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## THE HISTORY OF THE BORNHOLM ISLAND IN THE YEARS 1940–1946

WWII constitutes one of the most important moments in the history of Bornholm. The turn of war events in the island differed significantly from what the rest of Denmark experienced at the same time. In the island the war lasted from April 10, 1940, i.e. from its occupation by German units, to April 5, 1946 when the last ship carrying Red Army soldiers aboard sailed away from Rønne. During the German occupation the island was one of the most peaceful places in the entire Kingdom for in Bornholm the German exerted the “mild” version of the occupation. The situation changed in May 1945, the time when Soviet bombs were cast on the island while the rest of Denmark celebrated the regaining of liberty.

The article aims at presenting the history of the Bornholm Island in the years 1940–1946. In order to do so I make use mostly of the literature on the subject written in Danish. The most important sources are: *Bornholm i krig* edited by Ann Vibeke Knudsen<sup>1</sup> as well as a set of documents entitled *Bornholm mellem Øst og Vest. En udenrigspolitisk dokumentation af Bornholms stilling op til og under de sovjetiske befrielsestroppers ophold på Bornholm 1945–1946 og under den kolde krig*. This latter publication constituting a set of 1077 documents on the situation of the island of Bornholm in the international arena in the years 1945–2000, is available online.<sup>2</sup> The documentation come first and foremost from the Copenhagen State Archives and includes also British and Russian records (all of them translated into Danish).

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<sup>1</sup> *Bornholm i krig 1940–1946*, ed. by A.V. Knudsen, Rønne 2000.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.danmarkidenkoldekrig.dk/Bornholm/bog.pdf> (accessed: 2.01.2013).

## The German occupation

On April 9, 1940, early in the morning, Denmark was captured by German troops which appeared in Bornholm on the following day. There was even a suggestion that the German simply “forgot about the island” and that Hitler had had to give a special order so as to speed up its seizure. Several factors determined the Danish occupation. Not only did the state constitute the Third Reich’s food base, but it was also an area connecting the Reich with the Scandinavian peninsula. The occupation of Denmark was supposed to assure the German control of Norway from where Swedish iron ore, indispensable in the German metallurgical industry, was transported via the Narvik port. The control of Norway, in turn, enabled the German to set their air and naval bases there from which they could control the North Atlantic and attack transports of supplies for Great Britain. Also, the German realized that the British and the French had their own plans towards Norway. Thus, air bases in the northern Jutland protected the long Norwegian coastline while at the same time the German navy could control the Danish waters both as an important operational route and a training area for U-Boot crews.<sup>3</sup>

At first Bornholm was not in the centre of the German attention, yet it did not remain in the eclipse for the Third Reich, either. On April 10, 1940 700–800 German soldiers came to Rønne in the afternoon. The seizure of Bornholm was peaceful for, on the very same day, the island’s commanding officer, Colonel J.T. Waagepetersen received an order from the Ministry of War not to resist the possible German appearance in the island.<sup>4</sup> In the following month the German forces in the island were reduced and supplied with marine personnel numbering 50 persons to be stationed in Rønne. Bornholm came under the command of the German navy in Kiel, with its commanders being oftentimes older reserve officers who avoided both interfering with the island’s domestic affairs and clashes with local people. The proper occupation authorities in the island remained meager for almost the entire WWII period. As the war progressed, Bornholm gradually became a part of the German war actions such as e.g. token alarms for the German air defense as well as it served as a holiday place for German naval personnel.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On German plans towards Norway see: E. Denkwicz-Szczepaniak: *Norwegia w planach hitlerowskich Niemiec* [Norway in the Plans of the Nazi Germany], in: *Norwegia w I połowie XX wieku* [Norway in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century], ed. by E. Denkwicz-Szczepaniak, Toruń 2004, pp. 9–43.

<sup>4</sup> *Bornholm i krig* ..., p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

This growing German activity in the island also translated itself into numerous buildings which the occupier constructed there. These comprised observational posts at the seaside as well as all signaling, radar and measuring stations. In 1941 the German built a camp – the commander and his staff's headquarters near Rønne to serve as also a holiday resort for U-Boot convalescing crews. The camp stretched for 2,5 ha.<sup>6</sup> The remaining bigger German gauges encompassed several stations near Snogebækand and Levka camouflaged as farms but actually measuring U-Boots' noise level. In the vicinity of Rytterknægten 65 m high tower was erected for maintaining radio connection with Germany. Later, more radar gauges were raised, too,<sup>7</sup> work which required the presence both of qualified labourers and experts. In 1944 ca. 1000 Germans were residents in the island.<sup>8</sup>

The German plans towards the East set a Mark on the lot of Bornholm. On October 4, 1940 Hitler ordered cannons to be installed in the island. After a careful scrutiny the southern part of Bornholm, that is, the area around Dueodde was selected for that purpose. Four posts with 388 mm. cannons were planned. Their task was to cast the heaviest shell weighing 800 kg as far away as 42 km, whereas the light shell weighting 500 kg – as far away as 55 km and within 128 seconds at that. The 19 m long barrel weighted 110 tons. The cannons were assumed to be a part of the German system of Baltic defense serving as reserve weapons for big German battleships. The construction of the immense concrete building required the presence of 50 German specialists and 300–500 Danish workmen. Eventually only two of the planned constructions were completed, whereas the cannons never reached the island.<sup>9</sup> Nowadays these posts constitute a most unusual war remnants to be viewed by those visiting the Dueodde area in the island.

