

The University Centre in Svalbard
Written exam SH-201 The History of Svalbard
Monday 4th of February 2019, hours: 14.00-17.00

Permitted aids: *none, except dictionary between English and mother tongue.*

*The exam is a 3-hour written test. It consists of two parts: Part I is a multiple-choice test of factual knowledge. **This sheet with answers to part I shall be handed in.** Part II (see below) is an essay part where you write extensively about one of two alternative subjects. You may answer in English, Norwegian, Swedish or Danish.*

Part I counts approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ and part II counts $\frac{2}{3}$ of the grade at the evaluation, but adjustment may take place. Both parts must be passed in order to pass the whole exam.

Part I: Multiple-choice test. Make only one cross for each question.

1.	How many ships took part in the Dutch expedition that discovered Svalbard in 1596?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
2.	A well-documented, involuntary wintering on Svalbard took place in 1630-1631 – by whom?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> British	<input type="checkbox"/> Russians	<input type="checkbox"/> Dutch
3.	When did the so-called “Recherche” expedition visit Svalbard?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1765-66	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1838-39	<input type="checkbox"/> 1882-83
4.	Who is associated with the polar airship expedition from Svalbard in 1909?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wellman	<input type="checkbox"/> Amundsen	<input type="checkbox"/> Nobile
5.	When was Longyearbyen established?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1905	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1906	<input type="checkbox"/> 1907
6.	How many states have signed the Svalbard Treaty?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ca. 40	<input type="checkbox"/> ca. 60	<input type="checkbox"/> ca. 80
7.	When did the Soviet company ‘Arktikugol’ open its coalmine in Barentsburg?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1923	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1932	<input type="checkbox"/> 1946
8.	A species was protected in 1952 – which one?	<input type="checkbox"/> Reindeer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Walrus	<input type="checkbox"/> Eider
9.	When did Svalbard Airport open?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1958	<input type="checkbox"/> 1965	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1975
10.	When was it decided to station the Sysselmann permanently in Longyearbyen all year?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1925	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1935	<input type="checkbox"/> 1945
11.	When was Store Norske Spitsbergen Kulkompani taken over by the state and nationalized?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1976	<input type="checkbox"/> 1989	<input type="checkbox"/> 2015
12.	When did coal mining in Sveagruva end?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1989	<input type="checkbox"/> 2005	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2016

Part II: Choose and answer one of the following questions:

A. Svalbard – an Arctic playground?

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries Svalbard was the arena for a number of non-scientific polar expeditions. Give an overview over the most prominent ones, including their motivation and results. Discuss to which degree they may be considered important in the history of Svalbard, and why.

Introduction

During the 19th century, and particularly in the second half, Svalbard became an increasingly popular goal for expeditions of various kinds. There was a growing interest among scientists to visit the archipelago and also a developing tourism. Tromsø became a central port for fitting out Arctic expeditions, supplying both logistics and expertise. Thus, Svalbard became better known to the general public and more easily attainable for visitors. This also attracted those who wanted to use the islands as a point of departure for more spectacular adventures – expeditions towards the North Pole. In this essay we will look more closely at some of these expeditions and discuss their potential historical significance.

Definitions and delimitations

In the following we will define ‘polar expeditions’ as ‘organized travels with the primary objective of reaching a high latitude, preferably the North Pole, using any kind of logistics’. We will limit ourselves to expeditions that used Svalbard as their point of departure, and focus on the period from ca. 1890 to 1930. The ones we will be dealing with are these (main nationality in brackets):

- 1894: Wellman (USA)
- 1896–97: Andrée (Sweden)
- 1907, 1909: Wellman (USA)
- 1925: Amundsen-Ellsworth (Norway/USA)
- 1926: Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile (Norway/USA/Italy); Byrd-Bennet (USA)
- 1928: Nobile (Italy)

Overview

In 1894, the American journalist Walter Wellman hired the Norwegian steel steamer “Ragnvald Jarl” and made an attempt to sail towards the Pole from the northern coast of Spitsbergen. The ship was wrecked in the ice at Sjuøyane, well below 81 degrees north, but the crew and expedition members were all saved.

