

“The sons of Denmark who after emigrating brought honour to their homeland”

29.11.17



A monument to Danes who lost their lives fighting in the First World War is beautifully situated in Århus, Denmark's second largest city. The names of the men are listed in (almost) alphabetical order, both those who fought for Germany and those who fought for the Allies. The dates and places of birth and death are recorded but neither rank nor regiment: they are equal in having been killed in the line of duty. The majority, 4000, were “Danish-minded” from the Schleswig region who had been conscripted into the German forces while 140 were Danes who had either voluntarily gone abroad for the purpose of joining up or as immigrants, fought for the Allied forces. While there was some controversy over whether specific Schleswigers were sufficiently “Danish-minded” to warrant the honour of being named on the monument, some of the Danes who had emigrated and were killed while serving for the Allies apparently didn't have, for whatever reason, families to put their names forward. The following 4 all gave their lives for the Allies and also all had a connection with Næstved, a small town on southern Zealand, Denmark.

The Andersen/Anderson brothers

The brothers Andersen from Stenstrup and Næstved, are named on the monument. They came from a working class family. Their father had originally worked on a farm before the family had moved into the local town. His beautiful young wife, on the photo with her 4 children, died aged 23. A year later widower Frederik Andersen married his 19 year old sister-in-law and they had 8 children. The eldest of the Andersen brood, Sofie, emigrated to America when she was 16, but she kept in contact with her family in Denmark and over the next years 4 of her siblings followed her and made new lives in Canada and USA. All three of these brothers served, Kristian and Oluf with the Canadian army while Anders/Andrew was conscripted into the American army.



Kristian sitting on tree trunk

30 year old bachelor farmer Kristian/Christian Andersen living in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan volunteered for the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) in October 1915 and probably got his baptism of fire on the Somme in October 1916. He was transferred to 46th Battalion Saskatchewan which was sent back into combat at Vimy Ridge in early January 1917. The battalion's war diary entry for 12th January records the night's skirmishes and states "781008 Pte. Andersen, C. Killed ". Kristian was buried at Villiers Station Cemetery, France.

Kristian in uniform



Kristian's next of kin had to be informed of their loss. On his attestation paper for the Canadian Over-seas Expeditionary Force it is noted that his father F. Andersen lived at Næstved, Denmark. This wasn't a lot to go on. The local newspaper Næstved Tidende published a piece on 9th March 1917 with the heading: "A local Næstveder fallen at the Front?". A letter had arrived at the post office, sent from London dated 8th February, addressed to Mr. Fr. Andersen, Næstved, Sjælland, Denmark. They must have opened the letter for they went on to say that the Canadian authorities wrote that a Dane C. Andersen no. 781008 serving with 46 Canadian Bn. had been killed in action.

The newspaper asked for any reader knowing the identity of this family to tell them of the letter at the post office. However it also mentioned that a retired Danish-American farmer Fr. Andersen had lived in Næstved 3 years earlier and returned to America and that it was most probably one of his sons that had fallen. This was obviously not correct and so an acquaintance of the right family has ended up with the unpleasant job of informing Kristian's family of the letter and in so doing of his death.

En Næstveder falden ved Fronten?

Der er til Postvæsenet i Næstved indløbet et Brev fra de kandidate Myndigheder, der har med Uddeling af Pension efter faldne kandidate Soldater at gøre. Brevet er adresseret til:

Mr. Fr. Andersen,
Næstved,
Sjælland,
Danmark.



Anders and Oluf

Kristian's 22 year old half-brother Anders lived with their sister Sofie in Omaha, Nebraska and worked as a labourer with the Union Pacific Railway. He was conscripted into the U.S. army in June 1917. Anders Andersen/Andrew Anderson survived the war. Their brother/half-brother, 20 year old farmer Oluf Andersen/Olaf Anderson, living at North Portal, Saskatchewan was conscripted into the Canadian army in November 1917. He lost his life while serving with 2nd battalion Canadian Machine Gun Corps. Oluf was wounded at Cambrai in October and taken for treatment to Etaples where he died on 17th October 1918. Oluf was buried at Etaples Military Cemetery.

