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International Relations of the German Antarctic Expedition 1938/39

Sovereignty dispute between Germany and Norway in the „Polar Desert”¹

Abstract

At the end of 1938, with two flying-boats on her board, German catapult ship *Schwabenland* – a former freighter, which was converted and used as a floating airbase – left the docks of Hamburg to execute her secret task in the Southern Ocean: the aerial surveying and mapping of the Antarctic mainland area between the longitudes 12°W and 20°E. Officially, the expedition – which was organized by the German government – was a scientific journey; but in the background, Nazi Germany prepared to claim for herself a South Polar district. However, the above-mentioned territory was not absolutely derelict, because Norwegian explorers visited these coasts of Antarctica several times previously. Norway also vindicated sovereignty rights over the region, thus the international conflict was unavoidable between the two countries.

Keywords: Aerial survey, Antarctic, catapult ship, expedition, Germany, New Swabia, Norway, Queen Maud Land, Schwabenland, territorial claims.

The German Antarctic Expedition 1938/39 was a unique and special event in the history of polar research. First of all, it was not a traditional scientific expedition only, but also a characteristic – although lesser-known – momentum of the Third Reich’s power and political ambitions on the distant South Atlantic waters. As an introduction, an attempt to present the diversified international relations of this half-forgotten exploration journey will be followed, above all from the point of view of the evolved territorial dispute between Germany and Norway about the vast areas of the so-called „*Neu-Schwabenland*” or „*Dronning Maud Land*”.² It must be mentioned, that the story of this enigmatic polar mission is inseparable from some other important – economic, military and scientific – factors; and in line with political questions, from time to time it is necessary to refer to these contexts.

The United Kingdom, France, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Chile and Norway had maintained territorial claims in Antarctica before the Antarctic Treaty entered into force in 1961.³ Although at the beginning of the 20th century

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² Dronning Maud Land (Queen Maud Land) is the Norwegian name of the Antarctic region between 20°W and 45°E. (Ca. 2,7 million square kilometres.) Neu-Schwabenland (New Swabia) was the German cartographic name of the polar area between 12°W and 20°E and the location of the German Antarctic Expedition in 1938/39. (Ca. 600.000 square kilometres.)

³ The Antarctic Treaty was signed in Washington in 1959 and after the ratifications, came into effect in 1961. Nowadays, the above-mentioned pretensions appear less conspicuously. Contrary to

Germany also took part in the early stages of the race for the discovery of the the Sixth Continent⁴, after her defeat in the First World War, the German state lost all of her overseas possessions in the Versailles Treaty in 1919.⁵ Germany has also been excluded from the exploration of Antarctica for the next 15 years; it was a serious disadvantage against the rival nations, that meanwhile – on the basis of they earlier discoveries – established territorial claims in the region. Nazi Germany, when in the middle of the 1930s re-entered the polar debate on the southern half of the Earth, great parts of the continent have already been divided into so-called geographical sectors.⁶

The main reason of the idea of a new Antarctic expedition was economic. Germany was the second largest purchaser of the Norwegian whale oil on the

popular opinion, the Antarctic Treaty does not take stand categorically on territorial claims. Article IV of the Agreement includes the following: „No acts or activities taking place while the present Treaty is in force shall constitute a basis for asserting, supporting or denying a claim to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica or create any rights of sovereignty in Antarctica. No new claim, or enlargement of an existing claim, to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica shall be asserted while the present Treaty is in force“. The Antarctic Treaty. National Archives of Australia (NAA) A10728. It is important to emphasize, that the disallowance refers only to occurrent new claims – the pretensions, which had officially announced by several countries in the pre-treaty era, are only in „not current“ or „frozen“ status. Otherwise, the status of Antarctica and the far South Atlantic region is a global, but currently perhaps not a mainstream political-economic problem. There are immeasurable amount of raw materials in the depths of the mainland – obviously, hard to dredge – and also in the surrounding waters – although at this moment the Antarctic Treaty System protects the region against all types of mining. Besides this, the strategic significance of the region is not negligible, either. It is not inconceivable, that the White Continent will be a great encounter zone between world powers in the 21th century.