In 1896, the Swedish engineer Salomon August Andrée planned to fly a hydrogen balloon from Danskøya to the Pole and established a base camp at Virgohamna. However, the wind conditions did not allow a lift-off that season, so he returned in the summer of 1897. On the 11th of July he lifted off together with Nils Strindberg and Knut Fraenkel in the balloon “Örnen”. They crashed a few days later in the ice at 82°56’ and spent more than two months trying to go back over the ice to Svalbard. They eventually ended up on the remote Kvitøya in October, where they all died. The remains of the expedition were discovered in 1930.

Wellman came back to Svalbard in 1907, this time with airship “America”, and stationed in Virgohamna as Andrée had done. The first flight failed. The underpowered airship was blown across Smeerenburgfjorden and crashed on a glacier. Wellman ordered a larger, more powerful airship to be built and returned to make a second attempt in 1909. This time the flight started well, but having lost ballast lines and released gas, the expedition decided to break off a little north of Spitsbergen and was towed back to Virgohamna.

Aircraft technology was developing rapidly in the early 20th century. In 1925, Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen and his partner Lincoln Ellsworth of the US came to Ny-Ålesund with two fixed-wing flying boats, “N24” and “N25”, and a crew of four. They took off from Kongsfjorden and headed north, but had to make an emergency landing in drifting ice at 88°. Spending a few weeks in the ice preparing a take-off strip, they finally managed to fly back in one plane to Nordaustlandet, where they were salvaged by a Norwegian sealer.

Amundsen and Ellsworth came back to Ny-Ålesund in 1926, this time with the airship “Norge” – constructed and flown by the Italian officer Umberto Nobile. The plan was to make a transpolar flight from Svalbard to America, and this they succeed in doing, although the airship crashed near Teller, Alaska. This was indeed the first transpolar expedition, but possibly not the first to reach the North Pole. A few days earlier than the departure of “Norge” the Americans Richard Byrd and Floyd Bennet flew a fixed-wing airplane from Ny-Ålesund, returned after more than 15 hours and claimed to have reached the pole. This was accepted as a “first” at the time, but has later been brought in doubt.

Nobile and Amundsen fell out after the 1926 expedition, and the former decided to make an all-Italian flight. In 1928 Nobile flew his airship “Italia” from Rome to Ny-Ålesund. From

here he made two long flights to Greenland and Franz Josef Land before he departed for the North Pole with his crew. They reached the Pole, but crashed in the ice on the way back. A huge international rescue operation was set in motion. Nobile himself and a few of his crew members were saved, eleven others disappeared. This ended the era of spectacular polar expeditions from Svalbard.

Discussion

How important are these expeditions in the history of Svalbard? That depends on one's perspective and interests. In the long course of four centuries with human activity on Svalbard, this handful of expeditions may seem like mere episodes – curious, exiting, but hardly very significant. They had very little and not lasting impact on local development and economy. They were more like international sports events that incidentally took place on or involved Svalbard. From a scientific point of view they yielded few important results or knowledge that had not been already acquired, although the flights of Amundsen, Nobile and Bird into the central Arctic Ocean confirmed Nansen's finds from the Fram-expedition 1893-1896 of no land or continent.

On the other hand, the polar expeditions roused enthusiasm for and interest in exploration of the Arctic in general. This may have made it easier for scientific actors to get funding for polar research in the long run. It also showed that Svalbard could offer infrastructure (e.g. Ny-Ålesund) and conditions favourable for human activity, be it research or industry. Tourism was certainly stimulated by the polar expeditions. Today, they are an important part of the narrative that tourist companies and guides like to convey to their guests. Thus, the polar expeditions still inspire (and amuse) travellers to Svalbard and the Arctic.

