



The Liberation of Northern Norway, 1944–1945

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BOOK REVIEW

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The liberation of the Arctic area from the German invaders, known in Russian historiography as the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation, is considered by some to be one of the 50 most important strategic operations of the Second World War. It was a part of the expulsion of the *Wehrmacht* from the territory of the USSR and affected the balance of power in Europe, particularly in its Northern areas. The study reviewed here focuses on the history of the liberation of Northern Norway by Soviet troops in 1944 and their presence in the Norwegian territory until the autumn of 1945. This book is based on documents from the military archives of Russia and Norway and interviews with participants of the events.

The book presents a comprehensive overview of the historiography on the liberation of Northern Norway. Based on the documents from the military archives, it also reconstructs the day-by-day chronology of the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation, including both the Navy (Operation *West*) and Air Force operations, which assisted the offensive of the 14th army of the Karelian Front. The authors point out that the liberation of Northern Norway was based on the Norwegian-Soviet Agreement of 16 May 1944.

The primary sources used for this research consist of a wide range of historical documents, memoirs, and interviews. Most of the archive materials have never been published before. The key archive documents are published in full in the book. Among them are the report by the Northern Fleet on Operation *West*, the report on the operation by the Air Force of the Northern Fleet, information about the deployment of Soviet troops in Norway and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the territory of Norway on 24 September 1945, and also the day-to-day diary report of the 14th Army of the Karelian Front.

Documents that were declassified by the Norwegian State Archive (Riksarkivet) in connection with the 70th anniversary of Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation are published in this book for the first time as well. Among them is the agreement between the Royal Norwegian and the Soviet governments about the cooperation between the armed forces of two countries during the liberation of Norway. The book also has precise information about German and Soviet Air Force losses during the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation, as well as detailed reports dealing with the deployment of Soviet troops on Norwegian soil after the liberation. Maps of the area of operations during this offensive are also included.

The book contains excerpts and extracts from memoirs of planners and participants in the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation, both of Red Army high commanders, as well as ordinary soldiers and officers. Memorable historical episodes are illustrated by excerpts from interviews with war veterans from Norway and Russia, including soldiers of ski battalions and representatives of small ethnic groups. These interviews were collected by the authors during numerous expeditions between 1989 and 1999. The authors interviewed members of the Norwegian resistance, soldiers of ski battalions of the Red Army, and a number of representatives of the indigenous peoples of the North (Saami, Nenets, Komi, and some Hanti-Mansi). The book also contains previously unpublished photographs from German, Norwegian, and Russian archives.

As such, the authors made a significant contribution to the study of the history of international relations in the High North during World War II and its aftermath. The book includes the authors' hypotheses about the periodization of the liberation of Norway, the division of spheres of influence in the Arctic, and the reasons for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Norway in September 1945. In particular, the text contains information about the beginning of the liberation of Norway. The authors show that the liberation of Norway proper in fact started in May/June 1942, when a British and Norwegian force liberated Svalbard (Spitsbergen), which, under the Norwegian Constitution, is a part of Norway. This was necessary to protect Lend-Lease convoy traffic to the Soviet Union. The first part of Mainland Norway was liberated by Soviet forces in October 1944, when they occupied the eastern part of the Province of Finnmark.

The authors deal with the place of Norway in the post-war period. Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin met in October 1944 in the presence of the American envoy A. Harriman in Moscow and signed the so-called Percentage Agreement, which established the spheres of influence in Europe. According to the authors, Norway functioned as a 'bargaining chip' during these negotiations. This was because Soviet forces by then already were approaching the Norwegian border, had even crossed it at some spots, and were soon to occupy the whole of Eastern Finnmark. These Soviet troops stayed in Norway until the end of September 1945. This was largely due to talks about the division of the spheres of influence in both the West and the East. Only after the spheres of influence in Europe were finalized at the London Conference of the Council of Foreign Ministers, did the Soviet leadership give up its ambitious plans in the Arctic, including the occupation of Northern Norway and the establishing of military bases in both Tromsø and other sites, and withdrew its troops from Northern Norway on 25 September 1945.

This study includes a chapter about problems connected with the demarcation of the borderline from the 16th century (the time of Ivan The Terrible) until the beginning of the 1950s. The authors answer questions connected to the reasons for the creation of a demilitarized zone in the Province of Finnmark, east of the North Cape/Nordkapp after WWII. According to the authors, additional agreements connected with the withdrawal of the aforementioned Soviet troops obliged Norway to refrain from deployment of allied troops along its Soviet border, border guard troops included. A so-called Norwegian self-imposed ban on all Allied air traffic east of the Northcape/Nordkapp was a part of this. These agreements are still kept classified on both sides, as tensions persisted until in the Spring 1996 a protocol was signed between Norway and Russia (by the then Russian Federation's Minister of Defense Pavel Gratchov), which again allowed the presence of allied troops and allied air traffic in Eastern Finnmark.

In other words, the research published in this book outlines the international significance of the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation and its influence on both international relations in post-war Europe and the Allied presence in Northern Norway. The authors present changes in the interpretation of these events seen from the perspective of both the West and the East. The geopolitical situation today in this area is presented in this book as well. Important speeches during 60- and 70-year jubilees at Kirkenes are printed in full and covered with photographic documentation. In October 2019, the 75-year jubilee included the participation of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov, Minister of Defense Soigu, and Contre-admiral Moisejev of the Northern Fleet of Russia. From the Norwegian side, representation was at the same level and included King Harald of Norway. The Norwegian Ministry of Defense was officially in charge of this ceremony, and an international conference took place in Kirkenes on this occasion.

This book is published in two languages in the same volume — in Russian and Norwegian. It is recommended reading for study at the Moscow Institute of International Relations (Department of Scandinavian Studies) and obligatory reading for diplomat education in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID).

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