

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 24, 2016

(Somewhat Repetitive from March 10, 2014)

Norway in my Lifetime: I had always wanted to visit Norway. Maybe it was because I marveled at people who could survive in such far-northern latitudes. Maybe it was the breathtaking scenery in the fjords or the Land of the Midnight Sun. In any event, Ruth and I went to Norway in 1990 and booked passage on a tiny coastal steamer that made a six-day trip from Bergen to Kirkenes on the Arctic Sea. We were in Norway from July 20 to 30, a month later than their longest days.

I remembered when Norway was in the News in the spring of 1940, when Hitler's Blitzkrieg forces sailed up the Oslofjord and quickly occupied Norway's capital, after pushing to capture Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark and isolate British forces against the North Sea at Dunkerque as the Maginot Line collapsed and France was about to fall. A Norwegian traitor named Vidkun Quisling passed secrets to the Nazis and became the hated ruler of his occupied country. From then on, the name "Quisling" became synonymous with "traitor," as had Benedict Arnold's. Another Nazi penetration of Norway was at Narvik, north of the Arctic Circle, where a rail line ran from there to the Swedish coal fields.

I liked the Norwegian people, partly because they loved Americans. Several told me they thought they would be enslaved forever until they heard about Pearl Harbor and the United States entering the war. Although it took three more long years, starting in 1942, they knew that eventually they would have a free country again. I also liked Norway because its largest cities reminded me of American cities of the 1930s, with no air conditioning, open windows, trolley cars, and lots of neon lights.

Norway is a very poor country with less than five million people, but they don't know they are poor. They work hard, and they appear to be very happy. They still have a king and a royal family but with much less pomp and circumstance than in Britain. The Royal Palace in Oslo looks like a miniature Buckingham Palace but with no fences or guards. We passed the Royal family's summer home outside the city. It appeared to be a country farmhouse with no gate or guards. When King Olav V was asked why he didn't have body guards, he replied, "I do have, five million of them" (the population of Norway). Olav died the winter after our visit.

When I was a travel agent, the Cunard Line and sometimes others operated an annual "North Cape Cruise" from New York toward the end of June. The advertising featured the Land of the Midnight Sun. Unfortunately, the weather was frequently damp, cold, and cloudy around the North Cape of Norway. Seldom did passengers get off the ship or even have a good view of the Cape. There were, however, several other ports visited before the cruise returned to New York.

In 1990, our little coastal steamer, along with 13 others (a daily departure from Bergen), made a 12-day round-trip from Bergen up the Norwegian coast, over to the Lofoten Islands and then through the channel to the Arctic Sea. The ship called at 30 ports in six days in each direction, many of them between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. In July, it didn't matter as it was not dark anyway. We didn't see the midnight sun as it was cloudy, but it never got dark on two of our nights. The North Cape itself is on an island, and a navigable passage to the south connects the Norwegian Sea (part of the Atlantic) with the Arctic Sea. We got off our ship at a port on this passage and were taken by bus across the island to the Cape. Reindeer were everywhere, as they swim annually from the mainland to graze for two months or so each summer. An enterprising Laplander came on our ship that night and prepared reindeer stew for the passengers. It was very good, tasting like beef stroganoff. The Cape Museum, carved out of solid rock, has about 100,000 visitors each year (or it did in 1990). At a latitude of 71 degrees north, it faces the North Pole, 1,350 miles away, from about 600 feet above the sea below.

Like ourselves, most passengers from foreign places took the tiny boat only one way and then flew back to civilization. We disembarked at Kirkenes, still in Norway east of the North Cape, and about 10 miles from the

Russian border. We took SAS flights back to Oslo, changing at Tromso, which is the largest city and features the only university in the world north of the Arctic Circle.