Oluf had also given their father N.F. Anderson, Nestved, Sjælland, Denmark as his "next of kin" on his attestation papers. One assumes that when the letter arrived with the sad news that he had been killed that the post office in Næstved knew to enquire first at Enghavevej 2 if the letter could be for them. It must have been to this address too that both sons' war medals were sent. The whereabouts of Kristian's is unknown now. Oluf's younger sister Karla was the keeper of his medal for many years and it has been handed on down through the generations. Both Kristian and Oluf were buried in France; there is no personal text on either's Commonwealth War Grave headstone. On the Århus monument, they are named next to each other as brothers.



Poul Victor Dornonville de la Cour

One could imagine that with such a fancy name Poul Victor Dornonville de la Cour would have a middle class background. He was born in Næstved in 1879 where his father Colonel Victor Dornonville de la Cour was in command of the regiment stationed there, a stepping stone to an eminent military career. Poul Victor Dornonville de la Cour joined the Danish Cavalry after school and everything was set for him to follow in his father's footsteps. It would appear that personal circumstances in the form of marriage and a child at the age of 21, forced him to change plans and he emigrated to South Africa in 1901. Here he seems to have had a successful career as an engineer/surveyor in several mining companies and he remarried after a divorce. Poul Victor volunteered in 1915 and as a private in the 4th South African Scottish Regiment saw action in both Egypt and France and quickly moved up through the ranks. Promoted to Lieutenant in 1917 he was serving as an observer in the RAF in the spring of 1918. At 38 he was much older than most of his colleges.

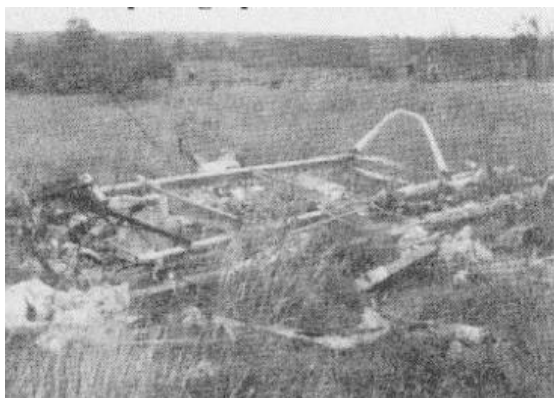


Photo of the crashed plane taken after the war ended

From: Airfields and Airmen: Arras, by Mike O'Connor

A Bristol F2B from 11th squadron RAF with pilot Capt. J.V. Aspinall and observer Lt. P.V. Dornonville de la Cour was shot down over Ovillers-la-Boiselle (Somme) on 15th May 1918, reported as being seen "in flames and well over the German lines". Later that day the burnt bodies of two airmen, Capt. Mond and Lt. Martyn 57th Squadron shot down in the same dog fight, were picked up in No Man's Land and taken to the advanced dressing station "Smith's farm" to await burial. Their pockets were emptied and the contents sent to their next of kin. A couple of days later men from 11th squadron, assuming they were their comrades, and with no one on duty to correct them, picked up the bodies. They were buried as Capt. J.V. Aspinall and Lt. P.V. Dornonville de la Cour at Doullens Communal Cemetery Extension No. 2. Items from Aspinall's billet were returned to his family. No personal effects were found for Poul Victor Dornonville de la Cour to send home to his next of kin, his wife home in South Africa. Louisa Helen Dornonville de la Cour chose as a personal text to be inscribed on her husband's headstone:

A former Danish officer

Who gave his life for humanity

Mrs. Mond, mother to Capt. Mond the pilot on the other plane shot down that day, received the personal effects from his pocket. She was informed that her son and observer Lt. Martyn were missing in action. She felt sure that some mistake had taken place, how could there be items from his pocket if he was missing in action? Mond's parents got one of the leading sculptors of the day, Sir George Frampton, to create a memorial statue for their son; a St. George figure now in the Imperial War Museum (IWM).



Over the next couple of years Mrs. Mond instigated extensive inquiries into what had actually happened to her son. The stretcher bearers who had picked up the bodies, the Australian officer who had emptied her son's pocket, those on duty at Smith's farm and the chaps from 11th squadron who had taken the bodies for burial were all interviewed. Mrs. Mond bought the site on which the plane had crashed and erected a monument to her son and Lt. Martyn there. Mrs. Mond's evidence was convincing. In 1923 the War Graves Commission organized, in the presence of Mrs. Mond and the father of Capt. Aspinall, the bodies exhumed. Mrs. Mond identified her son.

