured, was sent the following summer to King Haakon as "a present from free Norwegians on free-Norwegian soil."

This first winter for the men of Jan Mayen went without trouble. Meanwhile, during all these months weather reports continued to reach Britain eight times a day; the coast of the island was patrolled regularly and the guards were constantly on duty. They had to make their own life and, used as they were to polar conditions, they succeeded where many might have failed.

With the turn of the year, however, it was found that great inroads had been made into the food supplies, and as it was not known when a relief ship might be able to get through, rationing had to be introduced. In March, 1942, however, the first ship arrived—the first contact for over seven months.

With it came mail with news of their families and friends in occupied Norway and elsewhere, new faces, fresh personal news. It was a happy band of shaggy, bearded men who watched that first relief ship grind her way through the ice. Later on many of the "old originals" returned to Iceland or Britain while fresh troops took their places. Some, however, preferred to remain on Jan Mayen.

During the summer months there was once again feverish activity, including the erection of new huts and defences. The German air raids were resumed, but once more they were without effect.

Icelandic ponies were brought to the island—they had to swim from the ship to the shore—and these animals eased the transport situation considerably. An electric

power plant driven by a windmill was installed and electric lighting took the place of tallow candles. New supplies were distributed throughout the island, repairs were carried out, and in general everything was once more made snug for the long winter ahead.

The Jan Mayen community was no longer based on improvisation. Those days were over by the end of the summer of 1942. Now they even had fresh meat to look forward to in the winter, for a number of pigs had been imported and were to be fattened up on camp swill ready for slaughter at Christmas and after. Some hens were imported too, but this experiment was not very successful and the birds died. Even sheep were brought from Iceland, but the moss and the very sparse patches of coarse grass were insufficient to maintain them.

It was whilst these sheep were being kept that one of the men, who had charge of the huskies, earned the name of "The Elk." One of the animals escaped into the mountains and could not be caught. Although nearly 50 years of age "The Elk" chased it for 18 hours until the animal was exhausted. And then he carried it home. You see, "The Elk" had been training huskies in North Norway since he was a boy, and to train them he had to run with them for mile after mile. The result was that he has an iron constitution, and as his comrades say, lungs of leather!

Another man whose iron nerve was legendary proved this one day when he and another soldier came face to face with a huge polar bear. The bear lumbered towards them, but the man—a sergeant—held his fire just for the fun of seeing how close the animal would approach. When it was six yards away his companion urged him to fire. But the sergeant waited. Not until only 12 feet separated them and the bear was about to leap upon them did he pull the trigger. This man was once a University professor—a man 6 feet 4 inches tall and with years of Arctic experience behind him.





One of the Norwegian garrison's few relaxations is to scale the extinct volcano of Beerenberg—a perilous 7,500-ft. ascent through the clouds and over treacherous snow-covered crevasses.



**D**URING THE WHOLE of the Norwegian occupation the Germans have never once attempted to set foot on the island. With the exception of air attack, they have taken no offensive action at all. Frequently U-boats were seen off the island re-charging batteries, but they always took care not to get within range of the Norwegian coastal guns.

## DAILY LIFE

Among the men who preferred to stay on Jan Mayen without even going on leave was the chief meteorological officer, who remained at his post from the time he first landed in March, 1941, until the summer of 1943 when he spent a short leave in London. But he was glad to return! He is a man of the Arctic, a man who has spent 25 years of his life in the northern hemisphere. Another of the men of Jan Mayen has been to Iceland once only—the farthest South he has ventured. He was formerly a trapper in Spitsbergen, and he has not seen a growing tree for sixteen years.

During the last four years some expeditions have climbed the towering Beerenberg with its great snow drifts, its crevasses and sheer cliff sides. They have climbed through the clouds and stood on the mountain summit gazing across a sea of swirling mist. Such an expedition with all its perils is recreation for the men of Jan Mayen.

In the summer time they sometimes swim in the freak lagoon of fresh water which lies at the southern end of the island. Here a great bar of lava rock closes across the mouth of the indented coast to form a lagoon which is filled with the water of the melting snows. The water is bitterly cold even in high summer, but the men are tough. The telephone linesman, for instance. Regularly when weather permits he sets out to check his wires and covers as much as 45 miles in 24 hours.

Stores of birds' eggs—mainly gull and auk—are collected during the summer months

too, to provide a valuable addition to the island diet. Expert climbers equipped with ropes are lowered over the sheer cliff edges of the coast to reach the nests on the ledges—a dangerous job with lava rock as sharp as a razor, and one which is entrusted only to the most skilled.

"If only the summer would stay throughout the year," one of the men has said, "life would be tolerably good on Jan Mayen despite the sudden storms. There's always something to do when there is summer light—sometimes too much as things are, what with the non-stop unloading of supply ships and the renovations for the winter."

Supply ships never linger at Jan Mayen, for sudden bad weather may hold up operations for weeks. On one occasion a supply ship stood off the island for two months before it could come inshore.

During the winter there are often times when movement out of the huts is absolutely impossible for days—sometimes weeks—on end. Then occupations must be found. The men play chess or cards or other games; they read, often several times, every one of the Norwegian books which are brought from all quarters of the world each summer; they eat and sleep. The craving for creative occupation is satisfied by woodwork.

With driftwood collected from the shore some beautifully hand-carved furniture has been made on Jan Mayen. A man will spend months in making one article so that the workmanship is perfect.

Some magnificent metal work has been done, too, with metal salvaged from one of two German planes which crashed on Jan Mayen. The first machine crashed somewhere on Beerenberg and the Norwegians never succeeded in locating it. The second one met its doom when it struck the mountain-side behind the camp. The crew of six were dead when they were found by the Norwegians. They were afterwards buried on the mountain, and their graves are marked with simple crosses made from driftwood.









On midsummer night the Norwegian garrison celebrates round a great bonfire of timber which drifts to Jan Mayen from distant Siberia.

Practically every man on the island made himself an ornate dagger with the salvaged material—knives with fine steel blades, handles and sheathes of polished perspex. One was specially made and engraved for King Haakon; another for the heir-presumptive, Prince Harald.

In winter time too, when the seas around Jan Mayen are frozen, thousands of seals appear. Then armed with cudgels the men would scramble across the ice floes to catch the baby seals whose skins are quite valuable, and whose carcasses provide meat for the dogs. The annual catch on Jan Mayen now averages 200 to 300 baby seals.

Hunting in one form or another occupies a considerable part of winter off-duty time for it not only keeps minds occupied and thus helps to stave off the dreaded "polar sickness"—when man becomes depressed and lethargic with the monotony of the life

and the desolation on all sides—but also yields considerable financial returns to the men when they return to civilisation. The principal prize is the skin of the blue fox, of which there are considerable numbers on the island. Every man on Jan Mayen is allowed to catch two foxes a year, all of which go into the common pool to be shared out at the end of the year.

Next in importance comes the shooting of birds—principally auk. These birds add considerably to the variety of the diet, and their flesh is relished by men who otherwise would have to live on tinned fish and tinned meat. But to shoot a bird on the wing with a .303 rifle bullet is no easy job, unless you are an expert marksman. And those who are not crack shots quickly became so on Jan Mayen and almost every man up there soon learned to bring down his bird at 200 or 300 yards range. Indeed they



become so proud of their marksmanship that they spend hours cleaning and adjusting their rifles, and no one would dream of "borrowing" another man's rifle. A rifle becomes part of a man on Jan Mayen.

Despite the climate the health of the men on Jan Mayen has always remained good. In fact, the only occasions when they contract common colds is when they board the supply ships during the summer. In winter time the men maintain that they do not catch colds because they take regular steam baths. This consists of pouring melted snow on to heated stones and standing in the steam. Then they run outside and roll in the snow. Casualties, too, have been light, only one man having so far been lost. He was drowned when his canoe, fashioned out of a tree trunk which was washed ashore, overturned.

There was a very amusing incident in the early spring of one year when a big American warship hove-to off the island and her commander invited the Norwegian officers to come on board for dinner.

The officers of Jan Mayen were rather taken aback. They looked at their "best" clothes—a battered fur cap, leather trousers which were worn and patched after a winter's wear, the heavy unpolished ski boots. Still, they cleaned up as best they could, trimmed their hair and beards, tried to clean their broken, hard-worked hands, and went aboard.

They were taken to the commander's elegant dining hall. Its parquetté floor shone and the whole room almost dazzled the Arctic soldiers with its white tablecloths, glittering silver and cut glass. Negro orderlies in beautiful white uniforms ushered them in and then the commander himself arrived—wearing his best white ceremonial uniform with a long row of medal ribbons across his chest.

"That was a wonderful dinner . . ." said one of the Norwegians afterwards.

It is not often the men of Jan Mayen have such a break as this.



*Above* Egg hunting among the cliffs is dangerous work, but the eggs collected help to vary the men's diet.

*Below* In off-duty hours "national" ski-jumping championships are held, and competition is keen.





**ALTHOUGH THE** **TRAINING**  
**TWELVE** best **10,000**  
Norwegian skiers had **SKI-TROOPS**  
been ordered on their  
"secret mission" to  
Jan Mayen in January  
1941, the balance of  
the "Norwegian Company, Iceland," num-  
bering about thirty men, continued with the  
task of organising the ski training school at  
Akureyri.

Everything required in the way of equip-  
ment, most of which was actually made to  
Norwegian design and by Norwegians in  
Britain and America, was shipped to Iceland  
and the full training programme was put  
under way.

The British troops received instruction  
both in theory and in practice on the  
mountain slopes of Northern Iceland. When  
they had mastered the art of skiing they  
learned to drive dog teams, to live in tents,  
to build snow huts and to dig cosy quarters  
in the snow itself. They had to learn all  
the arts of combating Arctic weather and  
snow storms, and to make the best of  
limited Arctic rations. In short, they learned  
how to make their homes with nature at her  
worst.

Full responsibility for the training of  
British troops in Alpine war technique was  
given to the Norwegians, and the whole  
programme was based on their experience.

All through the winter of 1940-41 this  
training was carried out at the highest  
possible pitch by the handful of instructors,  
but when in 1941 American troops arrived  
on Iceland the Norwegian authorities were  
requested to provide more ski-troops to act  
as instructors to the Americans.

In September of 1941 a further force of  
some thirty Norwegian ski-troops arrived in  
Iceland from Scotland, and, operating as a  
separate unit, they began instruction.

They set up a school at Reykjavik which  
also included a section for winter warfare  
training, and the equipment provided was



These American ski-troops are some of the  
10,000 British and American soldiers whom  
Norwegian instructors trained in Iceland.



of the very finest quality. This school indeed became the biggest and best organised of its kind in the world.

The British wanted at least one unit in every battalion trained as ski-soldiers, but the training went so rapidly and so well that not only was this object soon achieved, but several companies in every battalion, and in some cases every man in a battalion, learned to ski.

