

THE AMERICAN ISSUE OF GREENLAND

By Dr. Dan Laursen

Part Two: The Overprints



Fig. 4. Envelope with a combination of stamps from the Chr. X - Polar bear series, the overprinted American issue, the Frederik IX series plus the 1958 provisional issue. Made in memory of the 15th anniversary of the liberation of Denmark and benefiting "Foreningen til Hjælp for grønlandske Børn" (Society for helping children in Greenland).

Greenland's "American issue" had hardly reached all postal stations in Greenland when the liberation of Denmark occurred on May 5, 1945. The suggestion was made that the American issue stamps be overprinted with:

DANMARK BEFRIET 5 MAJ 1945

Otto Kjærsgaard of DGP maintains (personal written information) that Eske Brun, the chief governing official in Greenland at the time, came up with the idea for the overprints. Brun, however, has publicly declared that he did not know where the idea came from, but he agreed wholeheartedly and approved. This does not mean that he also approved of the so-called variations that subsequently became known. Most likely, the idea came from somebody in New York considering the short time between when the liberation message reached New York to when the order was given for printing.

The job of printing was first offered to the American Bank Note Co., which declined due to already having an overload. The Greendel office then asked the consulate's printer, Commercial Stationery Co., to do the work. The company accepted and negotiations took place about the text, color, and the costs. When everything was agreed upon, the Greendel office accepted. Ib Pedersen of



Greenel gave the order to Commercial Stationery Co. of New York in a letter dated May 17, 1945:

Commercial Stationery Co.
54 New Street
New York City
Att: Mr. J. Werner
Gentlemen:

We hereby confirm our order to overprint 2718 sheets of Greenland Postage Stamps with the wording:

“DANMARK
BEFRIET
5 MAJ 1945”

The printing to be partly in red and partly in blue according to detailed description already submitted to you. The total cost of making the necessary plates and printing will be \$600.00.

You are to return to us all sheets delivered to you including such which may be spoiled or damaged.

We understand that you will make delivery within 3 weeks from today. It is also agreed that you shall furnish us with print proofs to be OK'd by us before the actual printing is begun.

Very truly yours
Danish Consulate General
Greenland Section
Ib Pedersen

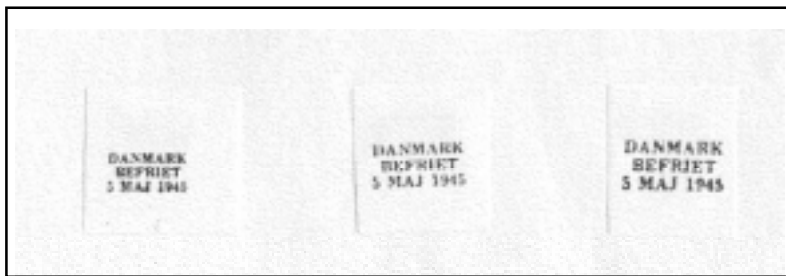


Fig. 5. The three plates of overprint “DANMARK BEFRIET 5 MAJ 1945. 1. Size 11 x 6 mm; 2. Size 12 x 6 mm; 3. Size 12 x 5 mm.

TABLE E
Cataloging the Overprinted Stamps

	AEA	DAKA	Facit	Hjlt me	Michel	Scott
1 øre gray/violet, red overprint	17	17	19	17	17	19
5 øre rose lake/olive green, blue overprint	18	18	20	18	18	20
7 øre green/gray, red overprint	19	19	21	19	19	21
10 øre purple/olive green, blue overprint	20	20	22	20	20	22
15 øre red/ultramarine, red overprint	21	21	23	21	21	23
30 øre blue/gray brown, blue overprint	22	22	24	22	22	24
1 Kr. brown/green, red overprint	23	23	25	23	23	25
2 Kr. dark brown/green, red overprint	24	24	26	24	24	26
5 Kr. dark purple/gray brown, blue overprint	25	25	27	25	25	27

Assuming the number of sheets were equally distributed between the nine values, 302 sheets of each value were overprinted ($2,718 \div 9 = 302$). See Table E for the cataloging of the overprinted stamps.

