HISTORICAL/BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

"A cursed affair"—how a Norwegian expedition to Greenland became the USA's first maritime capture in World War II

Frode Skarstein

Norwegian Polar Institute, Polar Environmental Centre, NO-9026 Tromsø, Norway

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Correspondence
Norwegian Polar Institute, Polar Environmental Centre, NO-9026 Tromsø, Norway. E-mail: skarstein@npolar.no.

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Last year, Frode Skarstein contributed an essay to Polar Research in which he related the failed attempt by a coterie of nationalistic Norwegians to annex part of Greenland—"Erik the Red's Land"—for Norway during the early 1930s. In the following essay, Skarstein tells the story of how the same group of Norwegian nationalists tried to resurrect Norwegian claims to the east coast of Greenland during the Second World War—and how the colliding interests of the Germans and the Americans made for a dramatic finale to the Norwegian adventures in Erik the Red's Land.

—The Editor

In the fall of 1941 a Norwegian ship left German-occupied northern Norway bound for Greenland. The *Buskø* was loaded with supplies for the Norwegian trappers who, as in previous years, were overwintering on Greenland's east coast. Organized by Norway's Svalbard and Arctic Ocean Research Survey, the precursor to today's Norwegian Polar Institute, these expeditions had developed into a yearly event. Hallvard Devold, the man heading the expedition in 1941, was the same man who, 10 years earlier, had done the dirty work in a wrestle with Denmark over eastern Greenland (Skarstein 2006). Almost three months ahead of Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, which precipitated the USA's formal involvement in World War II (WWII), the US Coast Guard seized and brought the *Buskø* and all onboard to Boston for interrogations. A remote and strategically unimportant place, Greenland had suddenly become an arena for the first encounters between US and German forces during WWII.

> A ship is coming! 8th of September,—a ship is coming! . . . I'm restless, rushing back and forth, the cabin is whipped into perfect order, preparing to receive guests . . . So they're still sending ships from Norway—they haven't forgotten us. The emotional turmoil is overwhelming. It is SS *Buskø* of Ålesund. (Sørensen 1958: 211–212; this and all other translations from Norwegian are by the author)

With these lines, the legendary Norwegian trapper Henry Rudi describes the scene when, after a long and lonely winter and summer, he realizes that he's not forgotten on the barren strip of land between the enormous ice cap of Greenland and the vast North Atlantic, where the Norwegian trapping station of Moskusheimen was located (Fig. 1). He had left Norway with a trapping expedition in the spring of 1939, before the Germans had overrun Norway and Denmark. During the winter of 1940/41 and the summer of 1941, he had had only sporadic contact with the handful of Danish trappers who inhabited all of north-eastern Greenland. The trapping season had been lousy, and after his radio batteries ran out he had virtually no information on how Norway was faring in the war, or whether he would be receiving essential supplies that year. The arrival of the *Buskø* and the supplies she carried was a great relief for Rudi, whose narrative goes on to explain that the ship had already dropped off five men north of Moskusheimen. In order to move some of their equipment further south, Rudi and his new partner Gerhard Anthonsen, who had come on the *Buskø*, travelled on the ship southwards along her planned supply journey to Myggbukta, Humboldt, and finally the southernmost Norwegian trapping station at Antarctichamn. However, shortly after being dropped off from the *Buskø*, presumably in a smaller boat, Rudi recounts how they were boarded by the US Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC) *Northland*, on patrol in the area (Sørensen 1958: 212). Acting on orders to evacuate all the trappers in east Greenland, the *Northland* had already seized the *Buskø* and detained everyone onboard. Rudi, in his 52nd year, managed to

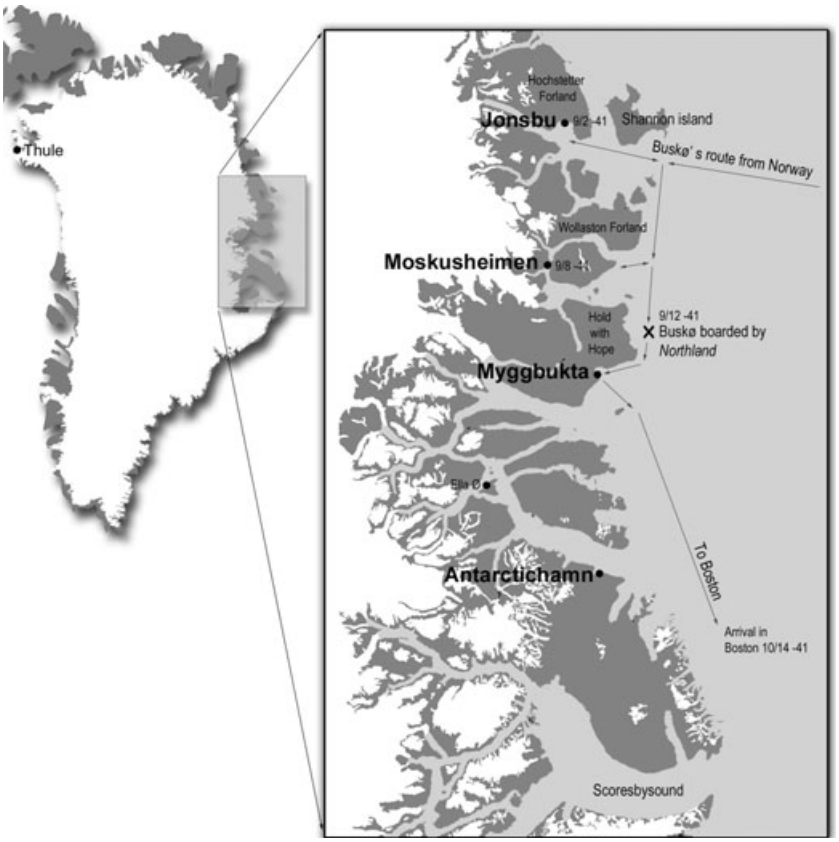


Fig. 1 Map of Greenland showing the most important places, events and vessel movements mentioned in the text.

convince the "calm and polite, firm and clear" captain of the *Northland*, Commander C. C. Von Paulsen, to let him stay in Greenland (Sørensen 1958: 212). Thus, a few days later, Rudi is again alone on the beach at Moskusheimen as the *Northland* steams off and disappears. The war, however, would soon catch up with him again. Within a year, as the conflict in Greenland between the Germans and the Allies escalated, Rudi joined the Danish-controlled Sledge Patrol that formed after the US initiative (Odsbjerg 1990).

A relief expedition

On 9 April 1940, the Second World War came to Norway and Denmark with the German occupation forces. At that time Arktisk Næringsdrift (Arctic Commercial Enterprises), the main Norwegian company involved with trapping in north-east Greenland, and Norges Svalbard- og Ishavsundersøkelser (NSIU—Norway's Svalbard and Arctic Ocean Research Survey, which, in 1948, became the Norwegian Polar Institute) were involved in trapping and weather-reporting activities in north-east Greenland. Divided between the areas of south-east and north-east Greenland (Fig. 1), about a dozen trappers had overwintered in small hunting stations scattered across the vast territory, in addition to a telegraphist and a scientist. One of the trappers had also brought his wife, who had given birth during the winter.