During the second winter one group of Norwegian instructors taught the theory at Reykjavik, where the course lasted for three weeks, followed by a similar or longer period of training in the mountains nearby. The second group comprised a practical school at Vinheimajokulen (meaning the home of the wind), and consisted of a tented camp. The wind in these mountains is the most powerful anywhere recorded, and consequently proved an ideal conditioning site for the trainees. Tents were often blown away and the men had to dig deep into the snow for shelter. To avoid losses in men and equipment, however, the company, which normally numbered about 200, generally moved into the valley upon the approach of fierce storms.

The organisation of transport to this tented camp 3,000 feet up in the mountains was a difficult problem of course, but with the aid of Icelandic ponies, or, if the snow was very deep and the terrain particularly bad, huskies, the difficulties were overcome. The Norwegians who arranged this transport soon learned to know the vagaries of the mountain weather in this locality, and always succeeded in getting through without losses, although often they were obliged to dig in until storms passed over.

The late Captain Nordahl Grieg, Norwegian war reporter and poet, who was killed while acting as an observer in one of the big R.A.F. raids on Berlin in 1943, spent ten days at the training school and his description gives a vivid impression of the life there:—

“The wild, tumultuous Atlantic gale weather

swept over the glacier and the Norwegians described last year's gale. The small but powerful Icelandic ponies which came up the mountain were blown off their feet. They themselves had their rucksacks blown away. All they could do was hang on and hope for the best.

“In good weather we looked across the Arctic Ocean—green-blue fjords, violet-blue sea, and the deep storm blue in the clear sky above. Blue is the colour of Iceland, with white mountain stretches, purple-tinted from the lava, the colours of the Icelandic flag.

“We lay in two-men tents, and perhaps only at sea is wind and weather so close as in a mountain tent. One listens through one's fitful sleep to the snow falling. It falls with a whistling, rain-like noise against the tent-cloth. And the wind gusts howl. We were not to listen for too long, however, because our entrance was snowed up and we had to crawl out head first through the snow in order to clear it away.

“When there was a storm it was as though fighting a forest fire, only the ‘smoke’ was ice grey and cold, and it swept down from the bleak mountains. We built weather-shields above the camp to try and stem it. Inside each tent a man stood and held the tent-pole. Outside others tried to hold the snow-field back with shovels to prevent it blowing away! One American shouted: ‘And my people think I'm in Africa!’

“Then came periods of stillness and cold—20 to 25 degrees below zero. The tent-cloth crackled, ice-stiff, when one moved in the night. In the morning, when the guard cried out that it was a quarter to seven, we would light the primus. The flames gathered up from this stove and a damp warmth filled the tent. Then we shovelled the porridge down.

“Best of all was to lie out of doors in holes in the snow-field with a candlelight glistening in the sparkling white crystals of the wall. To breathe in the snow air was





*Above* A ski-patrol rests in the shelter of a natural snow barrier during routine operations in Northern Iceland.

*Below* A "snow bath" is considered a sure way of staving off a common cold in the northern hemisphere.





like filling the lungs with the purity and chill of the stars."

During the first two winters in Iceland the Norwegians trained no fewer than 10,000 British and Americans as ski and mountain troops. And not one man was lost during all the rigours of training for which the Norwegians were responsible.

By the end of 1943 the Norwegians' task was completed. British and American units had by then sufficient skilled instructors of their own—if required—but as it was there was hardly an Allied infantry soldier stationed on Iceland who was not able to ski.

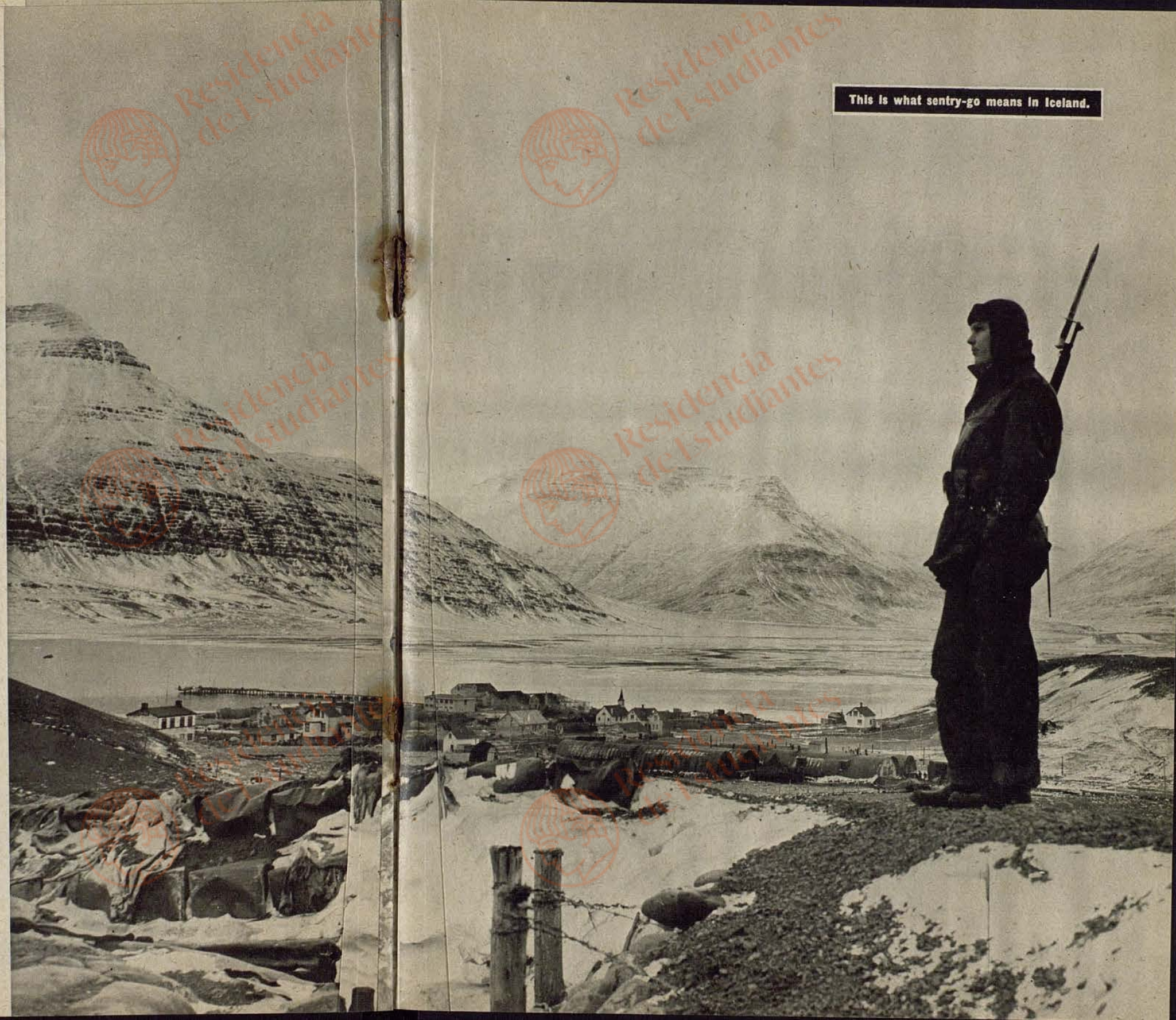
Many of the Norwegian instructors have, however, remained in Iceland where they maintain a small training school for Americans and also act as instructors at a special Recreation Hostel for Allied troops. Here, almost on the same lines as a Norwegian tourist hotel, they instruct the soldiers on leave in other aspects of skiing, such as jumping and slalom running.

IT WAS NOT only the **WINGS OVER THE ARCTIC** Norwegian Army—and sometimes units of the Navy—that was serving in Iceland during the early years of the war. Another Norwegian force was adding its weight to the Arctic war—the Royal Norwegian Air Force.

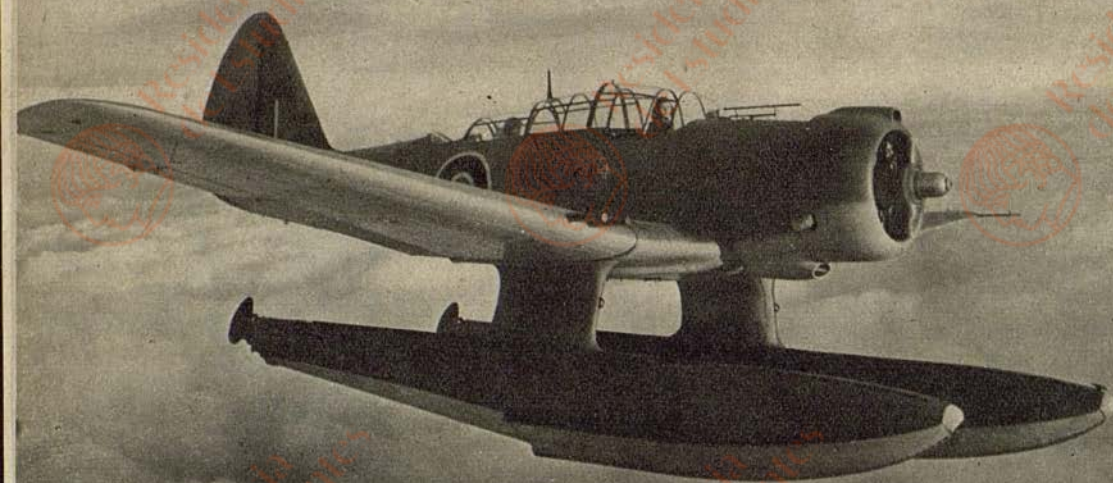
For two years a seaplane squadron was stationed in Iceland, where both ground and air crews worked under difficulties and hardships equal to those experienced by any other forces serving in the northern hemisphere. And many Norwegian airmen earned the amusing "Order of the Blue Nose" awarded to all those pilots and others who flew their planes north of the Arctic Circle!

After the Battle of Norway in 1940 the Norwegian Air Force was practically non-existent, having fought almost to the last

This is what sentry-go means in Iceland.







plane. Therefore the force had to be rebuilt from scratch on British soil. Before the invasion of Norway, however, a number of machines had already been ordered from America, so that by the time the new Norwegian Air Force was organised, with its training school in "Little Norway," Toronto, Canada, these machines were available for delivery.

Thus there was no appreciable time-lag in equipping the first Norwegian squadron to be formed on foreign soil. As soon as sufficient men had been trained the squadron was on its way to its operational post.