For the overprinting, three different plates were used. The 1, 5, 7 Øre stamps were overprinted with a text size 11 x 6 mm; 10 and 15 Øre with a text 12 x 6 mm, and 30 Øre, 1, 2, and 5 Kr. with a text 12 x 5 mm. The 1, 7, 15 Øre and 1 and 2 Kr. stamps were overprinted in red color; 5, 10, 30 Øre and 5 Kr. stamps were overprinted in blue. (Fig. 5 & Fig. 6.)



Fig. 6. The American issue overprinted DANMARK BEFRIET 5 MAJ 1945





Fig. 7. Examples of inverted overprints.

Rumor had it that the well-known New York stamp dealers, J. and H. Stolow, were the ones who got the idea of overprinting the American issue. So far, there is no proof of this but it is a fact that the Stolows very early were in contact with the Grendel office concerning the overprinting. On May 14, the Stolow firm wrote to Grendel as follows:

To the Danish Consulate General
Greenland Section
17 Battery Place
New York, NY
Att: Mr. J. Peterson
Gentlemen:

We took good notice that the Danish Government is going to release 9 stamps with the surcharge "Denmark befriet May 5, 1945," commemorating Denmark's liberation.

We are herewith placing our order for ten thousand complete sets for immediate delivery in accordance with our verbal agreement. The price per single set is \$1,736, and we shall pay the total amount of \$17,360.00 in cash against receipt of the ten thousand sets ordered, and we also agree to take the balance of 10,000 sets within one year. You, in turn, consented to return any remainder of this stock to Greenland and refrain from selling it to the public here in the States.

Very truly yours,
J. and H. Stolow

The letter is most remarkable in giving the Stolow company monopoly on the sale of these stamps in U.S. (The J. Peterson mentioned in the letter is most likely Ib Petersen.) The merchandise was delivered on June 18, 1945 in accordance to the following invoice.

June 18, 1945	
Messrs. J. & H. Stolow	
475 Fifth Avenue	
New York City, N.Y.	
	Your order May 14, 1945
Terms: Net Cash against delivery	
10,000 Sets 1945 Greenland postage stamps mint	
overprinted "Danmark befriet 5 Maj	
1945"	
each set (9) stamps at \$1.736	\$ 17.360.00
10,000 short sets (1,5, & 7 øre) Grønland 1945	
postage stamps, overprinted as	
above at \$0.026 per set	260.00
	\$ 17.620.00
The balance of your order, 10,000 each of the following denominations:	
10, 15, 7 30 Øre Kroner 1, 2 & 5, remain in our possession until you are ready to take them in accordance with our mutual agreement.	

As will be seen from the invoice, J. & H. Stolow got possession of no less than 20,000 of each of the small values, or about two-thirds of the overprinted issue. What is not mentioned in the communication is that J. and H. Stolow got the delivery directly from the printing office which made it possible to carry out the largest swindle in the Greenland postal history.

The invoice indicates that 10,000 of each of the higher values should remain in the possession of Greendel for a year. According to later correspondence, the Stolows only took half of those stamps. The rest were sent to Copenhagen in 1950 and placed in the archives of the Ministry of Finance. Both Torben Hjørne and Anker Block later tried to see the parcel which, however, was missing and nobody knew where to find it. Jens Fynbo, the later director of the Royal Trade (KGH), has verbally and in writing informed me that he personally at a certain point in time picked up the parcel against giving a receipt and burned the entire contents of the parcel without any more ado. The reason for this, according to Fynbo, was that the Greenland Administration and the Royal Trade already had more than enough trouble with these stamps, and it would be better to destroy them in silence rather than risking the possibility of somebody some day getting the idea of selling these stamps and thereby renewing the former hullabaloo. Fynbo was, of course, aware of earlier internal letters, such as one on July 10, 1947 which stated (in translation):



“There surely is a risk that the philatelists will rake up the stamp case if the said part (the filed parcel) of the war issue suddenly showed up on the market even if it was through charitable institutions.”

THE REACTION IN DENMARK

Danish collectors learned about the overprinted stamps in the early summer of 1945. It was obvious why the overprint took place, but it was difficult to decide whether it was due to the result of the liberation or in order to earn some money that the Greenland Administration had the stamps overprinted. In spite of all the official assurances, the budget situation might have been rather tense.

