

The Arctic—Friend or Foe?—No. 4

3 Islands Control Defenses—Reds Hold One

Russ Keeping, U. S.
Outside Iron Curtain

Across the top of the world, Russia and the United States face each other. If war came, the Arctic might be the first battleground. To learn about the military situation there the Scripps-Howard Newspapers sent Jim Lucas to the Far North to see the problems firsthand. This is the fourth of his reports.

By JIM G. LUCAS

Staff Writer
Washington, Oct. 12—Three northern islands—Spitsbergen, Bornholm and Iceland—form a strategic triangle which dominates the North Atlantic and much of the Polar front. Controlled by an unfriendly power, they could be a real threat to the security of the United States. For the time being, at least, they are controlled by three of the world's neutrals—Spitsbergen by Norway, Bornholm by Denmark and Iceland, a free republic.

Nevertheless, the threat is real. Russia has a foothold on one—Spitsbergen. She has had troops on another—Bornholm—and her maneuvers over that island prompted Danish protest last year. She was instrumental in forcing the United States out of a third—Iceland—where we maintained bases in World War II.

UNCLE SAM'S strategists are concerned. A glance at the map shows why. Spitsbergen, on a direct line, is 3500 miles from Pennsylvania and much of our thickly populated, industrial Eastern seaboard. Iceland is 2810 miles from New York and 2006 miles from Maine. Bornholm completes the triangle. The Soviets have owned coal mines in the Spitsbergen archipelago for several years. During the war, the Germans took them over, but Allied bombing denied the Nazis most of the output. Since the war's end, the Russians have reclaimed their mines and resumed operations.

Just what the Russians are doing on Spitsbergen is uncertain. A Swedish newspaper reports that "Russian infiltration in Spitsbergen is intensifying and an Iron Curtain has been lowered over the entire White Sea area."

The Stockholm Tidningen continues, "The Russians are so secretive about their activities that Norwegians working in neighboring Norwegian-owned mines do not know how many Russians are employed, or the output." The newspaper said the Norwegians were worried about their seal fisheries because the Russians tend increasingly to keep Norwegian sealers out of what Moscow considers Russian waters, using gunboats from their coast guard cutters and shore batteries.

Reliable sources say the Russians have 1500 to 2000 nationals on Spitsbergen. That estimate probably is conservative.

THE RUSSIANS have moved in quantities of earth-moving machinery. One source says for mining. But, it is believed, it will be useful in constructing bridges. Russia has played her cards well in this area. Her first move was to get the United States out of Iceland. The Soviets had occupied Bornholm in May, 1945, when the German garrison refused to surrender. They agreed to get out in March, 1946.

The Russians used their evacuation of Bornholm as an argument to force us out of Iceland. On Mar. 21, 1946, Henry A. Wallace, then Secretary of Commerce, said we should reciprocate and get out of Iceland now that Russia was out of Bornholm.

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"The only interpretation the Russians can place on continued occupancy of Iceland bases by American troops is that it is aimed at them," Mr. Wallace said. Earlier, in September, 1945, the United States asked Iceland's permission to retain naval and air bases in that country as a contribution to the United Nations. They were mostly small installations we had built during the war. Great Britain and Russia were notified in advance. Russia, in what was considered a counter move, hinted she might ask for Spitsbergen bases, similarly in the interest of the United Nations.

We withdrew our request and, on Sept. 20, 1946, withdrew our remaining 200 men from Iceland. Immediately, Russia put pressure on Norway for full control of Spitsbergen. The Soviet de-

mands were severe, particularly geographically, and has been a financial burden. All Scandinavia, however, is traditionally afraid of the Russians. Norway does not want to be drawn into a tug-of-war between the East and West, and has never taken a firm stand against Soviet infiltration.

Norway was given sovereignty over Spitsbergen by a treaty signed in Paris in 1920. She took possession in 1925, ending 50 years of dispute between Norway, Russia and Sweden. Russia ratified the pact in 1935.

NORWAY'S PARLIAMENT rejected the Russian demands in March, 1947. Apparently, however, the Russians have gone ahead with their plans and have extended their hold behind the Iron Curtain thrown around their coal mines on Spitsbergen.

Actually, Spitsbergen means little to Norway, economically or

politically. It is a mere island.

Next: How Well Do We Know the North?

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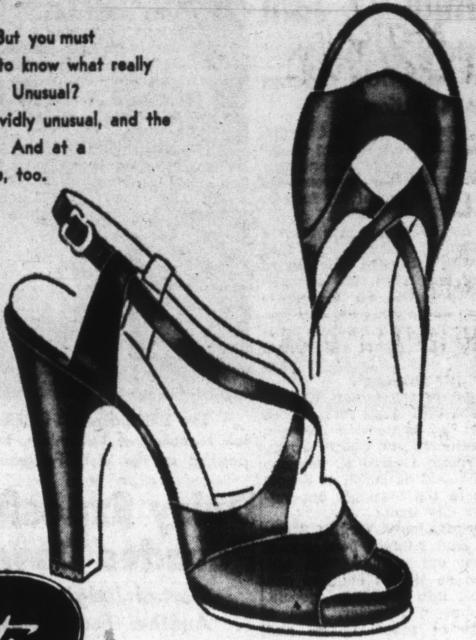
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B. ROUNDED NECKLINE COAT

DRESS. 11-Button closing. 2 Roomy pockets. Separate belt. RED, BLUE, GREEN. 14 1/2 to 26 1/2.

C. TAILORED CHECK FLY FRONT

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