Regarding the everyday life of the island inhabitants, it did not differ from the life as other Danish people experienced it in the period in question. Accordingly, food rationing, goods lacking, and restrictions were daily troubles in Bornholm, too. Added to these were the navigation problems such as the Copenhagen transport, problems resulting not only from the fact of lacking fuel but also the jeopardy of mines. Therefore, the island inhabitants were granted an air connection with the Kastrup airport in Copenhagen. Despite the said difficulties,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

Bornholm's situation as juxtaposed with the rest of Denmark was exceptional. The Germans practices there the "mild" form of occupation, and the German garrison was so small that it could do no harm to the island. One good example of the mild occupation is the attitude which the occupation authorities held towards Jewish people or communists dwelling in Bornholm. Contrary to the remaining part of Denmark, these political and ethnic groups were not repressed or persecuted in any serious way. This was owing not only to the small number of Germans stationing in the island but also their general – careless – attitude to performing their work.<sup>10</sup> Another example can be the events of September 19, 1944. On this day the action of liquidating the Danish police was carried out. In the course of this action about 2000 policemen, out of 9821 Danish policemen, were arrested. The majority of them was taken away to German concentration camps, whereas the rest assembled themselves in secret police groups.<sup>11</sup> Nothing like this took place in Bornholm, even though the police were liquidated, too, and policemen were sent back home.

The German police undertook more decisive actions in the island at the end of the occupation period. Still, the arrests which happened in Bornholm as well never entailed fatal, for the arrested, results. In January 1945 the Gestapo detained several policemen from the Resistance only to release them after a few days as a result of the protests organized by the local authorities.<sup>12</sup> One can only state that unfriendly demeanour or gestures that Bornholm inhabitants demonstrated towards the German did not effect in repression on their part. This idyll, in the situation when the remaining part of Denmark fought against the German occupier, did not mean that such a fight was not waged in the island, too. From the very beginning of the occupation numerous spontaneous demonstrations against the enemy took place in Bornholm. Its inhabitants were exasperated by the German navy's frequent visits in the ports on the island or German soldiers marching and singing. Therefore, Bornholm dwellers attempted to break off these practices by e.g. cutting telephone lines. Only later was that the proper anti-German activity organized. At the beginning of the occupation period, however, actions against Germans were carried out by but individuals or small groups independently of one another. Illegal press was distributed and explosions were caused in the home

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> W. Czapliński: *Ruch oporu w Danii 1940–1945* [The Danish Resistance 1940–1945], Wrocław 1973, p. 174.

<sup>12</sup> *Bornholm i krig ...*, p. 12.

or business places considered pro-German. One of the bigger sabotage actions took place in Aakirkeby in April 1943 when a German flax factory was kindled. Owing to the fact that no plants or factories cooperating with the German existed in the island, no grand-scale sabotage actions were taken there.<sup>13</sup>

Still, the uncontrolled actions which sporadically occurred in Bornholm at the time in question caused bothered those involved in the Resistance, and in reconnoiter actions, helping the runaways or weapon transport organization in particular. These people were well aware of the fact that the more peaceful the atmosphere was in the island, the better chance they had for the successful performance of planned tasks. Transports to Sweden and back on small ships or fish cutters and via the island of Christiansø situated about 18 km to the north-east of Bornholm's coast were of top priority. This is because runaways, Jewish people or Resistance activists could be safely taken to Sweden in this way. In 1944 several crews of American bombers, having forcedly landed in Bornholm, were transported to Sweden aboard fish cutters.<sup>14</sup> Transports from Sweden encompassed weapons and ammunition to be subsequently sent to Copenhagen. Delivery services collecting the information on the German installation on the island or the Baltic navigation was of particular importance, a reason why the organization of the Resistance controlled by the Bornholm Liberty Council turned out so significant a task to fulfill. Although Bornholm oppositionists avoided the fatal clash with the German police, nevertheless, several persons were killed during the action against the occupiers. The names of these persons can be seen engraved on the Almindingen statue.

Passing on the information on the German secret V-weapon must be considered the most significant achievement of the Bornholm intelligence services. The Germans experimented with V-1 bombs and V-2 missiles in the Peenemünde military research centre. Situated on the Baltic coast, Peenemünde could guarantee that the centre would be secure and it would be possible to control missiles' experimental flights from there. Still, it occurred several times that the missiles got out of control. In August 1943 near Bodilsker (in the southern Bornholm) a V-1 missile got dropped. Before the German regained it, intelligence officer Hasager Christiansen and policeman Johannes Hansen<sup>15</sup> managed to gauge and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 72–73.

<sup>15</sup> Hansen managed to avoid repressions, whereas Christiansen was sent to Copenhagen and tortured. Owing to the Resistance's help he was later on transferred to Sweden. Ibid., p. 61.

photograph it. The materials were sent, via Stockholm, to England and handed over to allied experts. The Allies had already been aware of the existence of the base and even undertaken attempts at destroying it. After the information from Bornholm the bomb attacks got intensified, a development which contributed to the delay in the works on the new weapon.<sup>16</sup>

At the turn of 1944 and 1945 the Germans were compelled to succumb to the prevailing Allied forces on all fronts. The commander of the German navy, Admiral Karl Dönitz knew that the Third Reich's defeat was inevitable. The admiral ordered mass sea evacuation of German citizens. The first to be evacuated were civilians and wounded soldiers, then came the troops retreating from the eastern front in the direction to the west. This task involved all possible units, starting from old liners from WWI period, through U-Boats, merchant vessels, boats, destroyers and ending in all that could float on water. On the whole 7000–8000 sailing units were assembled aboard which the evacuated could get to Kurland, East Prussia, Gdańsk Pomerania and all the territories on the Baltic Sea coast still in the possession of the German and from where they could be directed further to West Germany and Denmark. The success of the plan depended on whether the German would manage to keep the southern Baltic area, a reason why Bornholm became such an important (for serving as a transshipment place) point of this plan.

