

Ejnar Mikkelsen

(1880-1971)

The grand old man of Danish and international arctic exploration is dead.

Miki, as he was known among friends, was a sailor, explorer, and author. Strangely enough he also became a government official.

He went to sea at fourteen and had just received his captain's certification when he became a member of the Danish Expedition to East Greenland, 1900. From 1901 to 1902 he was cartographer to the Baldwin-Ziegler Expedition to arctic America; from 1906 to 1908 he was leader of the Anglo-American Polar Expedition to the Beaufort Sea and from 1909 to 1912 he led the "Alabama" Expedition to Northeast Greenland in search of the bodies and papers of Mylius-Erichsen and Hagen who perished during the "Danmark Expedition".

During his first expedition he became interested in the well-being of the Angmagssalik Eskimos; during the last he realized the tremendous hunting possibilities for Greenlanders in Central East Greenland. He became the strongest advocate for establishing a settlement within that area, preferably in Scoresbysund. At every opportunity he urged and pleaded with the administration for this — but in vain. National feelings also became involved when a treaty giving special rights to Norwegian hunters in East Greenland was ratified. Miki used strong argumentation and hard words when presenting his ideas and feelings while the administration tried to evade the precarious question. Miki might have been respected in governmental circles but certainly he was not very well liked. Fortunately he did not care and characteristically he carried out his ideas by soliciting funds from private sources which enabled him to head the expedition that founded the Scoresbysund colony in 1924. In 1925 he headed a fishing research cruise in West Greenland waters. In 1926 and 1932 he again explored in East Greenland. When the Norwegian government in 1931 occupied

parts of East Greenland he established the Scoresbysund committee and was its president until 1967.

When the government finally recognized him and his ideas he became a member of the Danish delegation to the International Court in The Hague in 1932 in the case of Denmark versus Norway, and was appointed Inspector of East Greenland in 1933, a position he held until 1950. During and after these years Miki frequently visited East Greenland where the population loved him and made him an honorary citizen in 1964. Denmark, the University of Copenhagen, and learned societies throughout the world bestowed great honours upon him. In his own opinion the greatest of them all came from a big-hunter in Scoresbysund who told Miki on one of his last visits: "Miki, now you are old and soon you will die, but don't worry. Send your wife up here, and I will take good care of her".

Miki's interest in Greenland and the Arctic, paired with a tremendous vitality, led to the revival of the Greenland Society whose president he was from 1933 to 1955, and honorary president from 1956. He also solicited funds for establishing the Danish Arctic Institute where he served on the board from 1954 to 1963. During World War II he was an advisor on Greenland to the Danish Embassy in Washington D.C. He was a Charter Associate and a Fellow of The Arctic Institute of North America, a Governor (1949-54) and finally an honorary Associate from 1957.

He wrote a number of books about his expeditions, works on Greenland and Eskimo life and a five-volume autobiography.

In spite of all his travel and publicity, his well-written books, and other great achievements, and the numerous distinguished honours he received, Miki was a humble man with the deepest respect for learning, science, scientists, and the true values of life. His humility made him a great and strong personality who will be remembered and honoured not only in our circle, but by all who knew him.

Dan Laursen

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