The information about the overprints immediately caused a lot of print in the press, both daily papers and philatelic publications. Of the latter, the stamp magazine *Frimerkesamleren* was very active. Hjørne (1983, p. 159 et seq) gave a brilliant summation of the discussion in that magazine. By permission, we present a short resume here. The story begins in the September 1945 number where the rumor about the overprinted issue being made on speculation is first aired. In the October number, the rumors were confirmed and important information was added. According to an advertisement in a Swedish stamp magazine, the following stamps were offered: 9 values with overprint 52.50 Skr. The same stamps with overprint in red and blue 190.00 Skr. The advertisement, furthermore, indicated that color variations were printed in a total of 2,500 stamps. This is the only place we have information about the number of the color variations. In the January number, an interview with Eske Brun confirmed that the total number of stamps printed was 100,000 sets of which 30,000 were overprinted. Of these, two-thirds were sold immediately in the USA and 5,000 were sent to Greenland to be used postally. Unfortunately, they disappeared on their way from New York to Godthåb. Finally, 5,000 sets were sent to Copenhagen. Five hundred of these sets were sent to Greenland as replacement for the “disappeared” stamps. They were supposed to be sold there and thus make it evident that the overprinted stamps were used postally correct.

During this entire delicate case, the Greenland administration was criticized from various quarters for the way the stamp issuing and the overprinting was handled and manner in which various postal situations were dealt with. The blame was laid on the administration’s lack of knowledge about such matters. I do not believe the people involved knew or cared about the international rules. The buyers in New York, who prompted the sending of the overprints to Greenland, told the officials the importance of the sale of the stamps from the Greenland post offices.

On February 5, 1946 Ib Eichner-Larsen wrote an article in *Berlingske Tidende* under the headline: “The scandal about the Greenland stamps culminates.” On March 6, 1946 a meeting arranged by the Frederiksberg Stamp Club resulted in formation of a committee headed by Bruun Pedersen,

then-president of Københavns Philatelist Klub (KPK, Copenhagen Philatelist Club), who applied for and got an audience with the State Minister. The minister promised to look into the case – and, as usual, that was the last we heard from the superior, legal authorities of the country.

The excitement did not diminish when the changed colors and the overprints hit the market. The authorities in Copenhagen – Grønlands Styrelse (The Administration of Greenland, GS) and Den Kongelige Grønlandske Handel (The Royal Greenland Trade, KGH) – tried very hard to get some material of the issue from the New York office to Denmark for sale there. They succeeded in getting 1,800 covers originally supposed to be distributed and sold at 19 of the 20 post stations (Thule covers were not on the market until 1958). These covers were auctioned off the first days of December 1945. The sale, however, did not pour oil on the troubled water and especially not after the appearance of the color “variations.”

On February 6, 1946, the following note was printed in the larger daily newspapers (here in translation):

Announcement from the Administration of Greenland.

Announcement is made that after numerous inquiries and requests from Danish stamp collectors the Administration has recalled the remaining stock of those during the war in America printed Greenland stamps that exist in the following values 1, 5, 7, 10, 15, and 30 Øre plus 1, 2, and 5 Kroner. The stamps have now arrived in two issues

1. Mint stamps without overprint and
2. Stamps of the same kind overprinted *Danmark befriet- 5 Maj 1945*.

Orders are received on the following conditions:

The amount Kr. 8.68 per set is sent to the administration of Greenland, Slotsholmsgade 10, K, in a registered envelope marked “Stamps” and including a SASE (registered postage). Payment only cash or certified check. Private collectors may buy until 5 sets of type 1, dealers until 100 sets and wholesalers of the stamp trade until 500 sets. The association of the persons to the stamp trade may if necessary be demanded documented. Only a single set of type 2 is sold to every buyer. These stamps are only sent to private addresses. Of this type is available 43 complete sets and about 4700 incomplete sets the 1, 5, 7 Øre stamps missing. 13 Øre in Danish stamps are therefore enclosed in orders in excess of 4700 sets of type 2 as a compensation for the lacking Greenland stamps. Orders for both types may be sent until Saturday 23 inst. Time of delivery about 3 weeks. If the number of orders are larger than the available the Administration reserves the right to a reduction respectively returning of the forwarded money.

