

REVIEWS

DAS ARKTISCHE JAHR

(The arctic year).

By GOTTFRIED WEISS. Braunschweig: Georg Westermann Verlag, 1949. 7½ x 9½ inches; 163 pages; 37 plates and 41 text figures. D.M. 9.80.

A fairly complete account of the various German attempts to establish and maintain weather stations in north-east Greenland during the Second World War has been given by Arnold Court in *Arctic* (Vol. 2 (1949) pp. 108-17), and a Danish version of what happened in northeast Greenland between 1940 and 1945 has appeared in 'Det Grønlandske Selskabs Aarsskrift' for 1946 ('The Greenland Society Yearbook').

Two of the seven German attempts succeeded, and during the winter of 1942-3 a German weather station operated on Sabine Ø (74°40N.), and the following winter another was established at Shannon Ø (75°20N.). Both were discovered by members of the Danish East Greenland Patrol and eventually destroyed by U.S. forces, but in both cases the German personnel was successfully evacuated by air.

At the outbreak of the Second World War a couple of hundred Greenlanders and a few Danes and Norwegians became isolated in northeast Greenland. About 225 of these were at Scoresbysund. A small group of Danish trappers and hunters invested with "police" authority occupied the northernmost Danish outposts of Ella Ø and Eskimonæs, four Danish scientists were stationed at Mørkefjord, and finally, about one score of Danish and Norwegian trappers were scattered along the coast between Scoresbysund and Danmarks Havn. A few of the Danish trappers joined the Danish police force, while the remainder, and all the Norwegians, were evacuated to west Greenland. In 1941, under authority vested in the independent Danish Government of Greenland, the small east Greenland police force was

organized into the East Greenland Patrol, and given full military status. The force actually consisted of less than two dozen men and was equipped with rifles only. For transportation they depended on dog teams in winter and on small motor boats in summer. In addition to the radio station at Scoresbysund, there were transmitters at Ella Ø, Eskimonæs, and at Myggbukta, but the patrol had no portable radios. Vessels of the U.S. Coast Guard undertook the supply service in summer, but during the ten months of winter the patrol was entirely thrown on its own resources.

In 'The arctic year' Gottfried Weiss, who was the scientist in charge of meteorological work at the German Sabine Ø station, gives what appears to be a straightforward, well illustrated, and most readable account of the expedition which sailed from Tromsø in Norway on 22 August 1942, in the converted German steam trawler *Sachsen* of 284 gross tons. Before its departure a non-stop reconnaissance flight from Norway to northeast Greenland had been undertaken in order to select a suitable site for the weather station. Ice conditions were exceptional in 1942, and the *Sachsen* made the crossing without difficulty, anchoring in Hansa Bugt on Sabine Ø on August 27.

While the *Sachsen* was slowly steaming through the ice pack off Sabine Ø, the U.S.C.G.C. *Northland* was anchored in Gael Hamkes Bugt only 50 miles to the south; luck, however, was with the Germans, for an American aircraft from the *Northland* flew almost directly over the *Sachsen* without seeing her.

In Hansa Bugt the *Sachsen* put into winter quarters, but first her masts were taken out and the superstructure camouflaged. On shore two simple huts were set up, one to serve as weather station, the other as quarters for the 18-man party which, besides the commander, consisted of meteorologists, radio ope-

rators, the ship's doctor, and the 10-man crew of the *Sachsen*. None of them were professional soldiers and only the commander had had previous arctic experience.

The early part of the winter was uneventful and the experience of the party differed in few respects from that of similar expeditions who have wintered in the Arctic under comparable circumstances; the last chapters of the narrative, on the other hand, where the story of the discovery and the subsequent encounter, first with the Danish East Greenland Patrol and later with the United States bombers is told, is dramatic and full of human interest. In this encounter the Danes had the advantage of being quite at home in this vast uninhabited and inhospitable land; they were experienced hunters and travellers, but without training and experience for the new role into which circumstances had forced them which, at any moment, might require them to hunt or even kill fellow human beings instead of seal or polar bear. The Germans, too, were amateur soldiers and had obviously hoped to remain undetected; although much better armed than the Danes, they must have spent the winter in constant fear of detection and surprise attack.

In March 1943 a 3-man sledge detachment of the Danish Patrol returning from a routine patrol of the coast, discovered evidence in a hunting camp at Germania Havn, a few miles south of Hansa Bugt, of a nearby German weather station. Unknown to the Danes a 2-man German hunting party saw the patrol and, under cover of darkness, returned to their base to give the alarm. Several German parties at once set out to capture the patrol. The Danes, however, managed to escape but in doing so had to abandon their three dog teams and travelling gear. Covering the 60-mile distance on foot, and without food and sleeping bags, they reached Eskimonæs and reported their discovery. Meanwhile the Germans, who were quick to take advantage of the dog teams of which they had so unexpectedly come into possession, set out in force to capture

and destroy the Danish stations before the alarm could be given. In this they failed, but on the way they ambushed another Danish sledge detachment. One Dane was killed and the remaining two were captured together with their dogs. Not long after one Dane managed to escape and the other, while the main force of the Germans were enroute to Ella Ø, disarmed and captured the German commander, Hermann Ritter, who had stayed behind to guard the prisoner. The Dane, with his, perhaps, not unwilling prisoner, travelling by a different route, reached Scoresbysund.

On May 25 four American bombers from Iceland, under the command of Colonel Bernt Balchen, partly destroyed the German station but apparently failed to see the camouflaged *Sachsen*. On June 17, after scuttling their ship, the remainder of the Germans who had suffered no casualties in the bombing, were evacuated from Sabine Ø by a German "Condor" to Norway. The ship's doctor, who was out of the camp at the time, was subsequently found by a party from the *Northland* on July 23.

A. E. PORSILD

TERRE STÉRILE

By JEAN MICHÉA. *Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1949. 7½ x 5½ inches; 221 pages; illustrations, diagrams, and sketch-maps.*

INUK: au dos de la terre!

By ROGER BULLIARD, o.m.i. *Paris: Editions Saint-Germain, 1949. 8 x 5½ inches; 358 pages; illustrations, sketch-map, and folding map.*

APOUTSIK: le petit flocon de neige.

By PAUL-ÉMILE VICTOR. *Paris: Flammarion (Les albums du Père Castor), 1948. 8 x 10 inches; 32 pages; illustrations. 300 fr.*

Arctic literature has been recently enriched by three interesting books in French which should appeal to all those concerned with northern problems. These books are moreover highly recommended for students of geography and sociology in English-speaking universities who wish to practice French without making it an ordeal.