At all cost was the island supposed to remain in the German hands for its loss could significantly impede the German trade on the Baltic. In order to prevent that, the command of the island was granted to an energetic and trustworthy 43 year old commodore, Gerhard von Kamptz. Von Kamptz, an experienced officer decorated with the Iron Cross for his former war merits, began his service for the Berlin naval command after he had sustained serious injuries on the front. Dönitz personally informed von Kamptz of the task consigned to him and made him promise not to capitulate “in a bad moment.” The new commanding officer arrived in Rønne on March 4, 1945. The governor of the island, Paul Christian von Stemann quickly noticed that, along with von Kamptz's arrival, changes began to occur. The German commanding officer acted rightly yet in a detached way and never pretended that would be tolerant for the actions hindering his performance of the task entrusted in him earlier. Also, from the very beginning he knew that he would not be able to prepare the whole island to the planned defense. Gaining

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

reinforcements turned out to be von Kamptz's chief difficulty. Since defending the island from the Russian invasion was impossible, two most important ports Rønne og Nexø and the road connecting them were resolved to be held. In the meantime the war was coming to its inevitable end. On March 18 the Russian seized Kołobrzeg (Kolberg) situated south of the island, and on April 26 Szczecin capitulated. On May 2 Berlin surrendered and Russians had to redirect their steps to the north. They captured Rostock and headed themselves towards Lübeck and Wismar. Geographically and militarily, Bornholm was situated far outside the Russian positions in Germany.

The statement of the capitulation of the German army in Denmark came as a surprise to everyone, the Bornholm commanding officer included. The latter was informed about the said capitulation by governor Stemann who in turn heard it on BBC radio. The capitulation became a fact on May 5, 1945, that is, Saturday morning at which time also British troops under Major Richard Dewing entered Copenhagen.<sup>17</sup> Both the capital and the rest of the country celebrated this fact, while politicians took care of forming a new government. In Bornholm the joy was mixed with anxiety. This is because a large number of German soldiers and deserters from the eastern front, many of them wounded, arrived in the island in the said period. It was understood that, in order to avoid unrest, they must be helped. The resistance members as well as the governor ineffectively attempted to establish contact with the Danish authorities in Copenhagen.

Gerhard von Kamptz was concerned, too. The connection with his superiors was impeded and the incoming reports full of contradictions. Great numbers of disorganized German soldiers seeking shelter in the island were an additional problem. Tired of fighting and hungry yet armed, these soldiers could be a serious trouble. The commanding officer eventually received a wire informing him that the German continued to be in the state of war with the Soviet Union. Also, the order came to defend southern transports at all costs and surrender Bornholm to the British only.<sup>18</sup>

May 6 had come and passed and neither the Danish, nor the German knew what was going to happen. They did not know, either, that General Dewing entering Copenhagen said that Bornholm had not been his cup of tea. General Eisenhower did not risk a confrontation with his eastern ally and, while sending his

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<sup>17</sup> B. Lidegaard: *Dansk Udenrigspolitik Historie*, vol. 4: *Overleveren 1914–1945*, København 2006, p. 600.

<sup>18</sup> *Bornholm i krig ...*, p. 16.

troops to the island, he positioned them far behind the Russian positions in Germany. The Russians did not sit on their hands, either. The information on Soviet planes appearing over the south-eastern Bornholm for the first time in many years was available to people as early as April 14.<sup>19</sup> On May 7 several Soviet planes flew over Nexø. The German ships returning from the eastern front opened fire on them. Several hours later even larger number of Soviet planes bombarded Rønne. Also, leaflets calling on the German to surrender were dropped. It was demanded that a representative of the German garrison were sent to Kołobrzeg (Kolberg) on May 8 for the purpose of passing on to him conditions of the capitulation.<sup>20</sup>

The German commander immediately turned down the Soviet demands claiming that the island was situated in the British sphere of interests, whereas Germany was in the state of war with the USSR and each attempt on their part to land in Bornholm would be stopped. The island inhabitants feared for the worst, the more so that announcements sent to Copenhagen did not bring any results. When the demand to surrender remained unanswered, on May 8 the Russian attacked again two Bornholm towns. In the morning they had dropped bombs on Rønne, in effect of which 70% of houses were destroyed. Also, leaflets warning Bornholm inhabitants of the decision to continue bombing raids at 3 p.m. were dropped. Since the Germans again declined their surrendering at the given hour, bombs were dropped on Nexø.<sup>21</sup>

The effects of the bombing turned out to be dramatic for the island inhabitants, for in Nexø about 2500 people lost roofs over their heads, whereas in Rønne – ca. 4000–6000. Out of the total number of 3400 buildings only 300–400 were not damaged, and 250 were completely destroyed. During the bombing 10 Danish persons lost their lives; the number of killed Germans has remained unknown.<sup>22</sup> On the whole, 93 bombs were dropped on Rønne and 132 – on Nexø. Material losses amounted to 27 million Danish crowns. At the last moment before the May 8 attack Rønne and Nexø inhabitants could be evacuated, a reason for only

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<sup>19</sup> Doc. No. 72: *Berlingske Tidende lørdag den 14. april 1945. Russiske bombemaskiner over Bornholm for første gang i flere år*, in: *Bornholm mellem Øst og Vest ...*, p. 62.