This was to be in Iceland—a country for which not only the men but also the machines were particularly suited. The planes were Northrop No. 3 patrol bombers, single-engined seaplanes armed with four 0.5" and two 0.3" machine-guns, and carrying a bomb load of 1 ton. The type had special

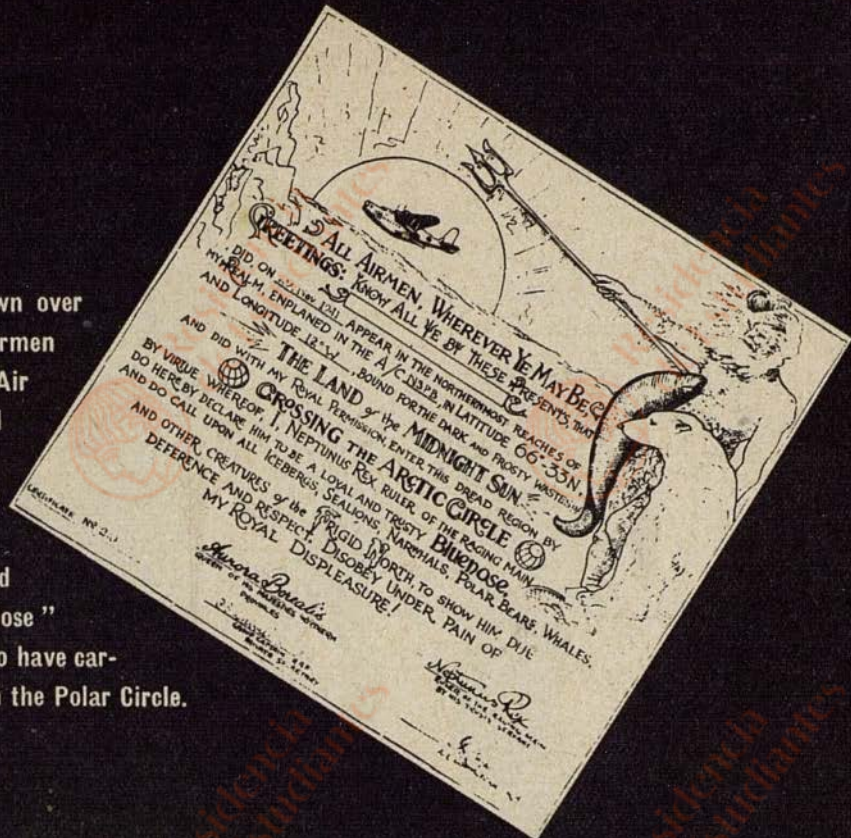
qualifications, and had been chosen for work along the far flung Norwegian coast, and was therefore also ideal for service in Iceland.

An advance party of the squadron reached Iceland in April, 1941, and prepared the way for the rest of the unit. There was no hutted camp or equipment waiting for them. They had to start from scratch. The men lived in tents until there was time to erect huts and look after their own comfort.

In May the first of the planes were landed in crates. The ground crew worked almost non-stop out in the open under all kinds of weather conditions in order to get the machines assembled in the quickest possible time, and thus enable the squadron to become fully operational. Owing to their great effort, the squadron was able to report "ready for operations" on June 12th, and that very afternoon the first Norwegian war plane to fly against the enemy since Norway



Great distances were flown over the Arctic wastes by airmen of the Royal Norwegian Air Force, who were stationed in Iceland for two years. A large number of these men hold the amusing but coveted "Order of the Blue Nose" awarded only to those who have carried out operations within the Polar Circle.



had fallen, almost exactly a year previously, took off from an Icelandic fjord.

It was the beginning of a largely unspectacular but nevertheless vital two years of hard work under the worst possible conditions. But the Northrop proved itself to be "the" plane of that time for all-round duty in Iceland. In this mountainous country with few cross country roads, no railway, no airfields for land planes—in fact, almost without normal communications of any sort—a multitude of jobs were found for the Northrops in addition to their routine U-boat hunting, sea patrols, convoy work and army co-operation. Among other things they served as fighters to drive off enemy spy-planes, as air ambulances and supply craft.

When the whole squadron was fully organised—it was, by-the-way, divided into three flights, "A" based at Reykjavik, "B" at Akureyri in Northern Iceland, and

"C" at Budareyri in Eastern Iceland—the men were at last able to turn their attention to securing a little personal comfort, and nissen huts were erected and surrounded by piles of sandbags to prevent them from being blown away.

Meanwhile, however, the ground staff still had to work on and maintain their aircraft in the open—often in dreadful weather. During the whole time the squadron remained in Iceland there were no hangars for the machines.

After every flight the Northrop planes had to be hauled out of the water and on to the beach, where they were lashed down with ropes to prevent them becoming involuntarily "airborne" again. The pilots, even though they themselves faced considerable hardships, were full of praise for the undaunted ground staffs.

The Norwegian machines operated over a





The ground crews on Iceland, some of whom are seen here de-icing a Norwegian plane, maintained and serviced the machines in the open under conditions of extreme hardship. The weather was often so bad that float planes had to be hauled ashore and lashed to the ground to prevent them becoming involuntarily air-borne again!

wide area, patrolling the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans between Greenland, Iceland, Jan Mayen and Scotland, often flying 300 to 400 miles from land. For the air crew—a pilot, navigator and wireless operator—flying was a continuous fight against snow storms, rain, fog and icing conditions. And in the fjords from which they flew wind gusts of hurricane force were frequently encountered. When flying round North and East Iceland in particular, they often had to “smell their way,” and in these regions weather forecasts were of little use because they had their own particular local weather phenomena.

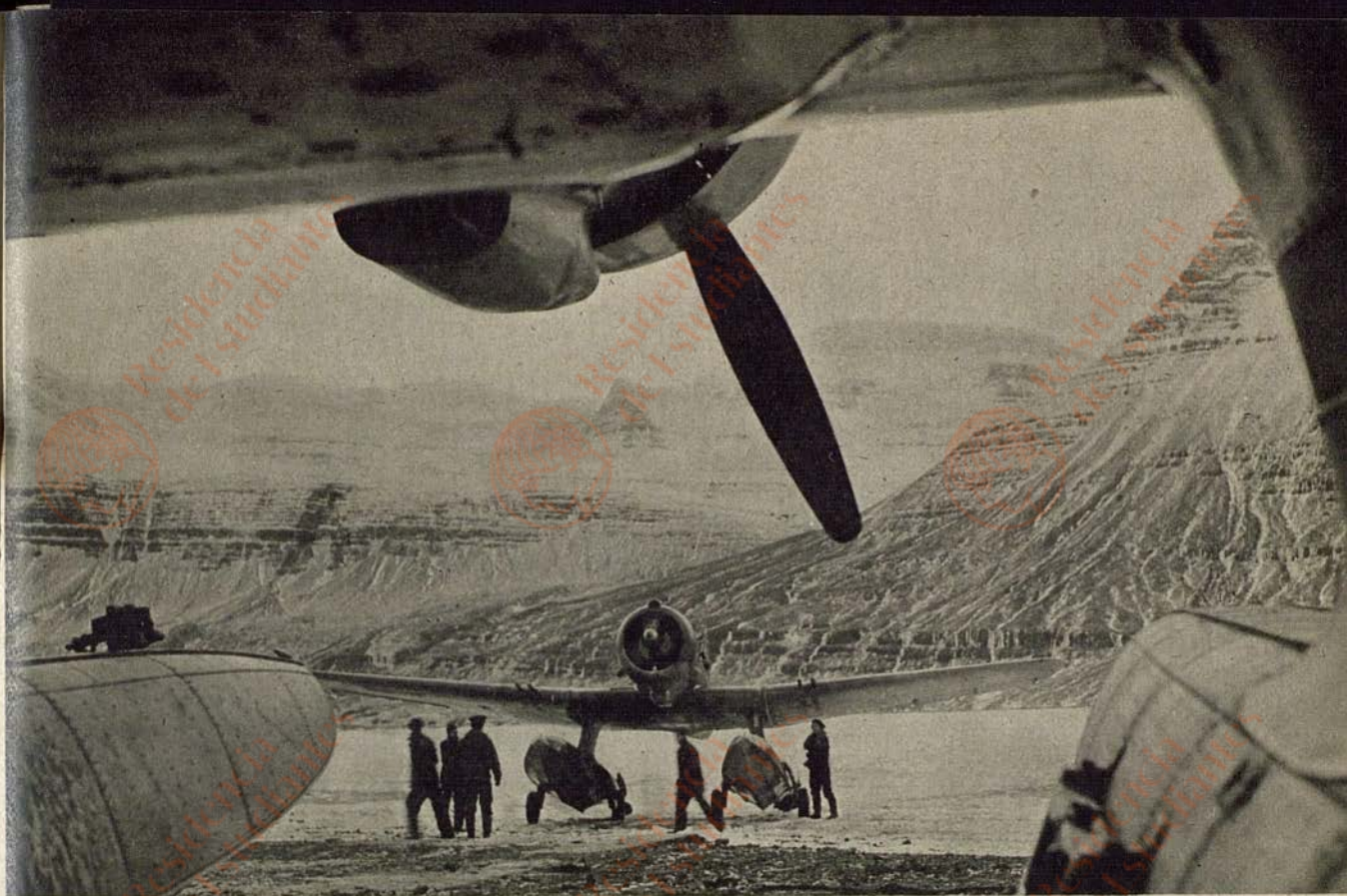
Further difficulty was lack of radio aids. These were unreliable or unobtainable because of the mountains and the magnetic

disturbances. These “magnetic gremlins” also had a marked effect on compasses.

Conditions were particularly gruelling in winter time. “C” Flight, for instance, was often cut off from the rest of the world for days on end. Sometimes the already poor communications would be put out of action—roads blocked by snow or destroyed by torrents of water; telephone lines, stretched across hundreds of miles of desolate country, broken; and even radio stations would be unable to make contact.

“C” Flight was stationed in a fjord, flanked on either side by 3,000-foot-high mountains, and down on the edge of the water lived about 200 Icelanders, principally sheep-farmers. “They were always very friendly towards us,” said one officer, “and





Preparing to taxi a Northrop float plane into the sea in order to take off on Arctic patrol.

invited us to their homes for parties. We returned the hospitality in our nissen huts. Before we arrived they were cut off completely during the winter, and we pleased them immensely by taking their mail to Reykjavik and bringing back odd things they needed."

The officer related some of the difficulties of flying in this particular spot.

"In the first place the wind, because of the fjord and the mountains, only blew in two directions—either in or out of the fjord. Thus if the wind was blowing off shore when a plane wanted to take off, the pilot had to taxi far out into the fjord and then fly inshore to take off into the wind.

"To do this is not easy. You would have to make a short run and fly straight towards the mountains. Often you would clear

these by only 60 feet or so, and because of the air currents you would find the plane skidding out of control towards the mountain-side and be unable to do anything about it. Then at the last moment the machine would answer to the controls. Often you would also drop into a pocket and fall two or three hundred feet without being able to help yourself."

Yet under all these climatic disadvantages the Norwegian squadron, together with the R.A.F. units, carried out their duties for two long years. From May, 1941, until May, 1943 (when the squadron completed its transfer to a Scottish base and was re-equipped with new types of aircraft), 6,373 hours were flown in Northrop aircraft alone. In addition, Catalinas which were added to the squadron



in June, 1942, were flown for 1,100 hours, making a grand total of 7,473 flying hours, of which 4,172 were operational.

Northrop machines made 303 anti-submarine patrols; 348 convoy escorting patrols; 52 reconnaissance flights; 179 fighter patrols; and 79 other operational sorties.