Very few private boats left Norway after the German occupation. The German occupation force was annoyed by the dribble of smaller vessels that slipped away into the North Sea towards Great Britain, and consequently imposed strict regulations on the movements of any vessel with long-range abilities. However, during the summer of 1940 the NSIU managed, with an odd combination of permissions from the German-installed Norwegian government in Oslo, and the fleeing Norwegian government in Tromsø, northern Norway, which was still free at that time, to arrange for two ships—the *Veslekari* and the *Ringsel*—to relieve the Norwegians in east Greenland. Off the coast of east Greenland the Norwegian inspection vessel *Fridtjof Nansen*, now in the Allied Coastal Patrol Service, intercepted the *Veslekari*. The crew was brought to England under suspicions of German association with the expedition. (The expedition leader, John Giæver, later managed to get to the USA, working for the Norwegian authorities there; he makes an entry in the *Buskø* story below.) The trappers that had overwintered were given

the choice of staying on or being evacuated. Six trappers were then removed to Iceland. Unaffected by these events, the *Ringsel* made a smooth return trip to Norway, despite having run into the USCGC *Northland* in south-east Greenland earlier.

Thus, when the spring of 1941 thawed the poor trapping winter of 1940/41, there were seven trappers in north-east Greenland, some of whom had been there for three years. The relief of these was the immediate and obvious explanation for the 1941 expedition with the *Buskø*. A more veiled and long-term goal was to maintain Norwegian trappers in east Greenland, in line with the Arctic expansion dream that flowed as an undertow of most of the activities of both Arktisk Næringsdrift and the NSIU. The ruling of the Permanent International Court of Justice in the Hague in 1933 against the Norwegian occupation of the large territory of Eric the Red's Land, in east Greenland, had killed public interest in the Greenland issue in Norway, and had halted to any concrete plans for Norwegian expansion in east Greenland (Blom 1973; Skarstein 2006). However, the effective and well-coordinated twosome that masterminded the occupations in the 1930s, Adolf Hoel (an influential Norwegian geologist who was head of the NSIU; Fig. 2) and Gustav Smedal (a nationalistic lawyer with a strong interest in Norwegian polar expansion), saw in the German invasion of Denmark and Norway a window of opportunity to regain the lost Norwegian "colonies in the east". At the same time, the war had brought Greenland into the focus of the USA. In cooperation with the now isolated Danish governor of Greenland, the US Coast Guard had secured the west coast and was patrolling sections of Greenland's eastern coast, inspecting and interfering with the activities of NSIU and Arktisk Næringsdrift. Hoel and Smedal felt that if no interest was shown from the Norwegian government in supporting the trappers and maintaining a Norwegian presence in Greenland, the changing geopolitical picture would make the USA move to grasp the island (Hoel 1977). The USA did indeed appear to shift in its interpretation of the political and security role of Greenland to make it fall within its sphere of interest (Stordalmo 2006). This meant that the USA could invoke its Monroe Doctrine from the 1920s and label any German or German-influenced establishment in Greenland as hostility against the USA's direct sphere of interest.

Fig. 2 This picture of Adolf Hoel (1879–1964), on the right, was probably taken in the late 1930s. As a geologist, Hoel had carried out pioneering research in Svalbard during the early 1900s, and was the main driving force behind the establishment, in 1928, of Norges Svalbard- og Ishavsundersøkelser (NSIU), the forerunner of the Norwegian Polar Institute. (Courtesy Norwegian Polar Institute Picture Library.)

Consequently, American involvement and cooperation with the Danes in Greenland was seen by the duo Hoel and Smedal as not only an overhanging threat to Norway's interests in east Greenland, but as a threat to the whole idea of Greenland belonging to Europe rather than to the New World. A year into the German occupation of Norway Hoel and Smedal were attempting to influence the Germans into direct action regarding the Greenland issue. The Germans, however, showed little interest in the idea of Norwegian Arctic imperialism, and the Arctic expansion enthusiasts turned again to the strategy of 10 years previously: to claim the land through subsidized use and exploration. Thus, in the eyes of Adolf Hoel, Gustav Smedal and the NSIU, the maintenance of Norwegian trapping activity in east Greenland was essential in maintaining Norwegian possessions and rights in the Arctic (Hoel 1977). With the NSIU's meteorological stations in east Greenland put out of function by Allied forces in 1940, the immediate purpose of a 1941 expedition would be to supply and relieve the trappers at the trapping stations.

To ensure that their plans were not lost at some low bureaucratic level, Hoel wrote directly to Vidkun Quisling, head of the puppet government in Norway. Initially Quisling, who had previously managed to get Hoel to join the Nasjonal Samling (NS)—the Norwegian Nazi party—by promising to put the Greenland issue on the party programme, had visions of a huge expedition of 100 trappers and several vessels. However, it was decided that 100 trappers could not be mustered at such short notice, but the expansion enthusiasts believed that they could assemble a group of 50 trappers for the coming season. This plan was rejected by the Department of Commerce and the German authorities (Stordalmo 2006). Seen against the backdrop of the previous capture of the *Veslekari* and the US involvement in Greenland, the rejection did not come as a surprise. In the beginning of August

1941 an agreement was reached between Arktisk Næringsdrift and the Ministry of Commerce on a more modest plan of 10 trappers and one vessel. This relief expedition even received a significant grant from the Department of Commerce (Barr 2003). Initially, each of the manned stations was supposed to have a radio set for communications between the stations. However, the Ministry insisted that no land-based radio transmitter should be brought along, as this would increase the risk of British or American intervention. This was formalized in a written agreement between the Ministry and Arktisk Næringsdrift. Furthermore, the whole expedition was to be kept as secret as possible to avoid any information reaching the Allied forces.

Enter the *Buskø*

With a definite go from the Norwegian administration in Oslo, Hoel immediately went into motion and, after having called around several companies, arranged for the steam-powered sealer *Buskø* of Ålesund, Norway, to be chartered for the expedition (Fig. 3). She was owned by the shipping entrepreneur Elling Aarseth, who also owned the *Veslekari*, already captured and now in Allied service in the western Atlantic. Built in 1926, equipped with a 140-h.p. steam engine from 1902, and measuring 105 ft, the *Buskø* was the largest vessel available for rent at the time. The name stems from the island Buskøya at the mouth of the fjord Sognefjorden, the home area of the first owner Jan Hess. The *Buskø* was officially chartered by Arktisk Næringsdrift, and in the contract between the company and the owners of the *Buskø* the purpose of the expedition was stated to be "explorations of a scientific nature and to bring new overwinterers and fresh supplies to Norwegian stations and/or to bring trappers, catch and equipment home" (State Archives). The experienced trapper Hallvard Devold was hired as the expedition leader (Fig. 4). He had been temporarily employed as secretary at NSIU after John Giæver failed to return on the 1940 relief expedition to Greenland. Devold had previously played a central role in the tussle over Eric the Red's Land in 1931 as head of the expedition that carried out the private annexation of the area, an action that eventually forced the Norwegian government into following suit by occupying the territory (Blom 1973; Barr 2003; Skarstein 2006).