<sup>20</sup> Doc. No. 140: *Telegram den 7. maj 1945 fra general Dewing. SHAEF Mission to Denmark, til SHAEF FORWARD*, in: *ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>21</sup> Doc. No 154: *Afdelingschef Hvass, Udenrigsministeriet, til general Dewing, SHAEF Mission to Denmark, den 8. maj 1945*, in: *Bornholm mellem Øst og Vest ...*, p. 106.

<sup>22</sup> *Bornholm i krig ...*, p. 114.



so many casualties.<sup>23</sup> When, several weeks after the Soviet bombing, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Bornholm, the island looked to him like bombarded London.

From the military point of view the air raid on the island was insignificant for the USSR as Soviet soldiers never attempted at landing in Bornholm. They appeared in the island only as late as May 9, that is several hours after the German capitulation became a fact, an action which could be taken without an air raid.

In May 1945 the situation in Denmark was as follows: the state was liberated by the three allied states, namely, the British (in the central part of the country), the Russian (in Bornholm), and Americans (in Greenland).

### **Liberation of the island and the Soviet occupation**

In May 1945 the Soviet army seized the German-occupied Danish island of Bornholm in the result of which its 11 month long occupation commenced. Although the liberation of the island by the Soviet army, the occupation and the evacuation constituted only a minor episode of WWII's last stage on one hand, still, these events became an important element of the Soviet policy towards Scandinavia and the Baltic region. The affair was of major significance for the Danish government, for none of its members knew the motifs behind the Soviet Union's seizure of the island; neither did they know for how long the length of the stay of the Soviet Union in Bornholm.

The literature on the subject suggests that, after the seizure of the northern Germany, the Soviet army immediately aimed at penetrating Schleswig-Holstein, Kiel, Copenhagen and Malmö so as Stalin could tighten the Baltic gates thus resolving about the fate of the Scandinavian states. In non-Soviet historical literature an idea was popularized that the Soviet Union had intended to occupy Denmark so that the Danish paid for the privilege of being a liberated state. However, the seizure of Lübeck by Montgomery's troops on May 2, 1945 threw a spanner in these plans.<sup>24</sup>

Bornholm became an interesting subject for Soviet politicians as early as 1944. The occupation of the island was considered in July 1944 when the Vice-

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<sup>23</sup> F. Wendt: *Danmarks historie 1939–1978: særudgave af Danmarks Historie*, Vol. 14, København 1978, pp. 319–320.

<sup>24</sup> B. Jensen: *Soviet occupation of a new type. The long liberation of the Danish Island of Bornholm 1944–1946*, "Scandinavian Journal of History" 25, 2000, No. 3, p. 221.

Commissioner Salomon Łozowski suggested Bornholm as a convenient military post in the Baltic. Also the Vice-Commissioner Vladimir Dekanozov talking with Molotov said that after the end of WWII the Soviet Union being the Baltic superpower should have the privileged position in the region, and the latter must be obtained playing a part in the liberation of Denmark, starting from Bornholm. Litvinov pointed, however, to a hole in the plan: the island was Danish with which the Soviet Union did not remain in the state of war.

As regards the liberation and future of Denmark, no agreement existed between Moscow, London and Washington. The “strange case” of Denmark, as Roosevelt referred to it, was a subject of a discussion at the Yalta conference in February 1945. Stalin did not want to have any obligations towards this state then. The question of deciding about Denmark’s future was not an urgent affair for him because in his view Danish politicians themselves allowed the German to enter their country in 1940.<sup>25</sup>

In the early April of 1945 the London government was convinced that the question of Denmark’s liberation was safe, i.e. it remained entirely in the hands of the Allied forces. On April 4, 1945 the Foreign Office informed General Dewing that the Russian had probably no intention of occupying Denmark although the situation could change if they regarded it strategically beneficial. In order to make sure that Denmark will be liberated by the British, on April 19 Winston Churchill ordered Montgomery staying south of the River Elbe at the time to hurry up and capture Lübeck as quickly as possible. In his wire to Anthony Eden Winston Churchill wrote: „There is no reason for the Russians to capture Denmark. This is the country which will be liberated and will regain its sovereignty. If we reach Lübeck, that’s the end of the story.”<sup>26</sup>

On May 2, 1945 British troops reached the Baltic Sea near Lübeck and Wismar where they established a contact with Soviet troops. Montgomery wired London that he passed the Russians by 12 hours and that the entire Schleswig and Denmark were taken over.<sup>27</sup>

In spring 1945 the Allied forces’ military efforts concentrated on the seizure of Berlin. When, on March 18, the forces of Konstantin Rokossovsky captured

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>26</sup> Doc. No. 81: *Telegram fra premierminister Churchill til udenrigsminister Eden, Washington, den 19. april 1945*, in: *Bornholm mellem Øst og Vest ...*, p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> Doc. No. 105: *Telegram den 2. maj 1945 fra feltmarskal Montgomery til War Office*, in: *ibid.*, p. 80.

the German naval base in Kołobrzeg (Kolberg), Vladimir Siemionov strongly insisted that the general naval command should have considered a possibility of capturing Bornholm. In relations with its western allied forces Moscow justified the capturing of the island as an opportunity on the part of the German to use it as an anti-USSR base. The liberation of Bornholm would be advantageous for the Soviet Union in other ways, too. The USSR could demand a place for itself in the allied commission controlling Denmark.