A possible conclusion might be that even if the polar expeditions themselves were not very significant in the long history of Svalbard, that same history would be poorer without them.

B. Svalbard during and after the Second World War

Outline the main events on Svalbard during the Second World War. Discuss how and why the archipelago was drawn into the conflict and what role it played during the war. Also, discuss how the war may have affected the political and strategic interests in the area after 1945, particularly the relations between Norway and Russia.

Introduction

In the late 1930s both Russians and Norwegians mined coal on Svalbard. The Soviet mines of Barentsburg and Grumant were in operation, Pyramidene was under development, and Store Norske produced in Longyearbyen. The coalmines in Ny-Ålesund had been closed in 1929, but there were plans to start new mining as the war broke out in Europe in 1939. There were also a handful of hunters and trappers present on the islands.

How and why was this peaceful corner of the world drawn into the Great War? What happened to the local population, and what were the short and long-term consequences of war on Svalbard? Did Svalbard's legal and geopolitical status change during and after the war? In the following we shall try and answer these questions.

Short outline of events

Mainland Norway was occupied by German forces in spring 1940 and the Norwegian king and cabinet fled to England in early June. However, the Germans did not send troops to Svalbard and the Russian and Norwegian coal production continued during the winter 1940/1941. Coal was, of course, a strategic resource in times of war, for civilian as well as

military purposes. Only once, when there was a fire in a mine in Longyearbyen, did German military airplanes come to Svalbard, bringing fire-extinguishing equipment. For the moment, Svalbard was not part of the war theatre.

This changed when Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, and the Soviets became allied to the Western powers. The Northern Atlantic and Barents Sea became strategically important, primarily because of the shipping convoys from USA and Britain to Northern Russia. The Soviets needed the supplies to keep up the Northern front, and the Germans naturally wanted to stop the convoys. Thus, there was a lot of military activity in the northern seas and airspace from the summer of 1941.

The British, not informing the Norwegian exile government in London, sent a fleet unit of four ships to Svalbard in July-August to do a reconnaissance. This was, in fact, a clear breach of the Svalbard Treaty. Moreover, they left behind a Norwegian officer and a soldier who effectively took over control in Longyearbyen, replacing the Sysselmann. Based on this expedition it was decided in London among the allies that Svalbard be evacuated. This happened in the period from 25 August to 3 September. Some 1900 Soviet citizens were brought to Arkhangelsk, nearly 800 Norwegians to the UK – without the Germans' finding out.

A few days later, German airplanes flew over Isfjorden and discovered that the settlements had been evacuated, the coal deposits put on fire and vital infrastructure destroyed. They soon established a meteorological station near Longyearbyen. This was later abandoned, but both the German Navy and Airforce established a number of met-stations on Svalbard, which were operated during the war, some manned, others automatic. They were serviced and supplied mainly by submarines. Weather forecasts were vital for military operations in the north, and hence this period has been called "the weather war" on Svalbard.

In 1942 Norwegian authorities, in understanding with British military, decided to send an expedition force to re-occupy Svalbard, the so-called "Fritham" expedition. Their two small ships, "Isbjørn" and "Selis", were spotted and attacked by German warplanes while they were entering Grønfjorden. Fourteen people were killed, but from this time and through the war a Norwegian garrison existed on Svalbard, partly in Barentsburg, partly in Longyearbyen. They were only rarely in battle with German forces, airplanes and submarines. The great exception is the combat that took place in September 1943, when a German fleet unit headed by the battleships "Tirpitz" and "Scharnhorst" attacked the settlements in Isfjorden. Barentsburg, Grumant and Longyearbyen were nearly completely destroyed. Nine Norwegian soldiers were killed and 41 taken prisoner. This was by far the most serious incident on Svalbard during the whole war.

As late as 1944 Sveagruva was set afire by a German submarine, but when Norway was liberated in May 1945, the war on Svalbard was over as well.