Capt. Aspinall and Lt. Dornonville de la Cour were subsequently classified as missing in action. Their names are inscribed on the Arras Flying Services Memorial. Poul Victor Dornonville de la Cour is also named on the Århus Monument.



Einar Petersen

According to Einar Petersen's attestation papers Einer Peterson had been born in Copenhagen in 1894 and joined the CEF on 26 January 1916. He was a short fair blond, blue eyed farmer who lived at Elva, south-west of Melita, Manitoba. His next of kin was registered as his father C.G. Peterson, Næstved Denmark. Pte. Einar Peterson served with 44th Bn. Manitoba Regiment. He was killed on 3rd June 1917 in the fighting at Vimy Ridge.

There was the same difficulty in getting in touch with the next of kin with the news of death as had happened with Kristian Andersen. A note was made on the edge of Einar's attestation paper: "*The only address available but will find party*". Once again a letter from the Canadian authorities arrived at the Næstved post office this time addressed to Mr. C.C. Petersen. The Næstved Tidende published a note on 12 July stating that the post office had not been able to find any such person in the town's postal district, and

asking for help to find the right person. This time they mentioned nothing of what the letter held only that it was important information.

Et Brev, der venter.
Paa Næstved Posthus henligger
et Brev fra den canadiske Rege-
ring, adresseret til Hr. C. C.
Petersen, Næstved. Postvæs-
net har hidtil ikke indenfor det
lokale Postdistrikt kunnet finde
Adressaten, som, hvis han fin-
des i Næstved By eller Næstved
Postdistrikt, bedes melde sig hur-
tigt muligt paa Posthuset, da det
er af Bigtighed, han faar Oplys-
ning om Brevets Indhold.

6 days later the newspaper brought the news that the search had been successful. Carl Petersen had turned up at the newspaper office with the letter in hand. His son Carl Einar Petersen, a brave soldier, had been killed on 3rd June when a grenade had exploded and he had died on the spot.

According to the newspaper this was devastating news for old Carl Petersen who had lost another son two years earlier in an accident. The brothers had emigrated to Canada 4 years earlier where they had worked in the forests. The younger of the brothers Marius had died while he had been out bathing. A year later Einar had volunteered and become a soldier. With the death of Einar, Carl Petersen had lost 5 of his 9 children: two had died one summer of meningitis. Carl was a labourer, had married twice and had moved from Copenhagen to Grimstrup just outside of Næstved 5 years earlier. That he didn't actually live in the town had obviously made it even more difficult to find him.

Einar Petersen hasn't got a grave. His name is on the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France with the others from CEF who have no known grave. Einar Peterson is also named on the 44th Canadian Infantry Vimy Ridge Monument in Winnipeg, Canada. Einar Petersen's name is not on the memorial at Århus.



Memorial Århus



After the war ended a group of parents formed a committee with the purpose of raising funds for a memorial in Denmark for their young men who had fallen as Allied servicemen. Originally the idea was for an obelisk to stand at Rebild, later changed to Århus, but they didn't manage to collect sufficient money and gave up on the idea in 1923. A few months later a different committee formed in Århus this time aiming to create a memorial park for Danes who had emigrated. They were successful in being given land near the Marselisborg Palace, the royal family's summer residence, for this purpose. Two years later the park was opened and the plan was to erect a monument to celebrate "Danes who abroad had been worthy representatives of their homeland". The former committee for the fallen servicemen memorial project was willing to donate the money they had collected if focus could also be brought on their "people" too. In fact a much grander memorial park for emigrated Danes opened in Copenhagen only one month after the "simple lawn" in Århus. It was a win-win situation for the two Århus groups to merge. Over the next couple of years a yearly party was held at these parks to celebrate the Danes that had emigrated and their families but participation numbers were disappointing and after 3 years not repeated.

