



When Greenland gave up its military secret

The recently declared interest of the US in bringing Greenland under its control has occupied headlines everywhere. However, readers might be surprised to learn that, more than 70 years ago, the world's largest island was thrust into the news by an incident involving a British aircraft and the revelation of an American secret. Diana Cormack explains.



Frozen north: Members of the British North Greenland Expedition camp on the ice cap. Photo Major D.E.L. Homard

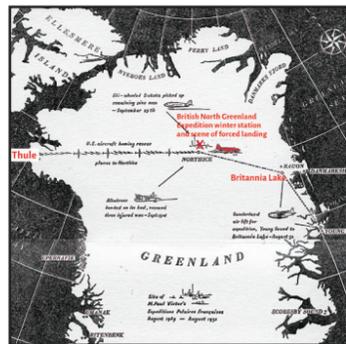
In 1952, my father Flight Sergeant Jack Boyd helped drop supplies from an RAF Hastings aircraft to the British North Greenland Expedition, a scientific mission 700 miles from the North Pole.

Some of these drops necessitated flying at very low levels. Unfortunately, on 16 September, while making this manoeuvre just 50ft off the ground, my father's Hastings hit a 'white out' that prevented the pilot from differentiating between the swirling snowstorm and the glaring icy surface below. The aircraft crashed on the Greenland ice sheet at an altitude of 8,000ft, careering over one and a half miles of treacherous terrain at 120 knots. The 11-man crew scrambled out into a temperature of 30 degrees below zero, lucky to be alive. Three had non-life-threatening injuries, one of whom was a US Air Force officer who had 'come along for the ride'.

Fortunately, the main body of their aircraft had remained intact and the fuselage became their living area. Essential supplies were air-dropped to them by the other Hastings while the world's media asked when and how they might be fully rescued. My dad took on the role of cook, going out early to collect snow which took ages to boil for the morning cuppa. He suffered from frostbite in his fingers for the rest of his life.

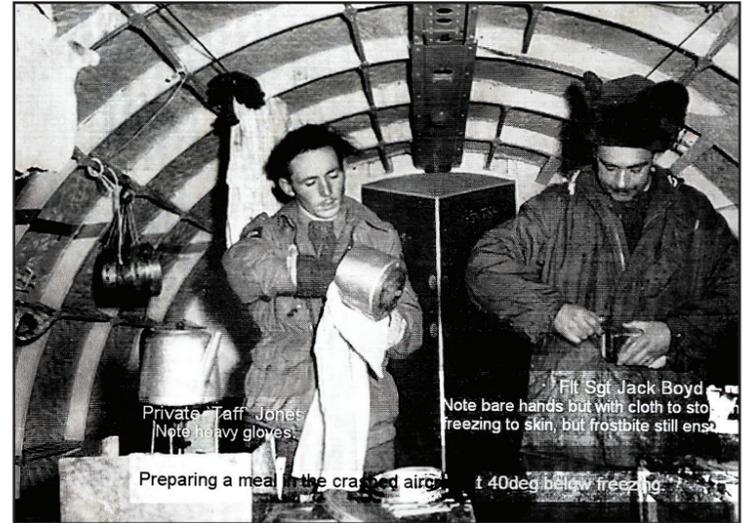
But another question was also being asked by the press: how did a British plane based in Yorkshire and carrying a heavy payload have the capacity to reach Greenland in the first place? Thus it came to light that the RAF had use of a top-secret air base built by the Americans in north-west Greenland at a place called Thule, 400 miles from the crash site. With the Cold War well under way, this was of huge strategic importance, lying as it did midway

between North America and Russia.



The red cross on the map marks the spot where the plane came down in the northern reaches of Greenland with the US base at Thule marked on the left

It was from Thule that the Americans carried out two amazing rescue missions. After seven days, the USAF Air Rescue Squadron brought in an amphibian plane to take the



Diana Cormack's father Flight Sergeant Jack Boyd, right, and Private Taff Jones prepare a meal inside the crashed aircraft. Jack has bare hands in temperatures of minus 40 degrees

three injured men off the ice cap. Two days later, a ski-wheeled Dakota aircraft took the nine others, including my dad. Both of these missions were made possible by Jet Assisted Take-Off being used for the first time at such a height and under such conditions.

as a space base.

Although other bases were built over the years, it appears to be the only one of these still in use, though there seems to be no apparent reason why American troops cannot occupy them again...



Jack Boyd in his crashed aircraft near the North Pole. RAF "Hastings" aircraft Serial No WD492

Two crew members stand close to the Hastings aircraft after its forced landing. Note the tents pitched next to the rear section

Eevie on the march for EEVRA

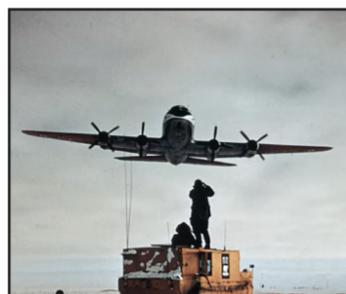
The recently formed East End Village Residents Association or EEVRA (The Archer, January 2026) is inviting people to join its non-political, resident volunteer organisation to strengthen the voice of the community.



Trunk call: EEVRA mascot Eevie hands over a raffle prize

Association mascot Eevie the Elephant has been busy introducing themselves around the area, including handing out prizes from a winter raffle that raised almost £1,600 towards the costs of protecting and improving the pocket park on Manor Park Road.

EEVRA is free to join and open to anyone living in EFC ward to the west of the Northern line and north of Elmshurst Crescent with plans to expand more widely as it becomes more established. Email hello@eevra.org.uk



Lifeline: An aircraft swoops low to drop supplies to the expedition members. Photo Major D.E.L. Homard

To this day, Wikipedia says that Thule Air Base was constructed in secret and the project was made public in September 1952. It does not say why or how! The Americans were not best pleased that their hidden base had been revealed. Building it had begun after a defence treaty agreement with Denmark in 1951, following on from one in 1941.

Thule was later given the Inuit name Pituffik and is now classed

Elemental music

Alyth Choral Society and soprano Emily Phillips will be performing works by Haydn, Bach, Rutter, Purcell and more at their 'Songs of the Elements: Earth' concert on Sunday 29 March at 7pm at NWRs Alyth, Alyth Gardens, NW11 7EN.

Tickets priced £20, free to students and under-18s, are available from www.alythchoralsociety.com

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LOCAL POLICE, LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

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 - Call **101** for non-emergencies, if your property has been stolen or damaged, you wish to report drug dealing or a minor traffic accident, and for general police enquiries
 - Report crime to your local Safer Neighbourhood Team by email: eastfinchley.snt@met.police.uk, gardensuburb.snt@met.police.uk or fortisgreen.snt@met.police.uk
- Find full details for the local SNTs at www.iloven2.co.uk/local-government-and-policing
- Stay anonymous and report information to Crimestoppers on **0800 555111**