Cash sale to persons appearing [at the GS office] does not take place. The orders are dispatched via mail only according to the rules stated above. Complaints are received within 5 days from the day of dispatch. Exchange will take place in Danish stamps or money.



As can be seen from the above, about 4,700 sets of the small values were missing. They seemed to have disappeared on their way from New York to Godthåb. Rumor had it that a man who looked like a sailor tried to sell a large lot of these three stamps to a New York dealer, who declined. After having read an article on this subject in *Luren* (Laursen, 1985), Phil Robbins of the stamp company Almar told *Luren* he was working for Carl Pelander during World War II when a man who claimed to be a sea captain came into the shop and offered to sell some Greenland overprint sets. There were no color varieties or errors in these sets. Robbins said Pelander purchased some for his customers and a few for stock and suggested he should offer some to Stolow. Shortly after Pelander advertised the Greenland sets, he had a call from dealer Avery Wells, who accused Pelander of having had the overprints made. Robbins said he joked with Wells that he (Robbins) had them printed on a rainy day in his back yard. Robbins said Wells then realized that Pelander had nothing to do with making the overprints.

In 1957, these stamps finally showed up for sale in Denmark. A certain amount of them were used as postage on a charity envelope issued by "Foreningen til Hjælp for grønlandske Børn" (Society for helping children in Greenland). According to Hjørne, about 7,700 envelopes were sold (Fig. 4). The administration also sent some sets of the overprinted stamps for sale in Greenland in order to legalize these overprinted stamps. At the same time, it should also be repeated that none of the changed color and/or the inverted overprinted stamps was ever sold from any postal station in Greenland or from the GS or KGH in Copenhagen.

SALE IN GREENLAND OF THE OVERPRINTED STAMPS

According to Hjørne (1983, p.148) the overprinted stamps did not arrive in Godthåb, Greenland, until November 22, 1945. One may wonder why it took that long. The overprint was ordered May 17, 1945 and delivered June 18, 1945 after which it took five months to get 700 sets of the 2,718 overprinted sheets to Greenland. As I remember, it was done only after some pressure was applied on the New York office from the administration in Copenhagen.

From a list of the Central Office for Greenland dated December 28, 1945, it appears that, in fact, very few of the overprinted sets were sent to the postal stations in Greenland.

As indicated from Table F, the allotment of the overprints to the various post stations was extremely small – only 10 percent of the amount of the non-overprinted stamps. Consequently, the stamps were snapped up right away; in some places the stamps did not even reach the window but were bought by the employees on arrival. I was traveling the west coast the summer of 1946 and asked about the overprints everywhere – they were no where to be found. I got my set from an old friend in Greenland who knew I was a Greenland stamp collector. Most likely, not a single stamp of the overprints was used as private or business postage on cards or covers. Philatelic mail is known; also known are cancellations with turned back cancellers.

THE SO-CALLED VARIANTS

A variant or a variation is a stamp that in one way or the other accidentally is different from the original. If the same error is repeated on every stamp in a sheet, we call it a sheet variation or sheet variant. Therefore, variations of the overprinted American issue should be called sheet variations, as will be seen from the following cataloguing (See Table G).

One sheet of the 15 Øre was printed with, (1) the small overprint normally used for the 1, 5, 7 Øre stamps, and (2) with the wrong color. So far, only a dozen copies or so are found and never in pairs or larger continuous units.

Because the horizontal distance between the overprints of the 1, 5, 7 Øre plate is 24 mm whereas it is 34 mm on the 10, 15 Øre overprints (type II), the fabrication of this special sheet is not done with the entire type I plate. It was done by using one or more single clichés put together for this special forgery. This suggests that the entire fabrication of all the falsified stamps was carried out at the end of the printing of the "Danmark befriet" sheets (Hjørne, 1983, p.180). Several plate flaws have been recorded but they should be regarded as printing flaws.