During the planning of the expedition, Adolf Hoel was asked several times to report on it to a certain Obersturmführer Hermann Krause from the German Security Police. During several meetings, Krause asked for information on all aspects of the expedition, including the backgrounds of the crew and trappers.

The *Buskø* left Ålesund on 18 August 1941 with Hallvard Devold onboard, hugging the Norwegian coast northwards towards the Norwegian port of Laukvik, Senja, before it turned west to cross the North Atlantic. During the trip northwards, the *Buskø* would have several stops to take onboard crew and equipment. Before the departure from Ålesund, Devold had sent off a telegram to Hoel that read: "If of interest, convey to Krause that the participants will be joining the boat in Namsos, Sannessjøen and Laukvik—Devold" (Norwegian State Archives).

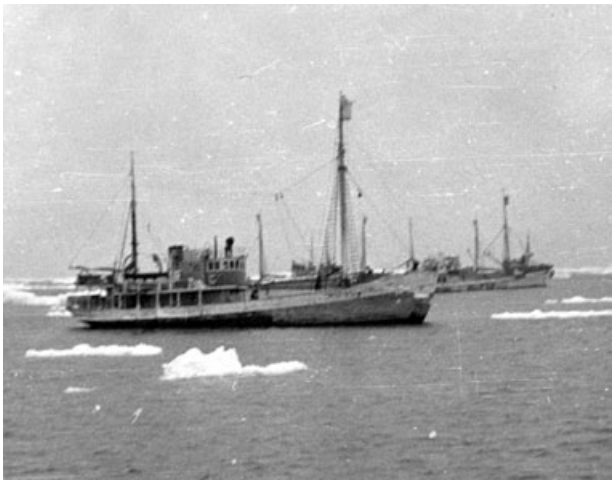


Fig. 3 The sealer *Buskø* in the sealing grounds off eastern Greenland in the early 1950s. (Courtesy of Ishavsmuseet, Brandal, Norway.)

Fig. 4 Hallvard Devold, the leader of the 1941 Norges Svalbard- og Ishavsundersøkelser (NSIU) relief expedition to eastern Greenland. The picture was taken in Laukvik, Senja, northern Norway, just before departure from Norway to Greenland. Four years would pass before he could return to Norway. (Courtesy of the Norwegian Polar Institute Picture Library.)

This telegram, as he would later explain, was sent because he had the impression that Krause wanted to inspect the crew and expedition members, as he assumed this was the reason Krause was involved in the whole business. In Devold's words:

> Already ahead of my departure from Oslo I was told that Krause would travel to Ålesund and inspect the expedition prior to departure. As it appeared so important to clarify which people would be joining the expedition I thought the purpose of his travel would be to gain an impression of the expedition members and possibly arrange for our departure papers. (Norwegian State Archives)

Krause however, never appeared in Ålesund, and Devold was told to go to the Harbour Office to confer with the German harbour commander there. He was interviewed for a full day about the purpose of the expedition, something he had to repeat several times as new German officers came into the room. As a confusing end to the day, the raring-to-go Devold had to garner more patience, as the Germans took him off for a social evening with a cinema visit and dinner. The following day, Krause still failed to materialize in Ålesund, and Devold sent the aforementioned telegram, a telegram he later realized could appear to indicate that he wanted the Germans to know where they could reach the ship.

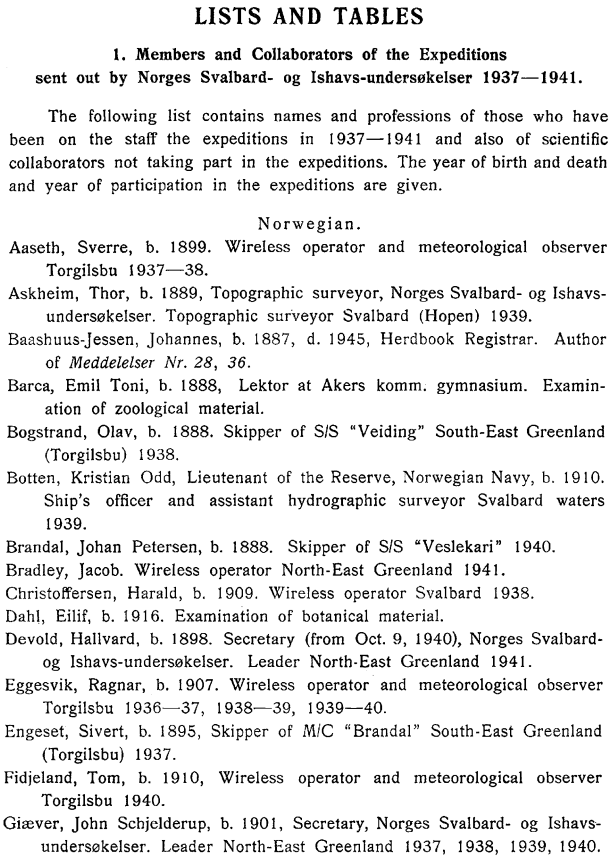
The *Buskø* arrived in Laukvik on 28 August 1941. This was its point of departure from Norway across the Atlantic towards Greenland. The same day Obersturmführer Krause arrived in a fishing vessel from Tromsø, a city to the north, under the pretext of inspecting the *Buskø* and the crew. However, it soon became clear that the visit had a more sinister purpose. He insisted that the boat bring along a land-based radio set and a radio operator to Petersbay in Greenland, where two of the expedition's trappers were already supposed to be based. The ship's captain and in particular the engine operator protested, and during a heated exchange with Krause the engine operator hinted that the *Buskø* might just not return. Krause dryly replied, "[W]e have long arms, we have both submarines and planes, and you have a family at home" (Simonsen 1941a). The same day the captain and the engine operator sent a co-signed telegram to the owner of the *Buskø*, Elling Aarseth, which he received only after the *Buskø*'s departure.

> I hereby take the liberty to convey that we in Laukvik have gotten onboard an extra man, from the German Wehrmacht, purportedly a radio operator, meteorological observer. This is outside of the contract and I am communicating this for the record. Nevertheless, I will complete my mission in accordance with ability and agreement. We depart from Laukvik at 4 AM on August the 29th. Sincerely, Elias Hessen & Petrus Ekrem. (Norwegian State Archives)

Later, Devold would recollect that during the trip northwards along the Norwegian coast with the *Buskø*, at a stop in Harstad, he had had a telephone conversation with Adolf Hoel. Sounding very disappointed, Hoel explained that an extra man would join the expedition. When Devold asked if it was a Norwegian or a German, Hoel replied, "It appears to be a Norwegian by the name of Bradley" (Simonsen 1941a).