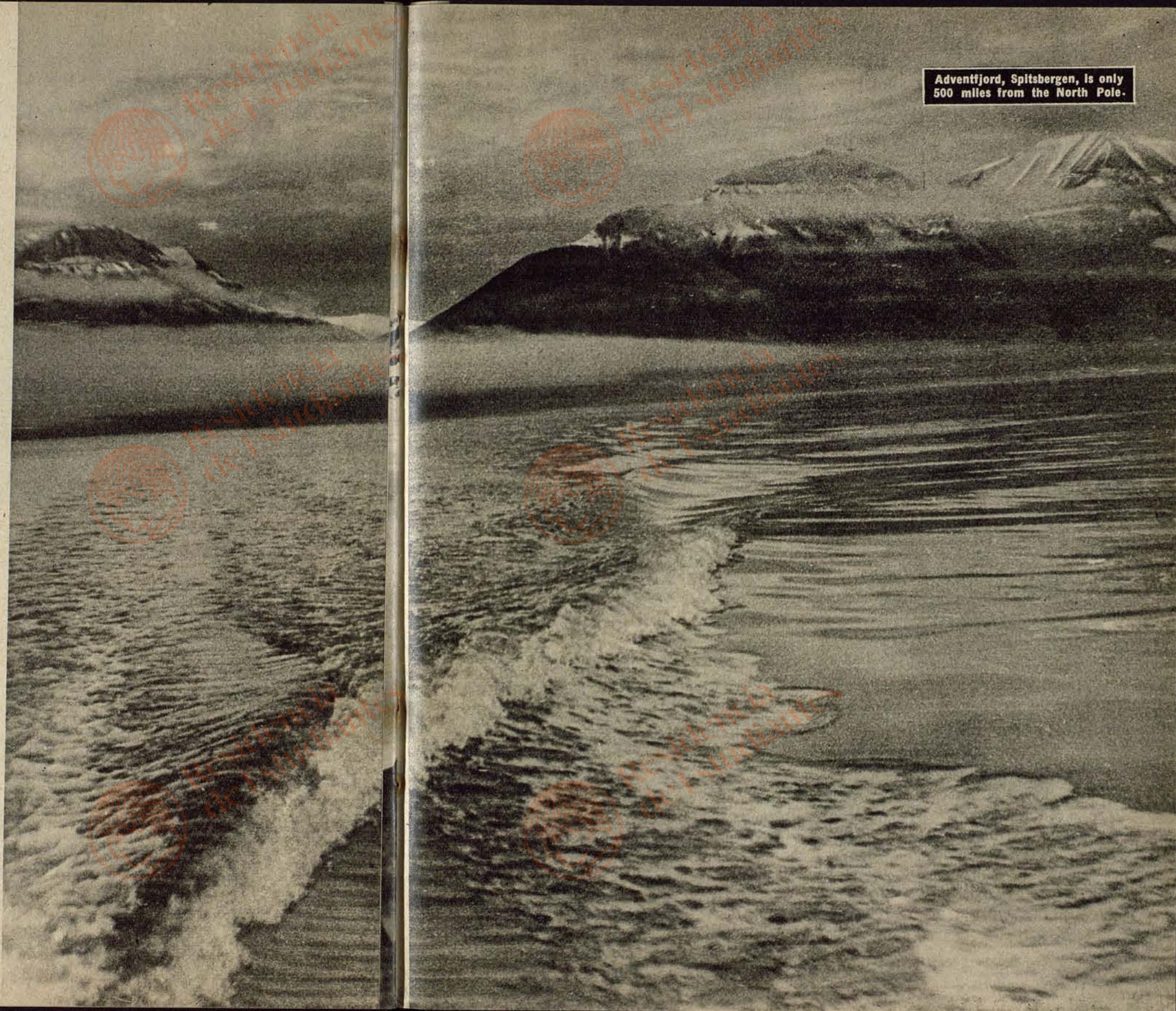
The convoys which Norwegian planes covered were principally those Russia-bound, the remainder being in the Atlantic. Reconnaissance work included obtaining information about ice conditions in the north, particularly in the Denmark Straits. Many attacks were made on German long-range aircraft, eight of which were definitely damaged, including four-engined F.W.200's, while many others were driven off before they were able to spy on vital convoys and direct U-boat packs to the scene. Yet, during this time the Norwegians did not have the assistance of Radar equipment and other devices for detecting aircraft.

The many sorties flown included assisting in the capture of a German U-boat about 200 miles south of Iceland in the summer of 1941. The waters south of Iceland—which the German U-boat crews called "Rosengarten" because they were so dangerous—was a favourite hunting ground for Iceland-based Allied aircraft. On this occasion a Lockheed Hudson spotted the U-boat on the surface and, as she crash dived, attacked with bombs.

By then the U-boat had had enough. She re-surfaced and showed the white flag, although ultimately it was found that she had suffered no damage. She wanted to surrender. The R.A.F. pilot sent out a rally call to the many other aircraft flying in the vicinity. The first of these planes to reach the scene was a Norwegian Northrop. Observing the U-boat on the surface but unable to see the Lockheed because of cloud, the pilot went in to attack and only pulled up at the last moment when he saw the white flag.

For 36 hours Norwegian and British planes flew overhead directing the U-boat to Iceland. Then British naval units arrived

Adventfjord, Spitsbergen, is only 500 miles from the North Pole.







Some of the 1,000 Norwegian civilians waiting to be evacuated from Spitsbergen in 1941 when Canadian, British and Norwegian forces visited the islands and demolished everything which might be of use to the Germans. Spitsbergen was re-occupied by Norwegian forces in 1942.

and took over. The weather was, as usual, rough and when the enemy ship had been escorted as far as the Southern Iceland coast she was beached on the sand there—among the shipping wreckage which litters that part of the coast and has earned it the name of “Dead Man’s Coast.”

The crew were taken prisoner and the U-boat later towed to Reykjavik, once again escorted by British and Norwegian planes in addition to the British Navy and the Royal Norwegian Navy.

The U-boat was of inestimable value to Admiralty Intelligence.

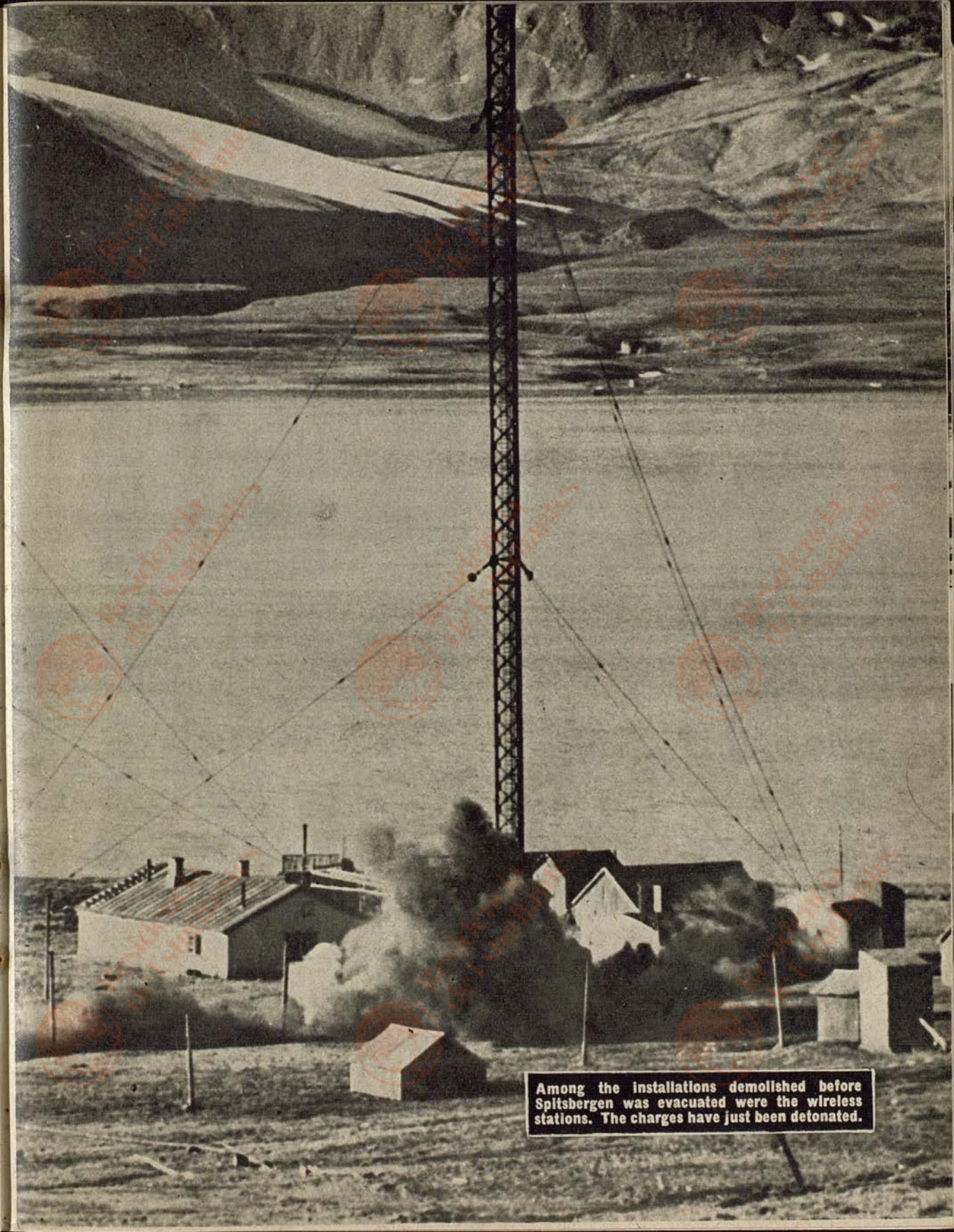
During their two years’ service in Iceland, Norwegian Northrop pilots sighted ten U-boats, seven of which were attacked with considerable success with depth charges and guns, but no definite “kills” were ascertained.

The Catalina aircraft of the squadron also had some success in attacks against U-boats. Five were sighted and two were attacked with good results although here again “kills” were not confirmed.

One of the many “general services” jobs for which Northrop seaplanes were used was to bring seriously ill civilians and service men from remote parts of the country to the hospital in Reykjavik. With communications as they are in Iceland, air ambulance transport was of great importance and many lives were saved in this way. Considerable skill was needed, however, to transfer the patients from rowing boat to plane in the choppy seas which are the rule rather than the exception in Icelandic waters.

Although the concrete results achieved by the squadron’s two years’ service in





Among the installations demolished before Spitsbergen was evacuated were the wireless stations. The charges have just been detonated.



Iceland may not seem spectacular their's was an essential job, even though the nearest enemy base was 500 miles away.

These men were laid to rest in rugged Iceland under conditions which are again described by Nordahl Grieg:

"The first of the autumn storms slashed the island over the tiny strip of land which separated us from the sea. The four young airmen who formed the guard of honour at the common grave swayed in the wild wind gusts. The Icelandic consecrating bishop, dressed in a cassock which hung soaked to his body, shouted in the storm which tore the words from his mouth and consumed them. Now and again some snatches of what he said reached those who stood near. 'Fight for what you cherish.' But that which we did not hear we nevertheless understood. Over the grave the storm swept in from the entrance of the fjord where the sea was lashed white . . . .