⁴ Before the First World War, Erich von Drygalski (1901-1903) and Wilhelm Filchner (1911-1912) had sailed to the coasts of Antarctica aboard *Gauss* and *Deutschland* as German scientists. The territory between 87-91°E was discovered and named by Drygalski as Kaiser-Wilhelm-II.-Land (Wilhelm II Land). MILLS, W. J.: *Exploring Polar Frontiers*. Santa Barbara (California), 2003. (MILLS 2003) 704. BRUNK, K.: *Kartographische Arbeiten und deutsche Namengebung in Neuschwabenland, Antarktis. Bisherige Arbeiten, Rekonstruktion der Flugwege der Deutschen Antarktischen Expedition 1938/39 und Neubearbeitung des deutschen Namengutes in Neuschwabenland*. Frankfurt am Main, 1986. (BRUNK 1986) 9. Filchner explored the region from 32°W to 77-78°S and named it as Prinzregent-Luitpold-Land (Prince Regent Luitpold Coast.) MILLS (2003): 229. BRUNK (1986): 9. The German government never announced formal claims about these territories; but the Versailles Treaty precluded also the theoretical possibility of the subsequent pretensions. LÜDECKE C. – SUMMERHAYES C.: *The Third Reich in Antarctica. The German Antarctic Expedition 1938/39*. Huntingdon – Norwich, 2012. (LÜDECKE – SUMMERHAYES 2012) 8.

⁵ The 118-119. Articles of the Versailles Treaty pronounce: „In territory outside her European frontiers as fixed by the present Treaty, Germany renounces all rights, titles and privileges whatever in or over territory which belonged to her or to her allies, and all rights, titles and privileges whatever their origin which she held as against the Allied and Associated Powers...Germany renounces in favour of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers all her rights and titles over her oversea possessions.“ (The Versailles Treaty. <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/partiv.asp>. Download: 10/01/2013.)

⁶ It is not easy to make a distinction between official and unofficial claims in Antarctica, including also the South Atlantic region. Great Britain, France, New Zealand, Australia, Argentina, Chile and Norway had announced different pretensions on sectors or islands before the end of the Second World War and in some cases, they entered also into disputes about the borders of the claimed territories. STUNZ, H. R.: *Walfisch, Wissenschaft, Wettbewerb – Die deutschen Ansprüche auf Teile der Antarktis. Die „Neuschwabenland“-Expedition von 1938/39 im Kontext*. Norderstedt, 2008. (STUNZ 2008) 18.

market,⁷ but after the Norwegian whaler owners doubled their prices in the year of 1935, the German government began to set up his own whaling fleets to reduce its more and more insupportable expenses in foreign exchange.⁸ After serious efforts, whale catchers had sailed also under German flag in all whaling seasons between 1936–1939 to the South Atlantic region. The initiator of an actual scientific journey to the coasts of Antarctica was Councillor of State Helmuth Wohlthat, chief of the German whaling industry.⁹ Within the so-called second „*Four Year Plan*”¹⁰, his most important task was to organize the German whaling fleets and reduce the import of the Norwegian whale oil. After the successful beginning, Wohlthat’s next goal was to defend the independence of the new German whaling. The State Councillor forged an ambitious plan: as reviver of the illustrious traditions of former German polar researchers Drygalski and Filchner, Germany organizes an expedition to Antarctica – and after the success of the mission, by right of discovery the German state announces an official claim on the explored territory.¹¹ Wohlthat’s superior, Hermann Göring „*approved the concept, and on 9 May 1938 assigned resources for a reconnaissance expedition, including a ship and two seaplanes for aerial survey and photographic mapping.*”¹² Of course, the Versailles Treaty practically was dead in 1938 and the Third Reich prepared with full effort for the war.¹³ Safeguarding of the whaling was not a negligible issue¹⁴ and the expedition was also a perfect opportunity for the German Navy to

⁷ LÜDECKE, C.: *In geheimer Mission zur Antarktis. Die dritte Deutsche Antarktische Expedition 1938/39 und der Plan einer territorialen Festsetzung zur Sicherung des Walfangs.* Deutsches Schifffahrtsarchiv 26. 2003. (LÜDECKE 2003) 75.

⁸ LÜDECKE – SUMMERHAYES (2012): 13.

⁹ Ibid. 15. Wohlthat was the „*key figure*” of the whole story. „*He had...worked for Economic Minister Schacht as head-of-department in the Ministry of Economies, with huge responsibilities aimed at removing the negative trade balance of Nazi Germany, under Minister Schacht’s New Plan, the motto for wuch was ‘Foreign Trade without Foreign Currency’...After the increase in whale oil prices in 1935, it was his expert advice that changed the official position of the Reich concerning German whaling.*” Ibid. 17.

¹⁰ Under the control of Hermann Göring, the primary aim of the second „*Four Year Plan*” (Vierjahresplan) was to prepare the German industry and armed forces for the next war.

¹¹ The worry about the independence of the German whaling was not groundless. After the successful execution of the expedition, Wohlthat had published an article in the official journal of the „*Four Year Plan*” where he alludes to the Norwegian whalers, who must pay taxes to Great Britain after they work on the waters of the British Antarctic Territory. (Wohlthat 1939, 613.) The official press report of the journey also contains, that the expedition „*...was necessary to escape the fate of the Norwegians who had pay a tribute to Britain on every barrel of oil.*” German Antarctic Expedition. The National Archives, London (TNA) CO 78/211/2.) Of course, taxation of whaling was not an option for the Third Reich. A German sector in Antarctica would have been the guarantee for the free whaling of the German ships in the surrounding waters.