The agent

A 1945 publication of the NSIU lists the members and collaborators of the expeditions sent out by NSIU in the period 1937–1941 (Fig. 5). One entry reads: "Bradley, Jacob [sic]. Wireless operator North-East Greenland 1941". This was the man the German officials forced the *Buskø* to take with them from Laukvik. Iakob Bradley grew up in Bergen, Norway, and was, at the time of the



LISTS AND TABLES

1. Members and Collaborators of the Expeditions sent out by Norges Svalbard- og Ishavs-undersøkelser 1937—1941.

The following list contains names and professions of those who have been on the staff the expeditions in 1937—1941 and also of scientific collaborators not taking part in the expeditions. The year of birth and death and year of participation in the expeditions are given.

Norwegian.

Aaseth, Sverre, b. 1899. Wireless operator and meteorological observer Torgilsbu 1937—38.

Askheim, Thor, b. 1889, Topographic surveyor, Norges Svalbard- og Ishavsundersøkelser. Topographic surveyor Svalbard (Hopen) 1939.

Baashuus-Jessen, Johannes, b. 1887, d. 1945, Herdbook Registrar. Author of *Meddelelser Nr. 28, 36*.

Barca, Emil Toni, b. 1888, Lektor at Akers komm. gymnasium. Examination of zoological material.

Bogstrand, Olav, b. 1888. Skipper of S/S "Veiding" South-East Greenland (Torgilsbu) 1938.

Botten, Kristian Odd, Lieutenant of the Reserve, Norwegian Navy, b. 1910. Ship's officer and assistant hydrographic surveyor Svalbard waters 1939.

Brandal, Johan Petersen, b. 1888. Skipper of S/S "Veslekari" 1940.

Bradley, Jacob. Wireless operator North-East Greenland 1941.

Christoffersen, Harald, b. 1909. Wireless operator Svalbard 1938.

Dahl, Eilif, b. 1916. Examination of botanical material.

Devold, Hallvard, b. 1898. Secretary (from Oct. 9, 1940), Norges Svalbard- og Ishavs-undersøkelser. Leader North-East Greenland 1941.

Eggesvik, Ragnar, b. 1907. Wireless operator and meteorological observer Torgilsbu 1936—37, 1938—39, 1939—40.

Engeset, Sivert, b. 1895, Skipper of M/C "Brandal" South-East Greenland (Torgilsbu) 1937.

Fidjeland, Tom, b. 1910, Wireless operator and meteorological observer Torgilsbu 1940.

Giæver, John Schjelderup, b. 1901, Secretary, Norges Svalbard- og Ishavsundersøkelser. Leader North-East Greenland 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940.

Fig. 5 Iakob Bradley and Hallvard Devold appear in a list of participants of Norges Svalbard- og Ishavsundersøkelser (NSIU) expeditions between 1937 and 1941, which was published in the NSIU's series *Skrifter* (p. 88) in 1945.

Fig. 6 Iakob Rytter Bradley presenting the Bergen Hird force to the German-installed Minister President Vidkun Quisling some time during the fall of 1940. Bradley claims to have left the Hird forces and the Nasjonal Samling shortly afterward. Bradley is in front of the uniformed lines, directly facing Quisling, who is wearing an overcoat. (Courtesy of NorgesLexi online picture archive.)

German attack on Norway, 25 years old and a member of the NS in Bergen (Fig. 6). He had by this time climbed to the rank of Sveitfører (the equivalent of Captain) in the Hird, the NS party's militia, which put him in charge of approximately 120 men (Pryser 2001). According to Bradley himself, his duties were mostly that of propaganda and drafting. Following disagreements with a German advisor to the local NS party, Bradley resigned this position during the fall of 1940 and, during the spring of 1941, he let his membership in the NS expire (Simonsen 1941a). Nevertheless, he had developed connections with several Germans, in particular civilians in the German Nazi party. Thus, despite considering himself as having left the NS, he kept in touch with the Nazi movement through social connections with Nazi party members and visits to the local NS office (Simonsen 1941a). This contact with the Norwegian NS, his German Nazi connections and his experience at sea were probably the reasons why, around the middle of August 1941, Bradley received a phone call from a certain Weiler in the German Security Police in Norway. Weiler informed him that plans for an expedition to Greenland were being developed, and asked him if he wanted to join as a meteorologist and radio operator. Bradley requested more information, but was told that he had to travel to Oslo for a full briefing on the matter. Weiler simply gave him a train ticket, and the next day the 26-year-old was on a train to Oslo. Over four decades would pass before he saw Bergen again. Arriving in Oslo he walked directly from the railway station to the German Gestapo headquarters in Victoria Terrasse. He spent the next five days in Oslo being trained in basic meteorology and radio operation. The training took place in a "private house" (Simonsen 1941a) between 08:00 and 19:00, and his teachers spoke only German. From Bradley's experience at sea, he had acquired a sufficient understanding of German to understand the instructions he got. The crux of his activities in Greenland was to collect simple weather observations at 05:00, 08:00, 12:00 and 19:00 every day, and to relay them to the Germans in one of the simplest cryptography codes available. He received a small-calibre pistol with 40–50 shots.

Six days after first being contacted by the Germans, he was on a seaplane northwards to meet up with the *Buskø*. The plane landed in Tromsø, where he spent two days, amongst other things, assembling some clothes for the overwintering, as he had not had time to pack anything upon his departure from Bergen. In the early hours of 29 August, he left Tromsø and arrived in Laukvik where the *Buskø*'s crew was recovering from a wet departure party.