Also, Bornholm's occupation was to demonstrate that Denmark's future did not lie entirely in the hands of Great Britain. Dekanozov supported this plan and Molotov ordered the proposition to be sent to Nikolai Bulganin in the State Defense Committee. When, on May 4, 1945 representatives of Oberkommando der Wehrmacht in Flensburg signed an act of surrendering all German forces in Denmark, Bornholm included, to Montgomery, the Soviet Headquarters (*Stawka*) instructed Admiral Nikolai Kuznetsov on seizing Bornholm no matter what. The west allied forces were never informed about this decision.<sup>28</sup>

On May 5, 1945, in the afternoon, British General Major Richard Henry Dewing, Head of the SHAEF mission in Denmark along with a small airborne division landed on the Kastrup airport where he was welcomed by Ole Lippmann, Head of the SOE (Special Operation Executive) in Denmark. The country was liberated in a peaceful way by the British, an utterly positive outcome. When a vast majority of the Danish celebrated the ending of the war, Bornholm inhabitants still had mixed feelings about it, for Russians, not the British came to the island first. On May 5–7 Ole Lippmann followed by the liberation government asked Dewing to send soldiers to the island so as they accepted the capitulation of the German garrison. The British general accepted the request of the Danish authorities, yet was ordered not to undertake any further steps regarding the island's future without the consent of General Eisenhower.<sup>29</sup>

Eisenhower knew that the Russians had had an interest in the island and did not want to complicate international matters any further. Consequently, he instructed Montgomery not to send any forces to Bornholm unless the Danish government clearly asked for it, yet, even then a consent of the American general was required.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, in two wires dated for May 7 and May 8, Dewing

<sup>28</sup> B. Jensen: op. cit., pp. 227–228.

<sup>29</sup> B. Lidegaard: op. cit., pp. 600–601.

<sup>30</sup> Doc. No. 136: *Telegram den 7. maj 1945 fra general Eisenhower, SHAEF FWD, til feltmarskal Montgomery, EXFOR MAIN*, in: *Bornholm mellem Øst og Vest ...*, p. 94.

asked Eisenhower to let him send a British troop to Bornholm so as to accept the German capitulation act. He also informed about 20 Soviet planes circling over Rønne.<sup>31</sup> Only after receiving these wires did Eisenhower ask Moscow on May 8 if sending British army would not clash with the Soviet plans towards the island.<sup>32</sup>

The reply from Moscow came two days later surprising the allied forces completely. The Soviet government informed that it had already captured Bornholm. The Moscow Headquarters made the final decision regarding the seizure of the island on May 9th early in the morning after Germany's capitulation became official and the British remained inactive for four days. The Soviet party justified its decision with several arguments. Firstly, the island was situated 250 km east of the Red Army's operational zone and the German who resided in it came to Bornholm from near Szczecin, Gdańsk and Kurland, that is, the USSR army-occupied areas. Moreover, the commanding officer of the German garrison surrendered to the Soviet army and asked for food.<sup>33</sup> The other consideration such as the island's convenient situation isolating Bornholm from the rest of Denmark also played a role in its seizure. The Soviet government realized that the occupation of this area would not cause such problems with the western allied forces as it could with regard to Jutland or Zealand.<sup>34</sup>

The Soviet army appeared in the island on May 9, 1945. On that very day, in the afternoon 5 small torpedo-boats with 170 Marines entered the Rønne port.<sup>35</sup> On May 10 their commanding officer stated that the boats would leave the island as soon as the last German soldier were disarmed.<sup>36</sup> As it turned out later, these were but empty declarations. On the same day the Red Army disarmed German soldiers only to begin their evacuation on the following day. In order to do that all Bornholm boats were directed to Rønne for the purpose of transporting from

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<sup>31</sup> Doc. No. 139: *Telegram den 7. maj 1945 fra general Dewing, SHAEF mission to Denmark, til general Eisenhower, SHAEF FORWARD*, in: *ibid.*, p. 96; Doc. No. 148: *Telegram den 8. maj 1945 fra general Dewing, SHAEF mission to Denmark, til general Eisenhower, SHAEF FORWARD*, in: *ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>32</sup> Doc. No. 157: *Telegram den 8. maj 1945 fra Eisenhower, SHAEF FORWARD til Military Mission, Moscow*, in: *ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>33</sup> Doc. No.184: *Telegram den 10. maj 1945 fra Archer og Deane, Military Mission Moscow, til Eisenhower, SHAEF FORWARD, Combined Chiefs of Staff og British Chiefs of Staff*, in: *ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>34</sup> B. Jensen: *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>35</sup> *Bornholm i krig*...18.

