Dancing oranges instead of bombs

by Marek Błuś

The newest postal stamp book of the Greenlandic Tusass is the smallest, thinnest, and most modest information-wise of the four such publications released to date by the northernmost post office (known formerly as TELE-POST). Regretfully, *Greenland During the Second World War* can't hold a candle to the previous editions, the quality of which has set the bar high.



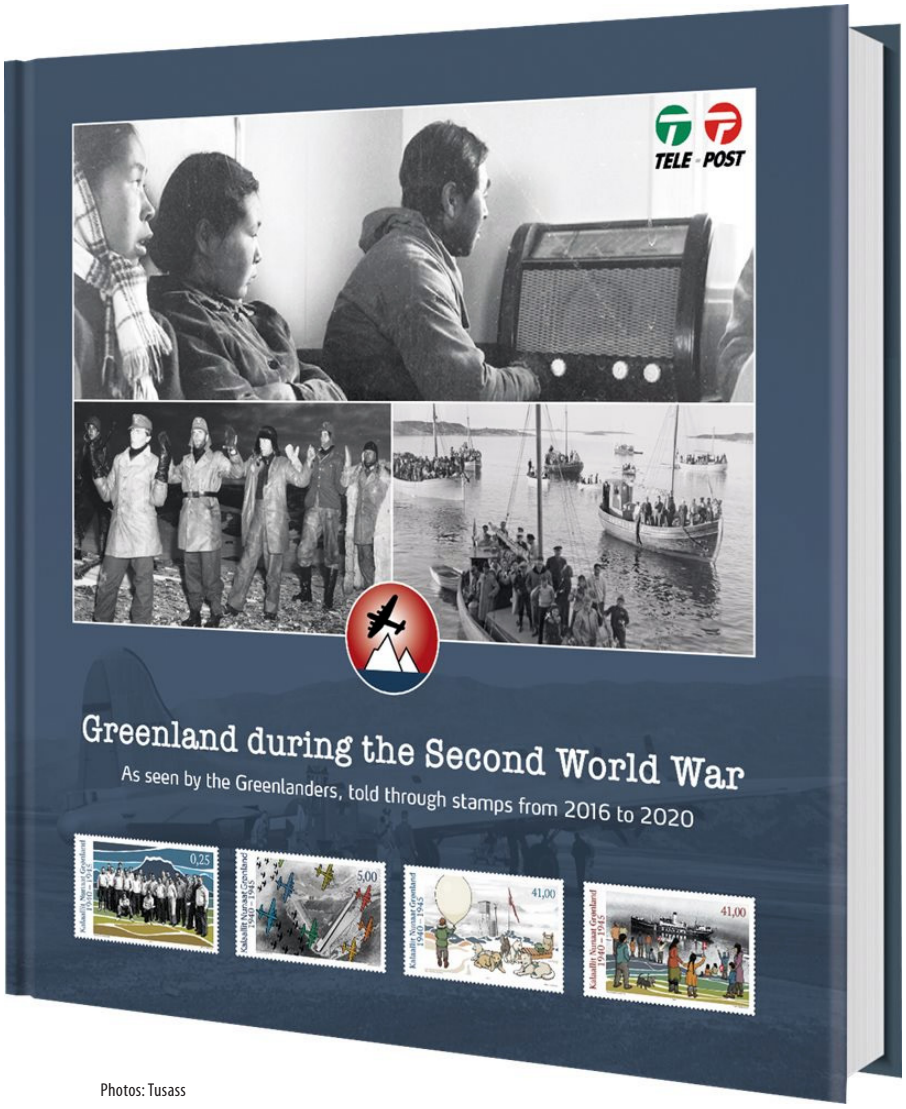
The first book, Ships in *Greenlandic Waters Over 1000 Years*, published in 2004, came in two volumes, comprising a condensed yet comprehensive essay about navigating to, from, and around Greenland. We had to wait an entire decade for the second publication: *Twelve Greenland Expeditions 1818-1978* (subtitled *Seen through stamps issued 2003-2014*), which included exploration stories. The following Greenland's *Civil Aviation History 1960-2015* was a complete encyclopaedia on all aircraft classes used by Greenland companies – depicted using 2016-issued stamps.

All of them are stuffed with stamps: the first has 16 with ships, the second – 12 souvenir sheets with portraits of explorers, their vehicles, and polar landscapes, and the third – 13 stamps presenting aircraft. It is worth emphasizing that all three books are richly illustrated with black & white and colour photos, and even with works of fine art. The artist Martin Mörck – who created all attached stamps and souvenir sheets both as engraver and designer (co-designer in case of some sheets) – binds the editions together.

The latest set, with a subtitle *Seen through the eyes of Greenlanders*, takes ten stamps from 2016-2020 to tell us about political challenges and social changes the island nation had to deal with after it was cut off from its metropolis and only trade partner, Denmark, which went under Nazi occupation in 1940. As a result, Greenland turned its whole economic attention to the US and Canada, opening Greenlanders' eyes to the world, until then shut close by the Danish government's policy. Before 1940, Copenhagen was convinced that the indigenous people of Greenland and their culture would be better off staying isolated. While WWII brought hardships and shortages, Greenlanders got the opportunity to taste oranges for the first time ever, as we can learn from the *New goods* DKK36.50 stamp. That said, the most surprising stamp (DKK 20.50's *Catalogue goods)* shows two couples dancing to music from a gramophone. The book quotes a Danish official according to whom catalogues from the American mail order store Sears "influenced the development of Greenland's society more than the complete writings of Karl Marx."

Some stamps are covered quite decently, like *Cryolite* (DKK 36.50)





Photos: Tusass



in the *Cryolite and foreign trade* chapter. In contrast, others require referencing additional sources to fully understand a given topic, filling in the gaps and understatements. For instance, specific questions arise when looking at the *New goods* stamp, such as – were oranges available throughout the war or maybe till December 1941 only when the US entered the conflict? Were they commonly available or rationed? By the way, which goods were rationed and for how long? From the perspective of continental Europe, WWII wasn't precisely about orange imports…

Greenland During the Second World War is also poorly illustrated. It contains mere 17 photos spread across 49 pages. For comparison, the third book had 49 on 57 pages. Then again, it is the first publication in this series that has enlarged reproductions of all depicted stamps, each with a separate page. If you love Mörck's art – this time integrated into a design by Naja Rosing-Asvid – you will be most pleased.

All mentioned books are still available via Tusass' online shop. However, it seems that in the heavily discounted *Ships in Greenlandic Waters*, the stamp mounts are already empty. ■