The German plan

On 20 August, two days after the *Buskø* left Ålesund heading northwards to Laukvik, Hoel was told to meet with Krause again. During this meeting he was informed that the German Luftwaffe would send a radio station and a telegraphist with the expedition. Hoel warned that this might jeopardize the whole endeavour, as the Allies would then perceive the expedition as being a German initiative. Furthermore, Hoel pointed out that the German-controlled Ministry of Commerce had strongly advised against this. Krause brushed all these protests aside, claiming that this was "an affair that entailed only German responsibility" (Stordalmo 2006). In an effort to cover his back, the following day Hoel sent a letter to Krause spelling out his protest, again referring to the agreement with the Ministry of Trade that no land-based radio station would be taken onboard the *Buskø*. Krause, however, simply failed to reply. On 25 August Krause contacted Hoel, who was told the identity of the telegraphist who would accompany the *Buskø*. As a result of a misunderstanding, Hoel thought the telegraphist was a previous acquaintance of

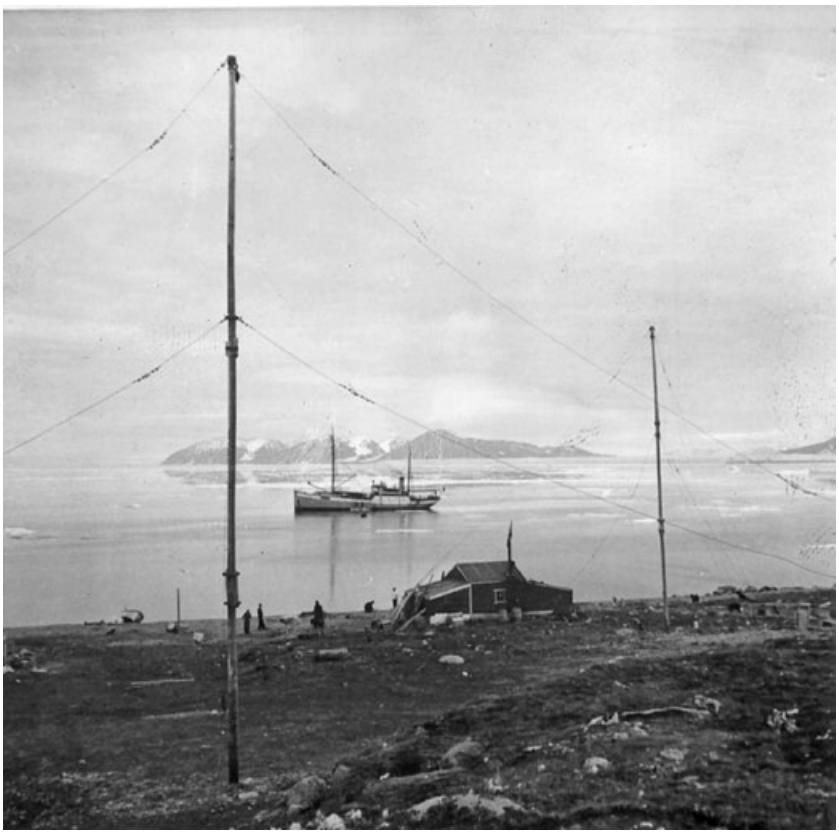


Fig. 7 The Norwegian trapping cabin of Jonsbu, located in Petersbay in eastern Greenland, in 1939. Bradley mentions having used the already existing antennas when he assembled the radio transmitter. (Courtesy of the Norwegian Polar Institute Picture Library.)

dubious reputation. Hoel's version of the telephone conversation he had with Devold in Harstad was that he wanted to warn Devold to be alert against this man.

Arrival in Greenland

After the radio equipment and Bradley were installed onboard the *Buskø*, the vessel left Laukvik and Norway on the morning of 29 August and headed out across the Atlantic. The crew accepted Bradley without open hostility, although a definite coolness was present, manifest in the fact that he was not assigned a place to sleep, and that few members of the expedition would later admit to having talked to him during the crossing. Krause had instructed that the suitcases that held the radio equipment were to be stored on deck for easy dumping overboard in case US or Allied forces intercepted the vessel. As the days passed and Bradley realized that none of the crew had any idea of his or the German involvement in the expedition until just before the departure, he expressed feeling betrayed. During his training in Oslo he had asked to meet with Hoel and the NSIU, but the Germans had claimed that there was no time and that everything had been taken care of with the NSIU. Thus, Bradley, realizing this was a somewhat shadowy affair, would later express that he regretted having agreed to come along (Simonsen 1941a).

The crossing of the Atlantic went smoothly, and by 2 September the *Buskø* was through the belt of drift ice that pours out of the Arctic Basin through Fram Strait and down along the east coast of Greenland. She touched land and immediately went north to Petersbay, and on 4 September, Bradley, together with two trappers and all their goods, provisions and meteorological and radio equipment, were dropped off. A weight must have been lifted from Devold's shoulders. However, his relief would last only a week.

Bradley was put ashore in Petersbay together with the two trappers who had been planning on using the Petersbay trapping cabin Jonsbu as their base for the season's activities. During the 10 days they spent in Petersbay, Bradley claims to have assembled the radio transmitter, but not to have used it. Oddly enough, one of the trappers there with him claimed that Bradley did not, in fact, assemble it (Simonsen 1941a). Devold would also later claim that the radio equipment was not even unpacked from the suitcases (Stordalmo 2006). Bradley felt no direct hostility from the trappers, but they would not help him with his equipment and argued that he would not get a share of the season's trapping income. The tiny group of men in the minuscule cabin (Fig. 7) probably

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

September 18, 1941

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

The substance of recent reports received from Commander Task Group 6.5 (Northeast Greenland Patrol, NORTHLAND, NORTH STAR, BEAR), is of possible interest to the President.

The sixty ton Norwegian steamer BUSKOE, chartered by Norwegian expedition headed by Hallvard DeVold, was boarded by U.S.C.G. cutter NORTHLAND at Myggbukta on 12 September. There was a crew of ten, with 11 passengers, all of whom were Norwegians and one of whom was a woman. Personnel carried the usual hunting guns and stated they left Norway 29 August and arrived Greenland on 4 September. Information elicited indicated that three men and radio transmitter had been left at Peter Bay, two men at Cape Maurer and one at Revet, with the remaining passengers to be landed at Myggbukta, Cape Humbolt and Havna. The BUSKOE was held pending further investigation and the NORTHLAND proceeded to Peter Bay to remove radio station before ice closed in. The Greenland Government was informed at this time. Apparently the Norwegian government in London had no knowledge of this expedition.

NORTHLAND arrived at Peter Bay station on 14 September and found German radio transmitter, meterological instruments, secret German code and three Norwegians, one of whom was a German agent whom the Gestapo arranged to have included as a member of the expedition. Agent prepared to send daily weather reports and other military information of value to German officials in Norway. NORTHLAND personnel removed all portable gear, including radio and meterological equipment and a special code which is now in custody of Commander Task Group 6.5. Some equipment was burned. NORTHLAND also evacuated personnel and material of other stations established by BUSKOE expedition, and plans to leave Arctic supplies at Greenland government stations at Eskimonaes and Ellas Island. A full report is to follow by first safe mail.

Navy Department, after consultation with the State Department, has asked for comment and recommendation from Commander Task Group 6.5 as to the feasibility of bringing ship, crew and passengers to a United States port, under protective custody.

Investigation indicates that this attempt, with German approval and financial support, to establish relatively large numbers of Norwegians in northeast Greenland was primarily for the purpose of reviving Norwegian claims to parts of Greenland, at next peace conference.

Respectfully,

J. R. BEARDALL

Fig. 8 The memorandum for the US President Franklin Roosevelt from Rear Admiral J.R. Beardall, dated 18 September 1941, regarding the *Buskø* incident. (Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, New York.)

stoically accepted the cards that fate had dealt them and began preparations for the long, dark Greenland winter ahead of them.