<sup>36</sup> B. Jensen: *op. cit.*, p. 230.

there to Kołobrzeg (Kolberg) 5000 German soldiers on May 11, 3000 Germans on May 12, whereas on May 13 the first convoy to Rønne returned bringing ca. 1500–2000 Soviet soldiers, war materials, horses, straw, and flour. After eight days since the action had begun about 16,000 German soldiers and defectors were transported from the island. On the whole, 12,000 German prisoners of war, 4500 civilians and 119 persons of other nationalities were sent to Kołobrzeg (Kolberg). The convoys between the latter and Rønne continued, for the Russian wanted to transport their own soldiers and military equipment to the island. Thus, in July in Bornholm there appeared ca. 7000 Soviet soldiers, 400–500 horses, wagons, lighter cannons as well as the various pieces of furniture such as sofas, carpets, tables and several pianos.<sup>37</sup>

Several days after the island had been captured by the Soviet forces, that is, on May 19–20, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Christmas Møller together with three other cabinet members: Aksel Larsen, Knud Kristensen, and Hedtoft Hansen visited the island, yet no talks with the Soviet military authorities were initiated. The negotiations did not commence even when the Soviet commanding officer with a group of officers were invited to Copenhagen to celebrate the liberation of Denmark on June 1. This situation continued through the entire period of the Soviet occupation in the island. Except for the Soviet memorandum of July 25, 1945 expressing the expectations of the Danish government as regards covering all the occupation costs starting from May 1945 until March 1946, few documents were exchanged between Denmark and the USSR.

Throughout the entire period of the Soviet stay in the island the Danish government carried out a very cautious policy towards the Soviet Union, never protesting against the presence of the Red Army. Although all matters concerning the situation on the island came within the authority both of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the head of this department, yet, official contacts between ministers of foreign affairs of the two states were practically nonexistent. The majority of cases were resolved in Bornholm itself by a representative of the Red Army and the island's governor Paul Christian von Stemann. The governor was a man whose directness and openness did not match the MFA norms.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, problems were solved in the course of informal negotiations oftentimes

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<sup>37</sup> Doc. No. 301: *Direktøren for Dampskibsselskabet af 1866, Thorkil Lund, Rønne, til amtmand Stemann den 11 juni 1945*, in: *Bornholm mellem Øst og Vest ...*, p. 195.

<sup>38</sup> T.B. Olesen, P. Villaume: *Dansk Udenrigspolitik Historie*, Vol. 5: *I blokopdelingens tegn 1945–1972*, København 2005, p. 43.

maintained by excessive alcohol consumption. The Kremlin did not want to get involved in the talks on the occupation with the Danish government, while the latter acted as if the Bornholm question never existed. It even advised the Danish and Swedish presses not to comment on the matter which the Danish Parliament never discussed.<sup>39</sup>

The island's inhabitants did not like having been liberated by the Russian while the rest of Denmark – by the British troops. People were afraid, embittered and depressed. They feared that the Soviet army would never leave the island. According to the Danish MFA, the question of the island had to be treated very cautiously and during top level talks only. Such demeanour but intensified the insecurity of Bornholm inhabitants wondering whether the government was sufficiently active to end the Soviet presence in the island. Some were of an opinion that the rest of Denmark had already written Bornholm off. The gaffe which the “Danish liberation government” committed never mentioning the island on the occasion of Parliament opening on May 9, 1945 was a particularly bitter pill to swallow.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the government in Copenhagen received letters and appeals of Bornholm inhabitants demanding a more active and firm attitude towards the Russian.

Many cases of stealth, robbery or breaking into Danish houses by Russian soldiers occurred, particularly in the first stage of the occupation. The Soviet presence resulted in the increase in people's insecurity: they were afraid of staying home alone at night; women feared walking alone in the streets in the evenings. Russians happened to enter gardens or houses of the island's inhabitants without any permission so as to openly demand women's – oftentimes paid – sexual services.<sup>41</sup> Other decisions the “liberators” made were not open-handedly welcomed by Bornholm inhabitants, either. Phone and wire connections with Bornholm were disrupted on May 15 and even though they got restored after a couple of days, they turned out to be available solely to representatives of local and state powers. Also, the Soviet authorities withheld daily air connections between the rest of Denmark and the island. As in the case of telephone connections, the air traffic was reopened yet for the island's administration and mail only.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> B. Jensen: op. cit., p. 231.

<sup>40</sup> T.B. Olesen, P. Villaume: op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> Doc. No. 355: *Amtmand Stemann til Udenrigsministeriet den 27. august 1945*, in: *Bornholm mellem Øst og Vest ...*, p. 235.

<sup>42</sup> Doc. No. 218: *Telegram den 16. maj 1945 fra chargé d'affaires Rodney Gallop, København, til Foreign Office*, in: *ibid.*, p. 142.

At first Soviet soldiers were isolated from the island's inhabitants residing in primitive camps in Bornholm forests. Throughout the entire occupation the number of Soviet soldiers in Bornholm changed to amount to 7700 persons, including the female staff, at the peak period. Later on the soldiers were moved to wooden barracks built specifically for them. Bornholm and the sea around it turned out a sea district under the command of the Russian naval base in Swinemünde. In September big manoeuvres were held there during which all ports on the island were inspected. The military presence of the Danish in the island was almost symbolic at the time, despite the fact that Bornholm still constituted a Danish sea district with its own head of general staff.<sup>43</sup>

On July 25, 1945 the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs sent a memorandum to the Danish government, a document which was the only official record as regards the Bornholm question that the Russian and Danish parties exchanged. It read as follows: "In the early May of 1945 the Red Army entered Bornholm and liberated it from the German occupation. The island constitutes a part of Denmark and is temporarily occupied by the Red Army until Germany's military problems are solved. [...] The Red Army takes responsibility for the safety of this territory, while Denmark is to cover the maintenance costs for the Red Army and the navy until Germany solves the expenses related to the liberation of the territories it occupies."<sup>44</sup>