"The chief said a few words and then commanded: 'Caps off.' That was all; it was enough."

Since the squadron was transferred to Scotland and re-equipped with Sunderlands, their sphere of operations has still been in northern waters—first in the area between the Faeroes and South-East Iceland, and later, in 1944, nearer their own country of Norway. A total of 5,530 operational hours were flown up to September, 1944, and two U-boats which were attacked with depth charges and machine-guns have been assessed as "probably sunk."

Russian convoys have been escorted on fifty occasions and Norwegian Catalinas have escorted British task forces during attacks on the *Tirpitz* in Northern Norway, enemy shipping in Bodo, and on German airfields in Norway.

During all these operations 15 U-boats were sighted, one of which was definitely "killed" and several damaged, probably sunk.

## FOR MORE THAN A YEAR after the German occupation of Norway there was very little news about the Arctic archipelago of Spitsbergen. These Arctic isles covering thousands of square miles, with mines producing a combined Norwegian and Russian output of coal amounting to about three quarters of a million metric tons a year, seemed to be forgotten.

# COMMANDOS IN SPITSBERGEN

Not even the Germans had bothered to occupy them—but they took good care that they got the Norwegian-produced coal, which was sent to Norway by steamship.

When Norway was invaded there were about 1,000 Norwegian men, women and children living at Spitsbergen. They were mostly engaged in the mining industry centred round Ice Fjord and resided in Longyear City, but a number of trappers and hunters lived in the interior.

Spitsbergen is sealed off by ice during the winter, and the coal export season, which begins in the spring, was just about to start when the Germans attacked Norway. During the critical two months which followed the people on Spitsbergen waited anxiously. The governor called up all men who had had military training and they were armed with all available weapons, mainly rifles normally used for polar bear and seal hunting, and a number of shot guns.

But no attack was made on Spitsbergen, and there was nothing the population could do to help the mother country where most of their families were. Norway fell on June 9th, 1940. Work in the mines at Spitsbergen was resumed. There was not much else that could be done.

The Norwegian output of coal dropped considerably of course. Nothing like the usual 300,000 metric tons were produced, for it would all have gone to the Germans.

On the whole, however, the Norwegians



had to carry on as usual. Weather reports from the station which had been established there in 1911 continued to be beamed to Norway and what coal was produced was shipped there also.

The winter came with its polar darkness and the severing of communications, except for radio, with the rest of the world. Then came the summer of 1941. In June Russia was attacked and as there was a considerable Russian mining community at Spitsbergen, mainly centred at Barentsburg which is also situated in Ice Fjord, German military operations were expected.

Nothing happened however—until the beginning of August. Then, warships steamed up Ice Fjord. But they were British warships and they were commanded by Admiral Vian. The Norwegians hoped at first that the British had come to occupy the islands, but that was not the case. They had just come to have a look round. Three coaling ships which were loaded and ready to sail for Norway were seized and diverted to Britain.

The Norwegians wondered what they could tell the owners back in occupied Norway, and pressed the British Admiral to send a force to occupy the islands. He promised to do what he could and the ships then sailed away, leaving behind a token force of one Norwegian officer and one rating.

Signals were sent off to the coal-owners in Norway saying that the three ships were delayed. During the next fortnight more excuses were made for their non-departure. The Norwegian administration knew that there would be serious trouble for them if the Germans came to Spitsbergen. One day a German reconnaissance plane was seen, obviously looking for the three ships. So a signal was at once sent to Norway: "Ships sailed today."

Anxious days followed but the tension was broken at last on August 25th by the arrival of a British, Canadian and Norwegian force. This force had not come however,

to occupy Spitsbergen. It had come to evacuate the population and to destroy the mines and other installations which might be of use to the Germans.

Twenty-four hours later the Russian community of about 2,000 was on its way to Murmansk on British ships. Meanwhile the Allied troops began their demolitions. Norwegian trappers—about thirty of them—were called in from the interior. With the rest of the Norwegians they packed their personal belongings and prepared to leave the Arctic land which was their home. They were all to leave for Britain where they would join the Norwegian armed forces.

Mining machinery, overhead conveyors, landing stages, everything in fact which might help the Germans in the event of their taking over the islands was destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of tons of coal were set on fire.

Six days later, the Norwegians standing on the decks of the British ships, watched the barren, snowy islands disappear over the horizon. All except one man. He was a miner. He had lived there for years and he flatly refused to leave. He was the only man left in the vast archipelago of Spitsbergen.

Three weeks later, however, a German force which landed on Spitsbergen found him. He was taken prisoner and sent to Norway.

## RECONQUERING NORWEGIAN SOIL

FOR MANY of the Norwegians who were evacuated this was not to be the last time they would see

Spitsbergen. In the spring of 1942 it was decided to reoccupy the islands and establish there a new meteorological station. The job was given to the Norwegians.

It was not known whether the Germans





The Germans left this damaged Ju.88 on the airfield they built near Adventfjord, Spitsbergen. They were forced to evacuate from here in the summer of 1942.

were still there or how many there might be, but in May, 1942, two small ships—*Isbjorn*, an icebreaker, and *Selis*, a sealer—left an Allied port for Spitsbergen. There were about 100 men all told, including the ships' crews, and sufficient equipment, supplies and arms to maintain the force for a long time.

When the ships reached the southern approaches of the islands it was daylight throughout the 24 hours. The weather was good and it looked as though the last stages of the journey would be free of ice. But when the ships turned into Ice Fjord the broken ice had frozen again. Thus instead of being able to get right through to the shore immediately many hours would be needed to break the ice. The work was begun.

One-third of the force was sent across

the ice carrying only their bare equipment, in order to reconnoitre and prepare the way for unloading. The remainder of the men were divided equally between the two ships.

Suddenly, out of the sun, roared a big four-engined Condor. It sprayed the two little ships with bullets whilst the Norwegians answered with Lewis guns and small arms. A second, third and fourth plane came into the attack, raking both ships which were lying line ahead. All but the ships' gunners were ordered overboard on to the ice. They scattered while bullets sprayed around them.

The planes came in again, this time bombing. *Isbjorn* was hit and sank immediately. *Selis* was then set on fire and blazed furiously.

For an hour the planes attacked the men who lay flat on the ice. When it was all





The bleak little cemetery at Spitsbergen. Only one Norwegian killed in action is buried here.

over the Norwegians gathered on the shore and took stock of the situation. Fourteen men, including one of three British officers who were with the expedition, had been killed and eight were seriously wounded. They were practically devoid of equipment.

The force moved up to the former Russian settlement of Barentsburg where one of the larger huts was converted into a hospital. While the wounded were being tended others returned to the still blazing *Selis* to see what they could salvage. They went aboard with ammunition bursting all round them and rescued as much equipment as possible, including three rucksacks, a damaged radio receiver, and a number of rifles.

Another party meanwhile made a tour of Barentsburg, and to their delight found large quantities of tinned and other foodstuffs and plenty of blankets which had been left

behind by the Russians the previous year. Clothing was the principal shortage.

In subsequent days the Germans made regular air attacks, but no further damage or casualties were caused.

Barentsburg was not very suited for defence against a land attack but as the wounded could not be moved, the camp had to be maintained there. A force of nineteen men, however, were equipped as well as possible with the object of making the 50 or 60 mile trek across deep snow and rough, mountainous country to the former Norwegian settlement of Svaegruga, at the extreme end of Van Mijenfjord south of Ice Fjord. This force made a non-stop march over terrain often reaching 3,000 ft. It took them 32 hours. One man was lost in a snow-covered crevasse. At Svaegruga a defensive position was set up.

On May 16th another patrol was equipped





The main street of Longyear City as it was when Norwegian forces re-occupied Spitsbergen, and before the German battle fleet raid in September, 1943.

at Barentsburg with the object of making a 50 mile journey farther up Ice Fjord to reconnoitre Longyear City where it was believed a German force might be established. As the journey was a difficult one and probably fraught with many dangers, a second patrol followed a day later. Four days afterwards both patrols returned to report that there were between 20 and 40 Germans at Longyear City where a landing-ground had been constructed on the ice. One patrol had reached the settlement by going through a labyrinth of pits in which they had previously worked, one exit of which directly faced the German force. They had hidden there and watched the Germans every move.

As the condition of the wounded at Barentsburg improved, more and more men

could be released and gradually the force at Svaegruga was reinforced.

Meanwhile radio operators had managed to repair the damaged radio receiver and among the stores in the settlement they found bulbs, batteries and other articles which enabled them to make an improvised aldis lamp.

On May 26th—12 days after the first German attack—an R.A.F. Catalina aircraft flew over the island. It kept its distance not knowing whether it was friend or enemy below, and it was then that the home-made aldis lamp saved the situation. An S O S and a request for supplies was flashed and was seen by the aircraft crew. The plane then flew off.

The Germans kept up their air attacks and one bomb that found the target crashed





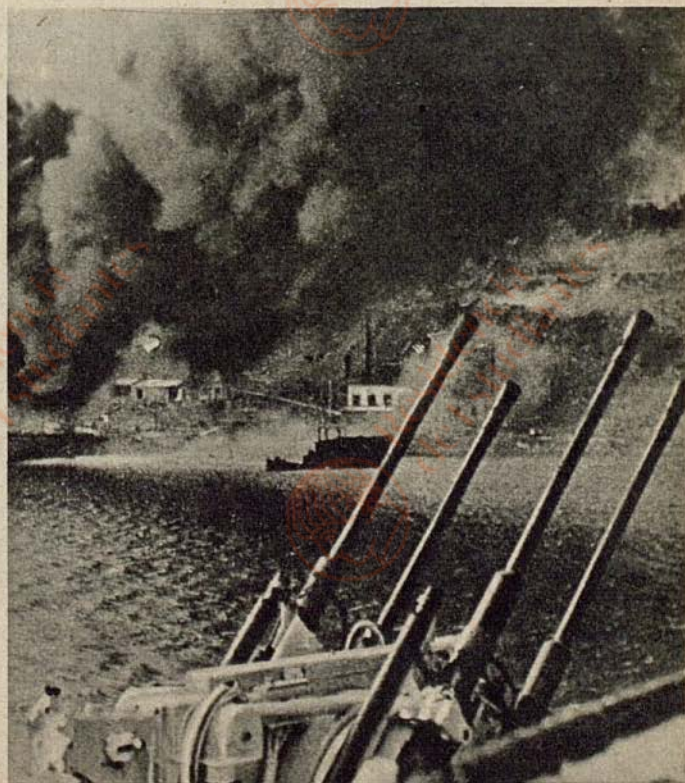
Then "Tirpitz", "Scharnhorst" and a number of destroyers bombarded Spitsbergen, and Longyear City was left a shambles.

The picture below was taken by a German photographer while the raid was in progress. The whole action cost the Norwegian garrison only six men killed.

right through one wall of the makeshift hospital but fortunately failed to explode. This bomb was soon afterwards dealt with by a wounded Norwegian officer assisted by a cabin boy and for this exploit he received the M.B.E. Other exploits in the course of this campaign, incidentally, earned a D.S.O., D.S.M., D.S.C., M.B.E. (the last two to British officers) and three M.M.'s in addition to a number of Norwegian decorations.