The first US capture during WWII

A memorandum for the President of the United States of America from Rear Admiral J. R. Beardall, dated 18 September 1941, begins as follows (see Fig. 8 for the full text):

> The substance of recent reports received from Commander Task Group 6.5 (Northeast Greenland Patrol, NORTHLAND, NORTH STAR, BEAR), is of possible interest to the President.
>
> The sixty ton Norwegian steamer BUSKOE, chartered by Norwegian expedition headed by Hallvard DeVold, was boarded by U.S.C.G. cutter NORTHLAND at Myggbukta on 12 September. There was a crew of ten, with 11 passengers, all of whom were Norwegians and one of whom was a woman. Personnel carried the usual hunting guns and stated they left Norway 29 August and arrived Greenland on 4 September. Information elicited indicated that three men and radio transmitter had been left at Peter Bay, two men at Cape Maurer and one at Revet, with the remaining passengers to be landed at Myggbukta, Cape Humbolt and Havna. The BUSKOE was held pending further investigation and the NORTHLAND proceeded to Peter Bay to remove radio station before ice closed in. The Greenland Government was informed at this time. Apparently the Norwegian government in London had no knowledge of this expedition. (File in Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum)

Fig. 9 The US Coast Guard Cutter *Northland* during her Greenland Patrol years. (Courtesy of the US Coast Guard Historian's Office.)

In his unpublished memoirs from his time onboard the USCGC *North Star* as a Lieutenant Junior Grade, retired Captain David Sinclair writes of the discovery and consequent capture of the *Buskø*:

> One of the Danes stationed at the Ella Island weather [station] was out working his trap line when he saw a trawler up a narrow fjord. He hurried back and reported to us. We immediately went up that fjord and found that the vessel had left. They had, in fact, steamed right into the hands of the CGC NORTHLAND. It was a Norwegian Trawler named BUSCOE. There were 27 persons on board, most of them Danish hunters and Norwegian trappers, and one woman who said she was a nurse. Also found were up to date radio transmitting equipment which may have been used for sending weather reports and information on Allied shipping to German U-boats and Axis-controlled territory. (Sinclair, unpubl. memoirs)

Together, the *Northland* (Fig. 9), the *Bear* (Fig. 10) and the *North Star* comprised the US Navy's Northeast Greenland

Fig. 10 The US Coast Guard Cutter *Bear*. (Courtesy of the US Coast Guard Historian's Office.)

Patrol, under the command of Commander E. H. Smith of the US Coast Guard. This patrol had been formed by direct orders of US President Franklin Roosevelt. During the summer of 1941, in a secret memorandum to the Chief of Naval Operations, President Roosevelt wrote, "I think the Nazis will attempt to establish weather stations on the east coast of Greenland, probably in the vicinity of Scoresbysound. I suggest that you have the *Northland*, the *Bear* and one other iceworthy ship patrol the east coast of the island to prevent their setting up weather stations, bases or other military works" (quoted from memory by Charles W. Thomas as "wartime security prevented making a verbatim transcript" [Thomas 1951]).

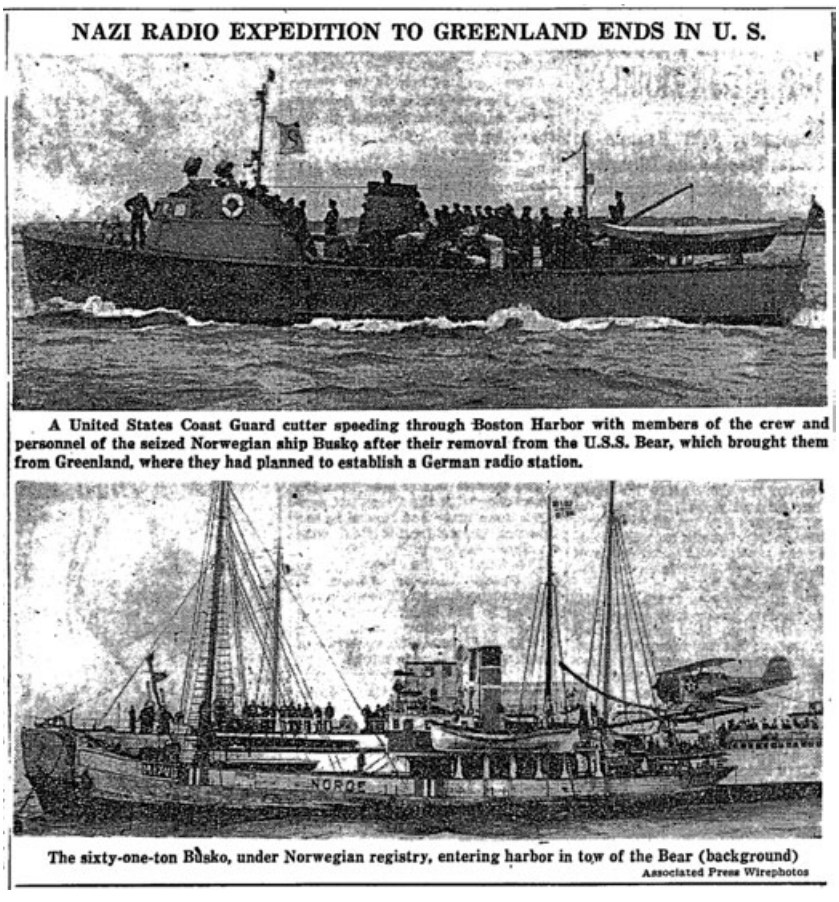
Onboard the *Northland*, Devold and the *Buskø*'s captain both admitted to the fact that they had dropped off three men with a radio station in Petersbay a week earlier. Whether or not they did this willingly would later become a topic of interest to the interrogation officers in Boston. Acting on this information, the *Northland* moved up to Petersbay. Arriving at night, the *Northland* launched a 10-man patrol under the command of Lieutenant Leroy McCluskey. Bradley and the two trappers were discovered sound asleep, and brought onboard the *Northland*. Some sources would later claim that, under the pretext of making some tea for the visitors, Bradley tried to burn a secret German codebook and instructions. Selinger (2001) refutes this story as just that, storytelling. The only "codebook" Bradley brought with him was a contemporary novel entitled *Det blåser fra Dauingfjell* (*A wind blows from Ghost Mountain*) (Fig. 11), on which he would base his encoding of the weather reports. The Americans proceeded to burn the radio equipment (Fig. 12).

Fig. 11 The book on which Bradley was supposed to base his coded weather reports to the Germans.