Figure 8 (from Hjørne, 1983, p.154) shows a lot from an auction catalog (Skandia nr. 23, Dec. 5, 1973) that carried the following description (translated): "1945. 30 øre overprint. Color error. Made by the J.H. Stolow Company in New York with permission of the Danish Embassy in USA. This stamp is of another type that under the quartz light is brownish when the normal type is aniline-red. The stamp is by experts and in AFA special catalog indicated as 'forged' what I (the text writer) here will put a question mark against because the 'manufacturer' is the same who made the 'genuine' ones. More likely he was short of a single sheet of 30 øre and reprinted a sheet with another pot of red color. This must have been done at the American Bank Note Company."

The describer was in error about where the printing occurred and the remark about permission from the Danish Embassy can be discounted as the author's ignorance of the facts.

TABLE F
Distribution of
Overprints in Greenland

Post Office	Sets
Julianchaab	85
Frederikshaab	25
Godthaab	160
Sukkertoppen	45
Holsteinsborg	35
Egedesminde	65
Christianshaab	5
Jakobshavn	35
Kurdiligssat	30
Godhavn	20
Umanak	40
Upernavik	35
Thule	5
Scoresbyund	5
Angmagssalik	10
Ivigut	100
TOTAL	700



TABLE G
Changed Colors of Overprints

	Over print	Qgy	AEA	DAKA	Facit	Hjrt me	Michel	Scott
10 re purple/olive green	red	2,500	20a	20A	22v ²		20 I	22a
15 re red/ultramarine	blue	3,500	21a	21A	23v ²		21 I	23a
30 re blue/gray brown	red	3,500	22a	22A	24v ²		22 I	24a
1 Kr. brown/green	blue	3,500	23a	23A	25v ²		23 I	25a
2 Kr. dark brown/green	blue	3,500	24a	24A	26v ²		24 I	26a
5 Kr. d. purple/gr. brown	red	3,500	25a	25A	27v ²		25 I	27a
1 re gray/violet		400	17x	17x	19v			
5 re rose lake/olive green		400	18x	18x	20v			
7 re green/gray		400	19x	19x	21v			
10 re purple/olive green		400	20x	20x	22v			
15 re red/ultramarine		400	21x	21x	23v			
30 re blue/gray		400	22x	22x	24v			
1 Kr. brown/green		400	23x	23x	25v			
2 Kr. dark brown/green		400	24x	24x	26v			
5 Kr. dark purple/gray brown		400	25x	25x	27v			
15 re red/ultramarine with the small (1,5,7 re) overprint			21xa	21Ay				

The stamps with changed colors of the overprint and inverted overprints are obviously not what we in general understand as variants. When they come in multiple full sheets, as in this case, they are created by a human hand and not by coincidence. An honest printer would never allow 4, 20, 28 and even 60 sheets with errors to run off the machine. He would have stopped the press, removed the waste, and delivered the same to the customer with the rest of the order in accordance to the written agreement. Why did this not take place?

As soon as the number of variation sheets was known, the question was discussed among those interested. Hjørne wrote at some length about it (1983) and indicated that we were not looking at what we normally think of as variations. The Greenland Posthistorians completely rejected this idea. DGP argued that the changed color prints were test runs to see which overprinting color looked best on the stamps. This is questionable, as one does not need several hundred of the test prints to determine desirable color. DGP's various explanations sounded unreasonable when published and the later disclosure of facts in the case proved that they were in error. On various occasions, I have talked and written about the question, agreeing with Hjørne.

THE TRUE FACTS

According to the well-known Danish philatelist Peer Lorentzen, the printing of all the "variation" sheets was done by John Stollow and his brother in the night hours when the shop was closed and no workers present. (Verbal

information from Peer Lorentzen.) The owner of Commercial Stationery Co. must have been involved in this deceit, probably getting his cut of the profit when these “variations” were sold. Lorentzen, who plans to publish his knowledge of the case, reports that John Stolow admitted having done the “variation” printing.