On May 29th another Catalina aircraft arrived and dropped supplies and automatic weapons. By this time all the Norwegian forces except for the seamen and the wounded had been transferred to Svaegrøva.

With plenty of blankets and tinned food they were fairly comfortable. The only food shortage was fresh meat and this was soon remedied. One of the officers who had





lived at Spitsbergen at the time of the evacuation remembered that the Russians used to keep considerable numbers of pigs at Barentsberg and he knew that they had been shot when the Russians were evacuated.

A search was made, and the snow was shovelled away from the pigsties. Sure enough they found the carcasses—frozen and fresh. Some had been chewed by Arctic fox, but the meat was in perfectly good condition. Seals too were found and shot, whilst birds' eggs, taken from the cliffs, also added to the variety of the diet.

Shortage of sufficient clothing caused some privation, and boots had become badly worn on the rough ground and were almost useless.

No German land attack ensued and the Norwegians refrained from any offensive action because of the lack of equipment and arms.

Meanwhile an R.A.F. plane had tried to get through to take off the seriously wounded, but it was forced back by bad weather. It was not until early in June that a Catalina finally succeeded in landing on the now ice-free sea in the fjord. Seven of the most seriously wounded men were taken on board and flown to Britain.

On June 14th a second plane arrived for the remaining wounded and for a British and a Norwegian officer who were required to report on the situation. It was only after they had given their reports that it was decided not to evacuate Spitsbergen again as had been intended, but to send reinforcements to help destroy the German force.

This second expedition landed at Barentsberg on July 2nd. Meanwhile extensive patrolling and reconnoitring had been carried out by the Norwegian force and every German defensive position had been pinpointed. With this information the now newly equipped force together with the reinforcements planned the attack.

By July 15th all was ready and the troops moved off to cross the 50 or so miles of rough country which separated them from

Longyear City. It was not until then that it was discovered that the Germans had taken the opportunity to flee whilst preparations for the attack were being made. They had evidently been evacuated by air.

The Norwegians were now in sole possession of the Spitsbergen archipelago. Most of the original force remained there, while the balance of troops no longer required were returned to Britain. All that remained was to establish defences to deal with any German assault and to establish a normal garrison routine. German planes occasionally appeared, but as one of the men afterwards said: "There was no excitement now."

The meteorological station was re-established, of course, and a three-hourly weather service was beamed to Britain.

During the winter, guards and patrols were maintained and for amusement the men engaged in trapping and hunting, skiing, card-playing. Cut off from civilisation as they were, they made their own life.

LIFE ON SPITSBERGEN was by no means easy. Sudden storms would often envelope the routine patrols when crossing the sea-ice or the mountain ranges with their treacherous snow-covered crevasses.

The year 1943 began with tragedy. On January 2nd a patrol discovered the few remaining survivors of a British merchant ship which had been wrecked off the most southern point of the Spitsbergen archipelago.

In a hut on the shore at the entrance to Ice Fjord the patrol found nine British seamen huddled together for warmth and suffering badly from food shortage, frost bite and exhaustion. In the same hut were the bodies of fifteen other seamen who had perished. The survivors were taken to Barentsburg where they recovered. They told a tragic story.

Their ship was wrecked on October 6th, 1942. The crew managed to get into two lifeboats, but these two boats became separ-



ated. One was never heard of again. The other, containing twenty-four men, reached the entrance to Ice Fjord; they managed to get ashore, and sheltered in a hut they found there, where they stayed for nearly three months. Fortunately they found just sufficient food in nearby huts and they had their lifeboat rations also. Fifteen of the men died from frost-bite and the exposure they had suffered in the open boat.

But the tragic part of the story was that if only the seamen had walked two or three miles up to the high ground behind the huts they would have been able to see Barentsberg camp a few miles away and signal for help.

Later in the year—March 1943—two Norwegian soldiers had a very narrow escape from death. They were on patrol along the Ice Fjord coast south of Longyear when suddenly a great storm descended. With equal suddenness the sea ice began to break up. They were unable to get back to the shore.

There was only one course open to them and that was filled with perils. It was to attempt the crossing of the ten-mile wide fjord in order to reach the opposite shore. The storm was still raging as the two men began the journey across the broken ice, jumping from floe to floe. It was so cold that they could not rest for more than a few minutes at a time; they had to keep moving. It was not until two days later that they finally scrambled ashore on the other side of the fjord and there they found a hut in which to rest.

To reach camp again now meant making a long detour round Ice Fjord and the route they mapped was shaped like a horseshoe. They had to cross arms of the fjord which were still frozen, climb over high rocky country and through deep snow. It took three weary days on short rations to complete the 50 or 60 mile journey. "Just part of our job," was their comment afterwards.

The next incident in the life of the Spitsbergen garrison was the discovery of Germans on the islands.

A motor-boat patrol was reconnoitring the western coast of the islands and when in Kross Fjord they stumbled across an elaborate German meteorological station.

As the Norwegians approached the building to investigate, the five Germans who were evidently operating the station, took to their heels.

The Norwegians gave chase, but four of them managed to escape into the hills. The fifth, however, was cornered, but rather than be captured he shot himself.

The Norwegians found some extremely good automatic meteorological equipment at the station, but while they were examining their find a German U-boat came up the fjord and shelled the party's motor-patrol-boat and then disappeared. As no trace was ever found of the four Germans who escaped it is presumed that they must have been picked up by this U-boat.

The Norwegians themselves were rescued by a British submarine.

## THE GERMANS ATTACK

IT WAS IN SEPTEMBER of 1943 that the German battlefleet put to sea in order to carry out its first full-scale offensive action since the attack on Norway in April, 1940. The objective of this powerful fleet, which had so long remained inactive and had shirked an open clash with the Allied Navies, was to destroy the 100 strong Norwegian garrison on Spitsbergen and anything there of value to the Allies!

So on the early morning of September 8th, the two battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Tirpitz* together with seven or eight destroyers were seen by the Norwegian guards stationed at Cape Heer near the entrance to Ice Fjord. Their appearance explained why the Luftwaffe had been so active during the past few hours.





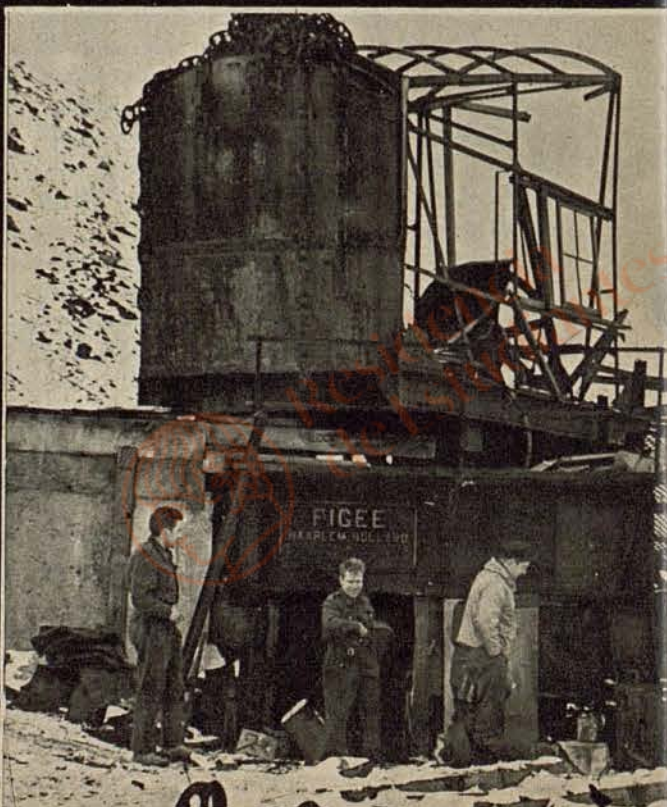
(1) Above The fires which were started among the huge coal dumps by the German bombardment were extinguished with snow.

(5) Below Much of Longyear City was destroyed by the German raiders, but the oven of a demolished house remained and became the bakery for the Norwegian garrison.



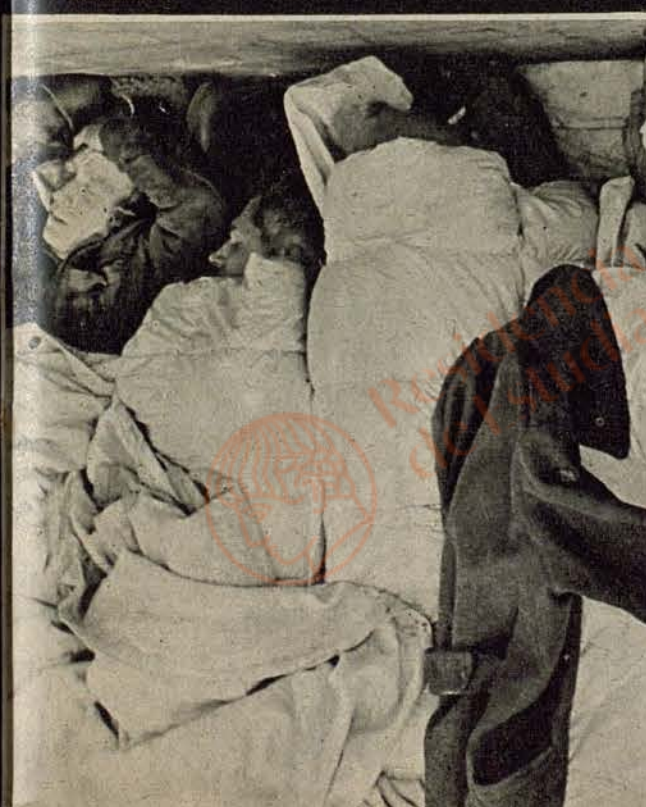
(2) Above A soldier who was wounded during the action used his ingenuity instead of his arms—and thus kept warm!

(6) Below Most of the huts were destroyed too, but this group found some shelter in what remained of a crane.



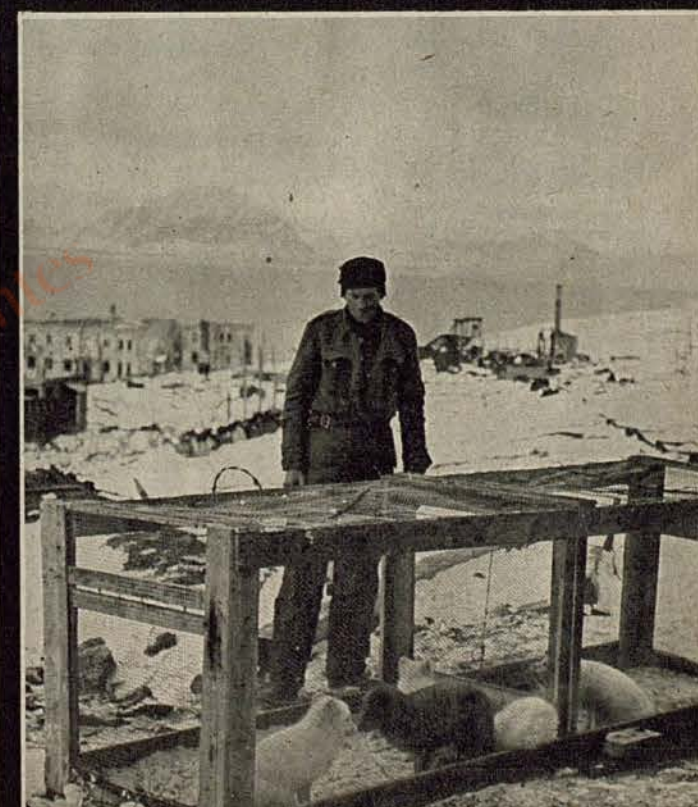
(3) Above Fresh supplies were sent to the lonely coastal outposts on Spitsbergen as soon as possible by means of motor launches.