The *Buskø* in Boston

A prize crew was put onboard the *Buskø*, while the Norwegians were transferred to the *Northland* and later to the *Bear* for the journey to the American port of Boston. With its inferior cruise speed, the *Buskø* was tied to the USCGC *Bear* and was literally pulled the 4800 km from the east coast of Greenland to Boston (as explained by crewmember Peter Sætre, who was on the expedition as an able seaman, to his friend Helge Ødegård). The arrival of the *Buskø* on 14 October 1941 in Boston created something of a media circus. The following day the story was in the headlines of many US newspapers, with varying degrees of sensationalism and accuracy (Fig. 13). The *New York Times* reported on the day of the arrival of the ships: "Brings seized ship from Greenland: [USCGC] Bear [. . .] Lands 21 prisoners, Nazi operatives, at Boston: Woman and boy included" (*New York Times* 1941a). The "Woman and boy" (not to be confused with the previously mentioned woman who gave birth during the overwintering)

Fig. 12 Crew of the *Northland* burning the German radio transmitter at Jonsbu. (Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum, Brunswick, USA.)



NAZI RADIO EXPEDITION TO GREENLAND ENDS IN U. S.

A United States Coast Guard cutter speeding through Boston Harbor with members of the crew and personnel of the seized Norwegian ship Buskø after their removal from the U.S.S. Bear, which brought them from Greenland, where they had planned to establish a German radio station.

The sixty-one-ton Büsko, under Norwegian registry, entering harbor in tow of the Bear (background)
Associated Press Wirephotos

Fig. 13 Page 3 of the *New York Times*, 14 October 1941, featured photographs of (top) the patrol boat bringing the *Buskø* crew into Boston Harbor and (bottom) the *Buskø* herself being pulled while tied to the side of the US Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC, not the USS, as stated in the newspaper's caption) *Bear*. (Copyright © 1941 by The New York Times Co. Reprinted with permission.)

were the wife of one of the trappers, not an unusual arrangement in those days, and a young apprentice onboard the ship. The next day the *New York Times* ran another story on the *Buskø* capture: "21 Norwegians held in seized ship case: Authorities at Boston are silent on fate of crew aiding Nazis" (*New York Times* 1941b). In *Time Magazine* of Monday, 20 October 1941, the affair was mentioned under the title of "No Trafalgar, no Jutland"

(*Time Magazine* 1941b), contrasting this first involvement of the US in WWII with earlier more grand openings to large military conflicts. The following week, on Monday, 27 October 1941, in a story shrewdly entitled "Prisoners of Defense", *Time Magazine* once more touched on the *Buskø* story, this time bringing attention to the peculiar legal status of the captives. As the US was not yet at war with Germany (or Norway for that matter), the status of the captives from the *Buskø* and Petersbay must have been a headache for the US bureaucracy, a fact that the sarcastic *Time Magazine* journalist did not fail to comment on:

> What was the status of the captives? Were they prisoners of war or (since the U.S. is not in the war) prisoners of defence? Under what law could they be held in jail? The unembarrassed Justice Department, which knows a lot about the law, smoothly ruled that the Busko's crew could be held "because they are not in possession of the proper traveling documents". (*Time Magazine* 1941a)

Thus, bizarrely, the captives from what the US armed forces would later describe as their first capture during WWII (see, for example, Thomas 1951) were being held for lacking proper immigration papers.

The Coast Guard and the Federal Bureau of Investigation interrogated all of the people onboard the *Buskø* after capture and during the first few days in Boston. The Norwegian authorities in the USA then interrogated everyone again for three days starting on 21 October. The briefs from the sessions show that the work of the interrogation committee focussed on trying to clarify four main issues regarding each of the crew members. Did they know about the German plans for bringing onboard a radio-equipped weather station before departure from Laukvik? Did they suspect that Devold knew anything about this? Were they or Devold members of the Norwegian Nazi party? What would they want to do now that they had escaped from occupied Norway? As it turned out, none of the expedition members (excluding Bradley) appeared to be affiliated with the NS, and they had no previous knowledge of Devold or of whether or not he was a member of the NS or was otherwise connected with the Germans. The interrogation briefs show that all of the captives were now eager to participate in whatever way possible in liberating Norway from the Germans.

As has been mentioned, John Giæver was interned in the UK after being captured on the *Veslekari* the previous summer. Giæver later managed to become installed at the Norwegian embassy in New York. He was sent to be present at the Norwegian interrogations. With the exception of Bradley, all the expedition members were released almost immediately after the Norwegian interrogations ended. They had been judged to be "good Norwegians" and, as expressed by the Norwegian Peter Simonsen, a central figure in the interrogations, in a letter to the Norwegian consulate in New York, there could not be any "uncertainty in releasing them. A few of them made a very good impression" (Simonsen 1941b).

Bradley and Devold were not among these. After stating that Bradley had confessed to working on behalf of the Germans to establish a weather station in Greenland, Simonsen concluded that his confession was "obviously enough for us to be sure that there is nothing that can be done on the Norwegian side to get the man released" (Simonsen 1941b). Simonsen felt that the papers Bradley had been carrying—copies of which he thought were being sent to London—might be of interest to Norwegian intelligence because they mentioned names of Norwegians involved in NS activities. As for Devold, the main issue was that during the interrogations Devold defended Adolf Hoel's actions in Norway, and was unable to give a satisfactory explanation of the expedition. Without stating why, Simonsen said he felt that it was unlikely that Devold would not have known anything about the radio transmitter beforehand. In Simonsen's words:

> It could be possible, as Devold explains, that the NSIU thought it so desirable to manifest Norwegian interests in Greenland that they scrambled together all the trappers one could muster and sent them off, and that the German arrangement with the radio station is as improvised as Devold's and Bradley's explanation gives the impression of. But totally convincing this explanation is not. (Simonsen 1941b)

Neither Bradley nor Devold were released.

Conclusion

It is difficult to make sense of the German Wehrmacht's behaviour in this incident. The whole arrangement appears very slapdash: contact with Bradley was only made a couple of weeks before the departure of the *Buskø* from Norway, and his training consisted of a 5-day course in meteorology and radio operation, a rudimentary introduction at best. According to Selinger (2001), it appears that the plan to establish a weather station in Petersbay was unknown to the German Navy. Perhaps the whole German involvement in the *Buskø* expedition was only a concealed prod to test the degree of American presence and intelligence in Greenland. When approached by Hoel and Smedal during the planning stage of the expedition, representatives of the German government had expressed concerns about opening up a new front in open conflict with the Americans (Barr 2003). This explanation is somewhat supported by the Germans explaining to Bradley during the initial contact that they could have

used a trained German for this, but it was supposed to be a Norwegian expedition and so a Norwegian operator it had to be. If the weather station were discovered, it would be harder for the USA to link it directly to Germany, or so Krause and his superior Zeibolt could have reasoned. However, judging by the media headlines in the wake of the *Buskø*'s arrival in Boston, the USA used this exposure of German activities on Greenland for all it was worth in shaping opinion against Germany.