It is obvious that the part of the overprints that J. & H. Stolow bought was delivered directly from the printer to the Stolow business. If not, the Grendel office would have discovered “the misprint” and either had to discard them or be privy to the case. It is important to note that the entire sum of the overprinted variation stamps was never in the hands of the Greenland postal authorities in New York or in Greenland. They were all sold first in the United States, more precisely from J. & H. Stolow’s stamp dealership in New York. The “variations” were never in the hands of the Grendel office and never distributed to the Greenland post stations.

DGP, in dealing with this question (DGP, 1987), maintains that the Stolows did not have anything to do with the printing and the “variations.” DGP contends that the variations occurred during the test printing of the various suggestions of the colors to be used. After the admission by Stolow to Peer Lorentzen, there is no longer any reason to consider DGP’s allegations about the printing.

It is easy to repudiate another DGP assertion – that the original printing of the American issue and especially of the overprint *Danmark befriet* was done to raise money for the slender treasury of the Greenland administration. Eske Brun has in several communications given exact information about the monetary and supply situation in Greenland during the war years. As an illustration, I refer to Brun (1950) where he says (in translation): “Thanks especially to the cryolite earnings it was possible already the first year in America to buy a complete year’s supply for Greenland; it was the shipping that caused the most difficulties.” The same information is reported by Otto Lerche of the Kryolith Mine og Handels Selskab and by KGH’s trading inspector, A. Malmquist.

The wartime distress and misery that DGP indicates is based upon a paper of Finn Løkkegaard (1967) concerning the economic situation between U.S.A and Denmark proper during the German occupation. Bente Gad and her late husband, historian Finn Gad, spent the war years in Greenland. I specifically



Fig. 8. Stamp from the auction catalog “Skandia,” nr. 23 of December 5, 1973

asked her about this period and she expressed the same opinion about the situation as that of Eske Brun. I asked her because she was not a part of the administration in any way. Also, I think that every administration under whatever situation will always be looking down into a more or less empty coffer. The importance of the booklet about the American issue by the Greenland Posthistorians is in the publication of the many documents concerning the case.

CONCLUSION

When Eske Brun decided to issue a new set of Greenland stamps made in the United States, it was a good and farsighted step.

In spite of the raise in the Danish postal rates, the choice of the values was under the given circumstances acceptable.

The American issue, as it became known, was sold from all the Greenland post offices making the stamps legal in every respect.

The idea of an overprinting with “Danmark befriet 5 Maj 1945” is understandable whether economical considerations were behind the decision or not.

It was a major error that the Greendel office did not make a counting of the stamps to verify the number when they were delivered from the printer. It also was a major error by the Greendel office to allow the large part of the stamps bought by the J & H Stolow Co. to be sent directly from the printer to the company. That made it possible to allow the fabrication of the falsified color and reversed variations.

These “variations” were never sold from any Greenland post office! They, therefore, do not fulfill the international rules and ought to be blacklisted, making it illegal to exhibit them in exhibitions sponsored by FIP.

POSTSCRIPT

This entire tangled affair should not pass without some kind of an investigation. The main office in Copenhagen demanded explanations concerning a lot of questions and wanted an exact account of the delivery, distribution, and sale of what the office termed the war stamps, as well as a list of the dealers to whom larger quantities were sold, and so forth.

It took exceedingly long for the New York office to answer, but finally a report was received in which no one seemed to have taken the responsibility for anything. I think it is safe to say that largely the entire case came to nothing. Who really cared? We were all so delighted that the war was over and the connection to our beautiful polar island was re-established.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my gratitude to Torben Hjørne for many a good discussion about these stamps and for allowing me to use his books to get some information it was difficult for me to get living so far from Copenhagen. I also owe thanks to Jens Fynbo, the former director of the Royal Greenland Trade, for important information, and to Gunnar Kaspersen, the former Postmaster

General of Greenland, for reading and criticizing the manuscript of this article. They both had an extensive influence in forming the budding postal system in Greenland. I thank Otto Kjærsgaard of the Greenland Posthistorians for his positive criticism and some new information that I incorporated in the text. My good friends, professor Warren Franzen and editor Paul Albright, proofread the manuscript and made corrections and suggestions to improve it. Thanks to Bente Gad and Jens Rosing for valuable information and to Peer Lorentzen for letting me use information from his unpublished article about his meeting with John Stolor.

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