(7) Below It was not the roomiest of billets, however, and sleeping quarters were cramped, to say the least!



(4) Above The only means of transporting provisions to those serving in the interior, however, was by man-drawn sledge.

(8) Below In all other respects, however, life went on as usual and the Arctic fox cubs, untouched by German shells, duly received their daily rations.





Gun positions at both Cape Heer and Barentsburg were manned as the enemy fleet steamed right up to the mouth of Ice Fjord. Three destroyers turned into Green Fjord, on which lies Barentsburg; one of the battleships and two destroyers took up a position in the middle of Ice Fjord and the other battleship and two or three destroyers lay a little farther out to sea, proceeding towards Advent Fjord.

While the enemy ships put into Green Fjord, Cape Linne, on the extreme tip of the entrance to Ice Fjord, was bombarded. There was no Norwegian garrison here, however.

The Norwegian lieutenant in charge of the battery at Cape Heer had only nine men in his force, but he made ready to defend the position. One of the destroyers steaming up Green Fjord broke off and pulled in towards the shore about midway between Cape Heer and Barentsburg. At the same time a smaller enemy ship broke off and sailed towards land just below Cape Heer.

German landing troops stood on the decks, but the ships were still out of the range of the ten men manning the gun. The position looked hopeless, and the Norwegian officer in charge ordered seven of his men to retire while he and two other men prepared to meet the enemy.

As soon as one of the destroyers came within range the three Norwegians opened fire. Suddenly, however, German soldiers appeared behind them, only seventy-five yards away. The gun was turned on the German troops, but before the magazine could be replaced a shell from the battleship lying well out to sea near the Island of Festning landed near to the gun position and made it impossible for the Norwegians to carry on the fight. One of the men, a corporal, was wounded in the leg, but all three of them managed to escape.

Meanwhile the German attack against Barentsburg had begun. The Norwegians had only three guns—two of them small calibre anti-aircraft guns. Apart from the gun crews all Norwegians were sent to the

rear as reserves. Thus only a handful of men opposed the German attack, which began with a heavy bombardment. The two German destroyers which steamed up Green Fjord were subjected to the full fire of the small Norwegian guns, and one of the 40 mm. anti-aircraft guns, manned by a lieutenant and seven men, fired 150 shells, most of which hit the destroyers.

One of the enemy ships steamed up the fjord until it was right outside the town and the Norwegians could see the landing troops on her decks when they opened fire. The cries of the German wounded on this destroyer could be heard plainly and when smoke began to pour from her she withdrew to the other side of the fjord out of range. From this safer distance, however, she continued to bombard the tiny Norwegian garrison.

For half an hour the fight went on. By this time the town and the Norwegian gun positions were saturated with shell fire. In addition, enemy troops had landed east of Barentsburg, near Finness, and several hundred more had landed to the west of the town, and both forces were advancing. The heavy fire from the destroyers was also threatening the Norwegian reserves who were lying at the rear end of the town.

There was no other alternative but to retire. The guns were therefore destroyed and a way of escape was sought. This was difficult, because heavy fire was raking the best escape route. Many of the German shells, however, fell on the coal and slag heaps just outside the town, and as a result a "smoke screen" of coal dust was put up and this enabled the Norwegians to escape unseen and without drawing any enemy fire.

Thus the greater part of the force managed to reach higher land, but German infantry forces which followed caused them to retreat even further into the mountains and German airplanes were also sent out to hunt them.

One Norwegian sergeant was so badly wounded during this retreat that he had to be left behind. His comrades, however,





The Norwegian destroyer "Stord" goes into action. This warship played an important part in the sinking of the German battleship "Scharnhorst."



refused to allow him to fall into the hands of the Germans, and so he was well wrapped up and hidden. Later on he was rescued and given medical treatment.

Not all the Norwegians managed to get away from Barentsburg, and among these captured was the commander. He was taken prisoner while attempting to burn his papers in his office.

At about 6.30 a.m., just over four and a half hours after the attack began, the sirens on the German ships howled and the German forces evacuated the smoking ruins of Barentsburg, and returned to their ships, taking their dead and wounded and prisoners with them.

Meanwhile the other battleship and its destroyer had proceeded up Ice Fjord towards Longyear City which lies in Advent Fjord, a branch of the Ice Fjord. The Norwegian garrison here was even smaller than the one at Barentsburg.

The guns at Hotelness, at the entrance to Advent Fjord, were about to be brought into action, when the officer in charge at this outpost saw that one destroyer which was sailing along the coast near to their position was flying the White Ensign. This destroyer then opened fire, however, and the small Norwegian force was left in no doubt as to its nationality. The Norwegians' position became hopeless when a German landing party was put ashore, and the eleven men retired. Five of them were taken prisoner.

The other destroyer continued towards Longyear City, and when she was first observed by the Norwegian garrison there she too appeared to be flying a flag other than the German flag. Because of this the Norwegians delayed their fire. Soon, however, this destroyer was joined by another and the two began to bombard the town. German troops poured ashore and the Norwegians retreated. The German advance was delayed, however, by a Norwegian corporal who fought a lone rearguard action armed only with a Bren gun, and fired

magazine after magazine until he was wounded.

The Norwegian troops retired in small groups and slowly worked their way inland towards Sverdrup City, followed by German soldiers armed with machine guns and hand grenades.

At 8 a.m. the Germans sounded the withdrawal and once again they took their dead and wounded and prisoners on board, but continued to bombard Sverdrup City. Meanwhile the battleship which had come up the fjord with the destroyers fired at every possible target—huts, houses and various installations.

An hour later the bombardment ceased, and the German battle fleet sailed back to the safety of the Norwegian fjords, leaving the Norwegian garrison to reoccupy the



"Tirpitz", the 45,000-ton German pocket battleship, was harried ceaselessly in her well protected lair in Alten Fjord, North Norway, before Bombers finally sank her in Tromsø Fjord. Barracudas of the Fleet Air Arm are seen here winging their way towards the battleship's bolt-hole on April 3rd, 1944.

wrecked towns and gun positions, and struggle with the task of improvising shelter against the coming Arctic winter.

The action had cost six Norwegian lives and a small number of prisoners.

THIS ACTION against the 100 Norwegians on Spitsbergen proved to be the swan song of the German navy as a powerful unit. After that raid it was hounded down until it was no longer capable of effective use against the Allied armies when they made

## GERMAN FLEET HOUNDED DOWN

their assault on the continent. In that work too the Norwegians have played their part.

No sooner had the German battlefleet retired to the bolt holes in the fjords of northern Norway than the British Navy was at its heels. *Tirpitz*, 45,000 ton sister ship of the *Bismarck* which met her fate in Arctic waters earlier in the war, had already been earmarked in 1942 for the earliest possible destruction or crippling. In that month she was attacked by the Fleet Air Arm when she tried to intercept one of those important Russia-bound convoys. She retired undamaged behind a smoke screen.

In July of 1942 the Russians reported torpedo hits on her in the Barents Sea, and this evidently kept her off the high seas



until the operation against Spitsbergen in September, 1943.

Soon after her exploit there her effectiveness as a fighting unit was sealed when the gallant officers and men of the British midget submarines penetrated Alten Fjord and damaged her below the waterline. Since then she has been attacked both by the Fleet Air Arm and by Lancasters of Bomber Command, and despite the shelter of the steep cliffs of Alten Fjord and the other German defence measures a series of hits were scored on her.

Finally when the Red Army crossed the Norwegian border at Kirkenes, the Germans made a last desperate effort to save their battleship. Crippled as she was *Tirpitz* left Alten Fjord in an attempt to slip down the 1,000-mile long Norwegian coast and into the Baltic.

The first stage of her journey brought her to a fjord near Tromsø. That short voyage was her last. On the morning of November 12th, 1944, Lancasters of Bomber Command scored direct hits with 12,000-lb. "earthquake" bombs and the *Tirpitz* capsized. Her war role—for what it was worth—was over.

Although the full part which the Norwegians—principally airmen on the "Outer Front" and underground workers on the "Home Front"—have played in these attacks cannot yet be told, it can be said that they did a great deal towards bringing about the success of the attacks, which ultimately resulted in the destruction of *Tirpitz*.

Little more than two months after the raid on Spitsbergen, the second battleship, *Scharnhorst*, was at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean. She had sallied forth from her Norwegian hide-out in the hopes of destroying a particularly big and important convoy bound for Russia.

But the British Navy was waiting. Admiral Fraser, commander of the Home Fleet, had an idea that *Scharnhorst* would show up sooner or later and the ships under his command had spent considerable time prac-

tising the action which they would take when she did. That chance came on December 26th, 1943.

The Home Fleet pounced on her. The destroyers came in close so as to cripple the great battleship with their torpedoes and enable the *Duke of York* and cruisers to finish her off. And one of the destroyers which carried out this daring attack was the Norwegian ship *Stord*.

The commanding officer revealed this when he told the full story of the *Stord's* share in the action against the *Scharnhorst*. "We were screening the *Duke of York* when we got the order to make a torpedo attack," said the officer, a thirty-six-year-old Lieutenant-Commander with the Norwegian War Cross and a double D.S.C. "We set off with the *Scorpion* to get ahead of the *Scharnhorst* and torpedo her from the port side.

"There was a heavy swell coming in from our quarter and it was quite dark. All we could see of the *Scharnhorst* was the orange flame of her gunfire.

"For two hours the *Stord* steamed as fast as she dare, covering more than sixty miles, before she got into position.

"The enemy were late in opening fire on us," continued the commanding officer. "They were firing at the *Savage* and *Saumarez* on the other side, and I think we took them by surprise.

"When they did open up, their fire was very erratic. Shells were falling all round us and in our wake, but nothing touched us. It was a miracle.

"The *Stord's* attack lasted about four minutes. It was made in the light of a starshell and brilliant gun flashes.

"The *Scorpion* fired her torpedoes about a minute ahead of us and I understand she is claiming one hit. I believe three explosions were heard, so we may have done some damage. The whole situation was too confusing to be sure of anything, except that the *Scharnhorst* was hit."



As the *Stord* was making her run in, the Commanding Officer kept her on a steady course despite the heavy fire from the enemy. He wanted to be sure of hitting his target.

"I remember thinking: 'If we come out of this alive I'm making whoopee.' It seemed impossible then that we should be unscathed.