When the parents committee gave their funding over in 1924 they hoped the money would be used for a monument and in 1927 it became the aim and focus for the memorial park in Århus to erect "a beautiful and noble memorial to the Danes who had died in the World War". Importantly the memorial wasn't now solely to be for those who had fought for the Allies. It was decided that the term Dane would also define the Danish-minded Schleswigers who had fought and died as German citizens. A competition was launched for designs for the monument which was to stand in a dip/depression on the lawn. It was to be "moving and peaceful", should incorporate episodes of the war and ceasefire, and have the names of all the fallen.

Taking into consideration that neither of the two Århus projects had been very successful the committee decided to create another advisory committee whose sole interest was the monument and it was made up of Denmark's artistic elite, that is to say, of professors attached to the Academy of Fine Art in Copenhagen and leading professional artists. The idea was to show that the monument in Århus was to be of national importance. It would also be unique in that nowhere else in the country was a monument where Danes and Danish-minded Germans who had fought on both sides of the conflict, would be honoured together. The romantics wanted to portray the idea that they had all fallen for the cause of South Jutland becoming Danish again, but this off course was nonsense!



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Leaving

The winner of the competition was the committee's choice, but unfortunately none from the advisory committee had voted for him. They had preferred the projects that came in second and third. And a new war began. For these two artists were infuriated and would not accept that the winner had no support of the art experts while they did. They took the case to court and after three years battling it ended up in the Supreme Court. The final verdict was given in 1928, they lost and the winning project could go ahead.

A nationwide collection in 1930 raised an impressive 212,000 kroner for the project, enough to cover 90% of the cost, and the remaining sum was covered by the City Council and the New Carlsberg Foundation. The next major job was putting together the list of names. There was a lot of controversy about who should be accepted as being Danish-minded. 5270 natives of South Jutland, the area that had been German during the war and after 1920 Danish, had fallen in the war. Lists of names were drawn up and published so that people had a chance to contest individuals being Danish-minded if they disagreed and the names could be removed. 4000 Danish-minded Schleswigers who fought for the Germans are named on the monument. 140 Danes who fought for the Allies are named. Why Einar Petersen's name isn't on the memorial isn't clear. His father had died by 1921 and perhaps his stepmother and his 4 siblings had also passed away too or perhaps they weren't aware of the possibility of recording his sacrifice.



Battle

The monument designed by the architect Axel Ekberg is fantastic, large and beautiful, and one can quite understand that it was the committee's first choice and that they stayed their ground and didn't give in to the art experts. The Rotunda is 40 metres in diameter with 4 ½ metre high walls of limestone from a quarry near Verdun. Placed on the inside of the 130 metre long wall are 4 large reliefs depicting "Leaving", "Battle", "Peace" and "Homecoming" by sculptor Axel Poulsen. The former Prime Minister I.C. Christensen wrote the dedication:

"Denmark our mother,

lifts her eye,

looks over countries,

her sons' journey.

War and violence,

dread in our hearts,

brother against brother,

pulls his sword.

Denmark our mother,

times change,

peace will heal,

sorrow and wound.

Missed sons,

names we write,

memory will live,

for thousands of years".





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Peace

The monument in the Marselisborg Memorial Park, a stone's throw from the royal palace, was inaugurated on 1 July 1934. The Germans had made it known that they wouldn't be represented at the ceremony. The consequence of which was that it was decided that it should be a purely national event. This also helped to avoid provoking those who didn't agree with the whole concept of celebrating those who gave their lives for the Allies when Denmark had been neutral in the First World War. So there were no representatives from any of the countries that those being commemorated had fought for. On the other hand the royal family, representatives from the government and the parliament and 50,000 citizens were present which was seen in the press as being a great success.



Count O.C. Schack from Shackenborg, Tønder, held the inaugural speech. He was very diplomatic, quite aware of the conflict that the monument after all also represented and which was simmering on the other side of the border, and kept his speech neutral. He was followed by the bishop of Århus who was on the committee. He on the other hand spoke of the poppies that covered the battlefields; he was very clearly pro-Allies.

A ceremony has been held every year¹ since 1934 on 11th November at the monument with speeches and the laying of wreathes, firstly by the Union of Danish-minded Schleswig veterans, and since 1988 by the Danish Navy.



Homecoming

¹ I haven't had the opportunity to check if the ceremonies continued during the German occupation of WW2.

Sources

Næstved Tidende

Dorte Pallisgaard

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