The Soviet authorities estimated the cost of the Red Army's monthly maintenance in the island for 2 mln Danish crowns and expected to be paid this sum. The Danish government did not take up any discussion on this subject and several days later the Danish Minister of Finance obliged the Danish National Bank to transferring 2 million crowns per month at the disposal of the Soviet forces in Bornholm.<sup>45</sup> All in all, Denmark paid 19 million crowns to the Red Army.<sup>46</sup>

The strategy of the Danish government, in particular its first Minister of Foreign Affairs after the Liberation Christmas Møller, was to evacuate as quickly as possible the British and American military forces from Denmark thus provoking a similar move on the part of the Russian. The majority of the British and all American troops left Denmark before November 1, 1945. The Danish government

<sup>43</sup> B. Jensen: op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>44</sup> Doc. No. 338: *Memorandum den 25. juli 1945 fra Sovjetunionens Udenrigskommissariat til det danske gesandtskab i Moskva*, in: *Bornholm mellem Øst og Vest ...*, pp. 227–228.

<sup>45</sup> Doc. No. 351: *Gesandt Døssing til Udenrigskommissariatet. Moskva, den 11 august 1945*, in: *ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>46</sup> T.B. Olesen, P. Villaume: op. cit., p. 46.

also intended London to discuss the question of Bornholm with Moscow, yet as early as in May 1945 the British powers stated that Denmark should talk with Moscow directly and on her own. In the autumn of 1945 Christmas Møller made several attempts to leave for Moscow so as to discuss the question of the occupied Danish island with the Soviet government. Stalin refused, however, to see him and the meeting never occurred. The official reason for this and all future refusals to see the Danish diplomats was the Soviet authorities' numerous obligations involving traveling. Such an avoidance of the contact with the Danish can only be explained as an inability on the part of the Soviet authorities to resolve about the future of Bornholm and an attempt to postpone such a decision.<sup>47</sup>

On July 10, 1945 the two-person committee for the Danish affairs presented to Molotov a plan of an agreement to be signed between Moscow and Copenhagen on the military bases in Bornholm, new regulations of the traffic in the Danish straits and the incorporation of Schleswig by Denmark. Molotov studied the project carefully but he did not take any actions. At the Potsdam conference the Bornholm question was not a point in the discussion neither of western superpowers, nor Moscow. Yet, the question recurred in December 1945 in association with Stalin's and Molotov's planned meeting with Ernest Bevin. Litvinov ordered Molotov to "play the Bornholm card" in the Kiel canal affair. This meant threatening the western superpowers with the reinforcement, in the form of fortifying Bornholm and Riga, of the Soviet security in the Baltic Sea if these superpowers refused to make the canal international.

Still, Molotov seemed to be more pessimistic than his colleague towards this idea. He did not demand either the Soviet participation in the control over the Danish straits, or making them international; neither did he demand making the Kiel canal international or mentioned Bornholm. He only said that by Stalin's order he wished to discuss the existing rules of controlling the Danish straits. Bevin assured that Great Britain had no intention of controlling the straits, either directly, or indirectly and considered the case closed. When, later on, Stalin returned to the question of navigation on and control over the Danish waters, Bevin retorted with a speech on the necessity to confirm the principles of free navigation for all nations. He added that no foreign military bases should exist in this area. Stalin

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<sup>47</sup> B. Jensen: op. cit., p. 232.



replied that he did not plan to establish any bases there. From that moment on Stalin gave up the Danish island.<sup>48</sup>

When, after several months of the Danish government passively waiting for the Soviet authorities' information on withdrawing their troops from Bornholm, the majority of the British army left Denmark as promised, the British pushed their new Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs Gustav Rasmussen to take some action. The events of September and December 1945 when the Norwegian and Czechoslovakian governments asked the Soviet army to leave their countries created an occasion for such action to occur. The British pushed on the Danish minister again in February 1946. Also Danish military men wanted their government to take up initiative and assured Moscow about the ability of the Danish military forces to take over the island's defense. Gustav Rasmussen mustered the courage and commenced an island talk with Andrey Vyshinsky in the course of a UN session held in London. However, the talk did not bring any concrete results then.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time a long-lasting correspondence exchange on the content of a Danish official note for the USSR government took place between the Copenhagen authorities and the Danish Ambassador to Moscow Thomas Døssing. The ambassador sent all sorts of insignificant messages to the Danish MFA which Gustav Rasmussen eventually considered. Døssing who was a huge sympathizer with the USSR convinced the Danish government in his reports that Soviet troops would leave Denmark soon after British and American armies had done it.<sup>50</sup> Eventually, on March 4, 1946 the Danish government sent a note to the Soviet government which was formulated with great care. The note read that the Danish military forces had been recreated and were capable of taking over the former Bornholm tasks of the American, British and Soviet armies performed in Denmark and Bornholm as well. It was also hoped that Moscow would agree with the Danish point of view.<sup>51</sup> On the following day Molotov talking to the Danish Ambassador Døssing conveyed this answer of the Soviet government: "If the Danish armed forces can take over Bornholm and institute its administration there without the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 234–235.