"As we turned away after the attack, I started taking evasive action and made smoke. The enemy were still firing into the smoke long after we'd cleared out," he added.

"When we received the order from the C.-in-C. to clear the target area, we still did not know exactly what had been the effect of our attack. It was not until some hours later, when we intercepted a signal from the *Scorpion* saying she was picking up survivors from the wreckage, that we knew for certain that the *Scharnhorst* had been sunk.

"There was no cheering. No one showed any emotion. There was just a grim feeling of satisfaction."

One man who will never forget this action is the twenty-five-years-old Sub-Lieutenant who aimed and fired the torpedoes. Only a few hours before the Fleet sailed, the *Stord's* torpedo control officer was sent ashore sick, and this Sub-Lieutenant took over his job. It was the first time he had fired torpedoes in action.

"I was too busy to be excited or worried about the enemy fire. All I wanted to do was make sure of a hit," he said.

Summing up the attack, the commanding officer said, "It went off according to plan. Admiral Fraser had a hunch that the *Scharnhorst* would come out one day and it would be a night engagement. We had practised it many times, often using the cruiser *Jamaica* as a dummy *Scharnhorst*.

"We are proud to have been with the British Navy on this occasion and personally I hope the co-operation started in this hard war will continue in the more pleasant days of peace."

Admiral Fraser, Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet, sent this signal to the Norwegian Admiralty: "*Stord* played a gallant part in the action, and I was proud of her."

UNITS of the Royal Norwegian Navy have of course been operating in Northern waters ever since the Germans occupied their country. But much of their work has been unspectacular—routine patrols, monotony, foul weather and intense cold. Convoy work, however, has always provided its share of thrills and both the Norwegian Merchant Navy and Royal Navy have been represented in almost every trip round the North Cape to Russia when the Germans would fling everything they had against them to prevent the important armaments from reaching the Eastern Front.

Similarly there were plenty of battles in the North Atlantic across which supplies were shipped from America to Britain. Many Norwegian ships have been lost in these waters. But even when the struggle was at its height the will to win never flagged.

A typical example of the tenacity of these seamen is that of a Norwegian ship which was torpedoed in the small hours of the morning and sank so quickly that only eight men managed to scramble on to one raft which was slashed free of the deck. It was typical North Atlantic weather—snow and sleet, a biting wind and rough sea. The U-boat that had sunk their ship surfaced and demanded information before leaving the eight men to their doom.

A British warship arrived soon afterwards and prepared to rescue the Norwegians. But the captain, who was among the survivors, shouted: "Don't waste time on us. Get the U-boat." The warship steamed off and the eight men were left on the tiny raft, wet through and numbed with cold. Six hours later the British ship returned. It had sunk the U-boat.



## THE LIBERATION HAS BEGUN!

THE STORY OF THE WAR in the Arctic entered a new phase in 1944. It began with the Red Army's entry into North Norway on October 25th. The last German hold in polar regions—Arctic Norway, a territory the size of Scotland and half of England together—began to be thrown off. But in the process Norway is suffering her greatest catastrophe.

The full story of this final chapter in Arctic warfare cannot yet be told. All through the German occupation Norwegians up there have been working underground and assisting the Allies in many ways—for instance, to strike at German shipping. The details of their secret work among the islands, in the fjords which have sheltered the German Navy, on the shores and cliffs among the German coastal batteries, and deep in the desolate tundra or mountain ranges, are not yet available. This work, however, during the four and a half years of German occupation has cost the lives of many Norwegian patriots. The final liberation of Norway will, no doubt, cost many more. But the liberation has begun . . .

On October 26th, 1944, Moscow radio broadcast an Order of the Day from Marshal Stalin addressed to General (now Marshal) Meretskov, saying that the troops of the Karelian Front had crossed the Norwegian frontier and had entered Kirkenes on October 25th.

This was a historic day for Norway, one which the people had long awaited.

The Red Army had fought its way right across North Finland, and the decisive battle which brought it to the frontiers of Norway was waged on "an eminence festooned with ice-covered dwarf birch," as a Russian reporter put it; but Norway was only finally entered after daring outflanking moves which brought Soviet troops into Kirkenes, the biggest German military base in the whole of the Arctic with its port facilities, airfields, huge military dumps, iron works, etc.



The first Norwegian troops set sail for Norway on a British cruiser at the end of October, 1944. They had waited for four and a half years for the day when they could begin to drive the Germans from their homeland.



Kirkenes and neighbouring towns had been subjected to Russian bombing prior to the invasion—there were 900 alerts altogether—but only 14 fatal casualties were caused. When the people realised that Eastern Finnmark was about to become a battleground, they sought refuge both from the battle and the Germans, who they knew would try to evacuate them, in the iron mines at Bjornevatn and in the nearby woods.

The Russians descended on Kirkenes so suddenly that the Germans did not have time to round up the civilian population. They were only able to seize those who fell into their hands easily—such as prisoner-of-war slave workers—pack them into any sort of seacraft or road transport which was available, and flee westwards, away from the advancing Soviet troops.

Only German rearguards were left behind to destroy everything they could, in accordance with the scorched earth policy which has since been applied all the way through North Norway with ruthless efficiency.

Of the 23,000 Norwegian inhabitants of Eastern Finnmark, about 20,000 evaded Nazi deportation. When the victorious Soviet troops arrived the Norwegians flocked out of the mines, cellars and woods to greet them as liberators. Although they had lost everything they possessed—their homes, furniture, food, and in many cases, as the Germans had seized their fishing boats, their livelihood—the Norwegians did all they could to assist the Russians. Fishermen guided them over the fjords and rivers in order to speed up the rout of the enemy, and what boats had escaped German looting or destruction were placed at their disposal.

The actual fighting on this front proceeded very rapidly, and once the Germans were defeated they withdrew as quickly as they could. Only three or four civilians were hurt in the battle area. But as the Germans pulled out they destroyed not only human habitations but all bridges and other means of communication. In this Arctic region where there is but one road crossing some

of the most desolate country in Europe, such action necessarily slowed up the Russian pursuit.

Meanwhile, Norwegian troops, who had been training for years in Britain for this day, were on the way to the Arctic Front, transported by the British Navy. With them was a Military Mission headed by Colonel Dahl, whose task it was to take control of civil administration and other matters in liberated Norwegian territory. By the time this force reached Norway hundreds of Norwegian volunteers were waiting to join forces with them. In fact, two days after the Russians entered Kirkenes no less than 1,500 Norwegians had volunteered for military service.

Ten o'clock on November 10th, 1944, is a time and date which will go down in the annals of Norwegian history. At precisely that time the first soldiers of the Norwegian Army crossed into Norwegian territory after journeying from Petsamo. Torch lights illuminated the frontier stone as they filed silently past it, and their thoughts went back to the time when they had escaped from Norway, landed in Britain and begun their training for the task which now lay ahead of them.

To the north-west the polar darkness was relieved by the red glow of fire—a tremendous coal dump near Kirkenes which the Germans had fired before they retreated and which was still burning.

Soon afterwards the Norwegians reached Kirkenes, the first liberated Norwegian town. A scene of devastation and destruction met their eyes. Only 28 houses remained standing. The quays had been wrecked, the plant and installations of the iron mines had been destroyed to the value of 42 million kroner (nearly 3 million pounds), and half-sunken ships could be seen in the harbour.

The majority of the civilian population were living at Bjornevatn, the mining community a few miles east of Kirkenes which had escaped large-scale German demolition, and it was here that the Norwegian Army personnel and their northern countrymen





*Above* The Germans destroyed everything in Arctic Norway as they retreated before the Red Army. This is all that they left of Vadsø.

*Below* At Kirkenes, the first Norwegian town to be liberated, Colonel Dahl, leader of the Military Mission, is welcomed by the newly reinstated mayor.





had their first reunion. A great meeting was held—the first gathering of free Norwegians in Norway for four and a half years.

All available habitation had already been placed at the disposal of the civilian population by the Russians, and now under the leadership of Norwegian troops, these people began the task of rebuilding what the Germans had destroyed.

Other forces advanced westwards in the wake of the retreating German Army, to find the same trail of destruction and devastation everywhere. In addition, they found that practically the whole of the civilian population had been deported by the Germans and only a few stragglers were discovered. As the Germans had put a safe distance between themselves and the Russians, they had effected with complete ruthlessness the forced evacuation of the population. Those who resisted the order were shot.

In small boats, dangerously overcrowded, and along the single Arctic highway leading southwards to Tromsø, and then on to Narvik and Trondheim, thousands of men, women and children were deported. They were allowed to take only the barest necessities with them. Before they left they were compelled to watch their homes, which had cost so much effort to build in this hard land of the North, go up in smoke and flames. Livestock and food stores were either looted or destroyed. Unarmed as they were and almost outnumbered by German soldiers, there was nothing these people could do. The deportation caused untold suffering, and many, including young children, died during the forced marches or in the overcrowded fishing boats.

Norwegian forces have discovered that 85 per cent of Vardo and 65-70 per cent of Vadso have been destroyed, and an even higher degree of damage is applicable to all the villages and towns right down to Tromsø—Berlevaag, Mehamn, Hammerfest, Lakselv, Alta, Nordreisa, to name just a few.

Stragglers have been found living in dreadful conditions—some in unheated turf

huts where many were suffering from diphtheria and other diseases. Hospitals had to be established under conditions which were worse than primitive.

Slowly, however, the Russians and the Norwegians working in close and cordial co-operation are bringing normal life back to Arctic Norway. Foodstuffs, medical supplies, clothing and other urgent necessities are being shipped there as quickly as possible. Without these things one cannot live in the rigorous Arctic climate.

Norwegian civil administration has now been re-established in Finnmark, and is working according to Norwegian law. A provisional county governor has been appointed in Finnmark, and in addition the former mayors of Kirkenes and a number of other liberated towns and villages have been reinstated. Norwegian police have resumed their duties, and their first task was to round up the few quislings who had remained behind.

Meanwhile, the German forces, which included the Finnish-Lapland Army of eight divisions, were harassed by the British Navy and Air Force as they attempted to escape by sea down the thousand-mile long Norwegian coastline with as much material as they could. Their losses have been considerable. Other troops straggled along the single northern road for weeks. In cold which sometimes reached 30 degrees below freezing, and in swirling snowstorms, they trekked hundreds of miles in lorries, cars, horse-drawn transport and on foot—and always driving civilians along with them, partly for protection against air attack, and partly for propaganda purposes to show how the Norwegians were "fleeing from Bolshevism." Behind them they left an unending trail of destruction.

Winter conditions in North Norway with its vast distances and lack of communications make modern war operations difficult, but everything that can be done both to get to grips with the Germans again and also to prevent their colossal plan of wilful destruction will be done.





Norwegian troops marched into Norway again on November 10th, 1944. The liberation has begun!





*Issued for the Royal Norwegian Government Information Office*

HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE: London, Edinburgh, Manchester, Cardiff, Belfast

1945

Printed by L. T. A. Robinson, Ltd.

Price 1s. 0d. net

S.O. Code No. 88-2351\* Wt. P.1227