The story of the *Buskø* was used in many different ways during the first few post-war years. From a US perspective, the mythology surrounding the US's first naval capture during the Second World War had an obvious propaganda purpose, and quickly grew out of proportion. A ridiculously embellished version was published in Kurt Singer's *Spies and traitors of World War II* (1945). This account includes Nazi agents trying to bribe their American guards (who patriotically retorted: "Mac, du could us nicht briben, wir are Americans"), and *Buskø* crewmembers frantically lowering the "Quisling flag, otherwise known as the swastika flag" upon entering Boston Harbor. Upon entering the harbour, the *Buskø* crew called out "We are not Quislings, we are not Nazis", claimed Singer (1945: 69), who also placed several Germans onboard—"The few Germans among the prisoners were quiet and despondent" (1945: 69–71)—although there were, in fact, none.

More interesting is the version provided by the Norwegian war pilot Bernt Balchen, who rose to (at least Norwegian) fame in the US Air Force during the war (Balchen et al. 1944). Perhaps he felt it was a patriotic move to distance the *Buskø* episode from Norway. In any case, in his version of the story, the *Buskø* is a "dubious looking Danish ice-breaker" (Balchen et al. 1944: 20). Why not blame Norway's Greenland arch-enemy Denmark? In Balchen's narrative, the crew of the *Buskø* were all Danish. Upon learning about the radio station, "a dozen heavily armed Coast Guard Commandos . . . landed in a midnight blizzard, raided the shack, and captured some twenty Nazi troopers in army uniforms who were asleep in their bunks" (Balchen et al. 1944: 20). It would have been interesting to learn how 20 men had managed to fit themselves into the tiny cabin in Petersbay.

As news of the *Buskø*'s fate started to reach Hoel and the NSIU back in Norway, the NSIU halted its expedition activity for the rest of the war. After the war the Norwegians resumed some weather station activity in Greenland, but in 1959 all Norwegian activity ceased in eastern Greenland.

Epilogue

Iacob Rytter Bradley was, according to Bradley's relatives in Norway, put on trial in the USA, but was not convicted because of the nature of the evidence. He was given a 3-month temporary visa to the USA, but for obvious reasons chose not to return to Norway. He lived underground in the USA for two years until he was employed on a ship bound for Paraguay, where he lived for a few years as a sailor. The family's version of these events contrasts with the account given by Stordalmo (2006), who holds that Bradley was in captivity in the USA until 1947. According to the family, after his release from US custody, Bradley found work in an Argentine shipping company, and captained a vessel conducting petroleum-related seismological investigations off the Argentine coast. He later married and settled in Sweden. He maintained contact with his Norwegian family but, fearing treason charges against him, he did not set foot on Norwegian soil again until the summer of 1979. The treason charges against Bradley had by then exceeded the statute of limitations. He passed away in or around 1999, and was buried in Sweden in accordance with Jewish rites as this was his wife's religion. It thus seems that his nationalism did not encompass the anti-Semitism so characteristic of Nazi ideology.

Hallvard Devold was taken to the UK, interrogated for 30 days and was interned on the Isle of Man until the end of the war. In August 1945 he returned to Norway, but was not tried for treason. As in the 1931 tiff with the Danes over Greenland (Skarstein 2006), Hallvard Devold seems to have been a pawn in a game of strategy played by people more powerful and cynical than he. Although Devold had probably been made aware, through Hoel, of the German curiosity in the details of the expedition, he might not have suspected the motives behind this interest. Perhaps he reasoned that the Germans were ensuring that the expedition was not just a cover for yet another boat escaping away from occupied Norway. According to the briefs from the interrogations in Boston, Devold believed "there was not much anyone could do, as the contracts for the expedition were signed and there was no opportunity in the contracts for the crew to ask for leave" (Simonsen 1941a). In a telegram to Hoel on the day before the departure from Laukvik, Devold apparently reported that he felt "the whole thing had turned into a cursed affair" (Simonsen 1941a). Devold was never involved in polar activities again. The archives of the Norwegian Polar Institute from the period after the war contain documents that suggest he may have considered a career in Argentina, but this was never realized. He passed away in 1957.

Adolf Hoel lost all his official positions at the NSIU, and his professorship at the University of Oslo, immediately at the end of the war. After the incident, Hoel claimed several times to have had no idea about the German plans to install a radio transmitter and telegraphist in Green-

land until after the *Buskø*'s departure. In Hoel's autobiography, published after his death, he referred to Bradley as "a telegraphist whom the Germans had slipped onboard without my knowledge" (Hoel 1977: 64) Another example is found in Hoel's correspondence, after the war, with the Swedish geology professor Hans Ahlmann, who tipped off the Norwegian authorities about Hoel's collaboration with the Germans in the *Buskø* affair. In 1949, Hoel wrote a tense letter to Ahlmann, who had been an old acquaintance, attempting to cast himself in a better light.

> The day before departure a representative of the German Gestapo came to Laukvik and forced onboard a radio station and a telegraphist that was to send meteorological messages to the German Luftwaffe. I had no knowledge of this, and was notified of this only when the vessel was at sea. (Simonsen 1941a)

The prosecutors investigating the treason charges against Hoel spent considerable time and effort exploring the degree to which he had collaborated with the Germans during the preparations of the Greenland expeditions in 1940 and 1941. Obersturmführer Hermann Krause (who died shortly afterwards) and others were interrogated by the Norwegian authorities after the war, but the prosecutors eventually dropped this serious charge from the case against Hoel (Stordalmo 2006). Hoel was charged with other offences and was convicted for treason against Norway. He was sentenced to 18 months of forced labour and lost his right to vote for 10 years. He wrote a scathing account of the unfair treatment he got during the trial, an account that was faithful to the details, as was Hoel's method in everything he did (Hoel 1951). He died in 1964 of injuries from a traffic accident (Barr 2003).

According to a widespread belief in US naval history circles, the *Buskø* never made it out to sea again, and the rotten remains can still be seen reaching up at the low tide at some forgotten pier in Boston Harbor (e.g., Snow 1965: 255). This is not the case. On 15 January 1942 the *Buskø* was released from US custody. The London-based Norwegian exile government then made a war-related forced lease of the boat and rented her to the US War Shipping Administration from the end of April 1942 to the end of September 1944. The Norwegian lease on the vessel ended on 30 September 1945. After a failed attempt that ended in engine repairs in St. Johns, Newfoundland, the *Buskø* returned to Norway, where she underwent serious restoration, including a new bow, cockpit and engine, in 1950 (Fig. 14). Then, in 1952, a terrible hurricane struck the sealing grounds in the ice belt outside of the east coast of Greenland. The *Buskø* went down with four other vessels in the drift ice, and a total of 79 men perished (Ottesen 2001).

Fig. 14 The *Buskø* in the drift ice off the east coast of Greenland in the early 1950s. (Reprinted from Ottesen 2001 with the author's permission.)

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