Discussion

Use of Svalbard for military purposes is an obvious breach of the Svalbard Treaty, Article 9. The direct cause to Svalbard being dragged into the war was the German attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. This resulted in the USSR becoming an allied and the need to keep up the supply line between Western Europe and Northern Russia. Hence, the Barents Sea became a strategic area for the belligerent parties, and Svalbard was at northern end of the "strait" all the ships had to pass through. Being able to get meteorological and other intelligence from the area was of vital significance for both parties.

The strategic location of Svalbard was realized very much by the Soviet Union, who foresaw that in the future it would be necessary to secure this area. In November 1944, the Soviet foreign minister Molotov demanded in a meeting in Moscow with his Norwegian colleague, Lie, that Bjørnøya be “returned” to the Russians and that Svalbard should be shared between Norway and the Soviet Union. It meant effectively putting the Treaty out of force. This situation is what has been termed “the Svalbard Crisis”. The Norwegian exile government did start a process of revising the Treaty during the last phase of the war, but when Stortinget (the Norwegian parliament) was convened after the war, the process was stopped. The Soviets did not pursue the matter either.

However, this situation put its mark on post-war relations during the Cold War. Norway became a NATO member in 1949 and two years later Svalbard was included in NATO’s defence area, against severe Soviet protests. There was mutual suspicion as to what plans the two sides might have for the area. The Soviets were wary of any signs that Norway might allow foreign military presence on the islands. Norway on her side stuck to a low-profile policy, carefully observing the Treaty and avoiding measures that might provoke the Soviet Union unnecessarily. This policy was successful, in the sense that there were few serious confrontations over Svalbard during the Cold War, with the Hopen accident in 1978 as one notable exception.

In conclusion, we can say that the Second World War thoroughly changed Svalbard’s geopolitical status. Not only was the Treaty temporarily ignored during the war, but the area became strategically important as a border zone between the Eastern and Western blocks and a potential military front. Norway’s membership in NATO after the war was of great concern to the Soviet Union, and this was a strain on the bilateral relations. However, it is fair to say that the local relations on Svalbard remained good during the Cold War and might be characterized as ‘peaceful co-existence’.

SH-201 Guideline for examiners

Grade	Part I (ca. 33%)	Part II (ca. 66%)
A	12 points (100%)	Very good overview over history and main lines of development, correct and relevant facts. Few mistakes. Critical and independent discussion of causal relations and contexts. Extensive, complete, and well-structured answer.
B	10-11 points (83-93%)	Good overview over history and main lines of development, generally correct facts. Relevant discussion of causal relations and contexts, with a reasonable level of independence. Complete, well-structured answer.
C	8-9 points (67-75%)	Adequate overview over history and main lines of development. A few factual mistakes are tolerated, if not grave. Good attempts at discussion of the central questions, but not necessarily a high level of independent interpretation. Orderly answer.
D	6-7 points (50-58%)	Knows the main lines and the most significant historical facts. May contain some mistakes. Some attempts at discussion of the main questions are expected, but not a high level of independent interpretation.
E	4-5 points (33-42%)	Lacks main lines and important elements or contains several grave mistakes. Inadequate discussion. Short, but does answer the main questions. A minimum of factual knowledge about the topic is required.
F (Fail)	0-3 points (0-25%)	Does not answer the questions. Lacks main lines of development or contains many grave mistakes. No discussion.

Part I accounts for ca. 1/3 of the average grade, Part II for ca. 2/3. Adjustments may be made to make the average grade fair and representative of the effort. Both parts must be passed, i.e. receive E or better. Grade F on one part means average F = fail. In calculation, A=5, B=4 and so on, using standard rules of rounding decimals. The table on the right shows all possible combinations of Part I and II grades prior to adjustment.

		Part II					
		A	B	C	D	E	F
Part I	A	A	B	B	C	D	F
	B	A	B	C	C	D	F
	C	B	B	C	D	D	F
	D	B	C	C	D	E	F
	E	B	C	D	D	E	F
	F	F	F	F	F	F	F