<sup>49</sup> Doc. No. 521: *Udenrigsminister Gustav Rasmussen til Kongen den 7. marts 1946*, in: *Bornholm mellem Øst og Vest ...*, p. 343.

<sup>50</sup> T.B. Olesen, P. Villaume: op. cit., pp. 43–44.

<sup>51</sup> Doc. No. 510: *Den danske note til udenrigskommissær Molotov, overrakt af gesandt Døssing til viceudenrigskommissær Vysjinskij den 4. marts 1946*, in: *Bornholm mellem Øst og Vest ...*, pp. 336–337.

participation of foreign powers and administrators, then the Soviet government withdraws its troops from the island handing it over to Denmark.”<sup>52</sup>

On March 8, 1946 the Danish government accepted the conditions proposed by the USSR.<sup>53</sup> Not even two weeks passed when the Soviet authorities ordered the Red Army to retreat from Bornholm thus ending the evacuation within one month at the latest.<sup>54</sup> The last Soviet ship with soldiers aboard it left Rønne on April 5, 1946 after a farewell celebration with the exchange of flowers and friendly words.<sup>55</sup>

As a matter of fact, the Danish never protested against the capturing of the island by the Russian, whereas the latter, in turn, did not make any demands towards the Danish government, neither any negotiations take place between Denmark and the USSR on the island's lot. Both parties acted as if the Soviet occupation had not been a problem in their mutual relations. All this suggests that, for the USSR, Bornholm was of no great value thus constituting no bargaining chip in its western superpowers tactics. Stalin accepted the situation in the Baltic Sea area. Moscow controlled the Baltic coastline up to Lübeck, a reason why Bornholm was of little importance to it. The Soviet troops left the island immediately after the Danish government had asked them about it. Still, Stalin's gesture had other consequences. The evacuation of the island improved the USSR's position in Scandinavian countries as well as it stiffened Denmark's attitude towards the American request of establishing a permanent base in Greenland thus putting the USA in a difficult situation. From that moment on, Americans had troubles with justifying their necessity to establish military bases in Denmark.

*Translated by Beata Zawadka*

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<sup>52</sup> Doc. No. 511: *Sovjetunionens Udenrigskommissariat. Referat af udenrigskommissær V.M. Molotovs samtale med gesandt Th. Døssing, tirsdag den 5. marts 1946*, in: *ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>53</sup> Doc. No. 529: *Note fra gesandt Døssing, Moskva, til udenrigskommissær V.M. Molotov den 8. marts 1946*, in: *ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>54</sup> Doc. No. 564: *Note den 16 marts 1946 fra udenrigskommissær Molotov til gesandt Døssing, Moskva*, in: *ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>55</sup> *Bornholm i krig ...*, p. 190.

## HISTORIA WYSPY BORNHOLM W LATACH 1940–1946

### Streszczenie

Artykuł ukazuje historię wyspy Bornholm w latach 1940–1946. Okres drugiej wojny światowej i kilkanaście miesięcy po jej zakończeniu stanowią jeden z najważniejszych momentów w historii tej wyspy. Jej mieszkańcy doświadczyli w tym czasie okupacji niemieckiej, radzieckiego wyzwolenia i okupacji. Na wyspie wojna trwała od 10 kwietnia 1940 roku, tj. od zajęcia jej przez oddziały niemieckie, do 5 kwietnia 1946 roku, kiedy z miasta Rønne odpłynął ostatni statek z żołnierzami Armii Czerwonej. W okresie okupacji niemieckiej rozwój wydarzeń na wyspie różnił się znacznie od tego, czego doświadczyła w tym czasie reszta Danii, Niemcy praktykowali tu bowiem łagodną formę okupacji, chociaż Bornholm stopniowo włączany był w niemieckie działania wojenne. Sytuacja odwróciła się w maju 1945 roku – gdy mieszkańcy reszty Danii świętowali odzyskanie wolności, na wyspę spadły radzieckie bomby. Artykuł wyjaśnia motywy działań Związku Radzieckiego oraz stanowisko rządu duńskiego wobec zaistniałej sytuacji. Sytuacja ta była tym bardziej zaskakująca, że Duńczycy w zasadzie nigdy nie protestowali przeciwko zajęciu wyspy przez Rosjan. Na końcu wyjaśnione zostały okoliczności wycofania się Armii Czerwonej z Bornholmu.

## THE HISTORY OF THE BORNHOLM ISLAND IN THE YEARS 1940–1946

### Summary

The article presents the history of the Bornholm Island in the years 1940–1946. WWII and a dozen or so months after it ended have constituted one of the most significant moments in this island's history. This is because at this time its inhabitants experienced both the German occupation and the Soviet liberation and subsequent occupation. In the island the war lasted from April 10, 1940, i.e. from its occupation by German units, to April 5, 1946 when the last ship carrying Red Army soldiers aboard sailed away from Rønne. During the German occupation the development of events on the island differed significantly from the parallel experience of the rest of Denmark, for in Bornholm the German exerted the "mild" version of the occupation even though the place gradually became a German war theatre, too. The situation changed in May 1945, the time when Soviet bombs were cast on the island while the rest of Denmark celebrated the regaining of liberty. The article explains the motifs behind these actions to have been undertaken

by the Soviet Union as well as the position of the Danish government towards this situation. The situation was the more surprising for, on the whole, the Danish never protested against the Soviet occupation of the island. The article ends in an explanation of the circumstances leading to the withdrawal of the Red Army from Bornholm.