¹² LÜDECKE – SUMMERHAYES (2012): 18.

¹³ No need to emphasize, that only for the sake of scientific research, the organization of an expensive and complicated polar expedition would not have been possible at the time.

¹⁴ „(The whale oil) was also used in making soaps and detergents...A by-product of soap manufacture was gliceryne – raw material for nitro-glycerine...Military uses included explosives and lubrication of precision instruments.” LÜDECKE – SUMMERHAYES (2012): 13. In the summer of 1938, Hermann Göring was very displeased with the production of explosives and he said the following on a

continue his covered military operations in the (South) Atlantic region.¹⁵ The above-mentioned strong political-economic-military relations proved sufficient to begin the preparations for an adventurous exploration journey – and on the eve of the Second World War, Nazi Germany entered into the fight for the „colonization“ of Antarctica again.

The project was grandiose – but the implementation was not easy. The appearance of a new rival power in the area was undesirable for all countries, that were concerned in Antarctic issues; moreover Germany was extremely dangerous in all respects. Great Britain observed all German activities very mistrustfully on the oceans and seas of the world. The United Kingdom and Australia supposed, that the *Kriegsmarine* took into consideration to build a secret military base in the Antarctic region to supply his auxiliary cruisers or submarines in times of war.¹⁶ The British-Australian fear was not groundless, but – against all subsequent theories – there are no data or information about a German station in the South Atlantic region before or during the Second World War; the guidelines of the next planned (1939/40) Antarctic expedition do not contain any references or feedbacks about a supply depot, either.¹⁷ Chile and Argentina also were not relaxed: there were large uninhabited territories, islands and „switchback roads“

Four Year Plan-meeting: „*The earlier results of the Four Your Plan were not satisfying...The situation is catastrophic in the field of gunpowders and explosives*“. (Vorbereitung der Reichsverteidigung. Bundesarchiv–Militärarchiv, Freiburg (BAMA) RW 19/1831. 221.)

¹⁵ Although Germany turned back to Antarctica only in the middle of the 1930's, the Atlantic region played an emphasized role for the German Navy in the whole interwar period. The German government – also in the era of the Weimar Republic and not only after 1933 – tried to circumvent the articles of the Versailles Treaty in every way. One of the methods was the detailed mapping of the Atlantic Ocean. German research vessels – for example the *Meteor* between 1925–1927 – did meteorological, nautical, oceanographic, biological, geographical and geophysical investigations in the Atlantic region. FISCHER, F.: „*A háború utáni háború*“. *Az európai hatalmi rivalizálás dél-amerikai dimenziója Németország és Chile haditengerészeti és légi kapcsolatainak tükrében 1919-1939*. Pécs, 2002. (FISCHER 2002) 147-151.) Officially, these were also the main tasks of the German Antarctic Expedition 1938/39. RITSCHER, A.: *Deutsche Antarktische Expedition 1938/39 mit dem Flugzeugstützpunkt der Deutschen Lufthansa A. G. M. S. „Schwabenland“, Kapitän A. Kottas, ausgeführt unter der Leitung von Kapitän A. Ritscher*. Wissenschaftliche und fliegerische Ergebnisse. Erster Band – Textteil; Bilder- und Kartenteil. Leipzig, 1942. 2. Of course, the results of these scientific researches were used not only for civilian, but military goals – and the *Reichs-* or *Kriegsmarine* have always been in the background. The reconsidered German naval doctrines after the First World War in full context: FISCHER, F.: *Die südamerikanischen Ausbildungsreisen der deutschen Kreuzer. Theorie und Praxis des Kreuzerkrieges (1924-1938)*. IN: *Regionalgeschichten – Nationalgeschichten. Festschrift für Gerhard Wanner zum 65. Geburtstag*. Weber, W. Feldkirch, 2004. 349-380.

¹⁶ Nazi basis in the Antarctic. NAA MP150/1, 449/201/807. This file contains a letter from Australian naval commander Griffiths Bowen to the Secretary of Naval Board from 1941 about potential German supply bases in the South Atlantic or Antarctic area. The short response of the Naval Board establishes, that „*quite possible, that the Nazis – or their friends – have a base in the Antarctic...*“ Ibid.

¹⁷ Richtlinien für die Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Deutschen Antarktis-Expedition. Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde (BABL) R 2/18372). After the success of the first expedition, the German government immediately began to organize a new one – but because of the outbreak of the Second World War, the preparations were stopped.

in *Tierra del Fuego*, geographically very close to the mainland of Antarctica. Chile realized, that the German Navy has got photos, films and scientific data about hidden fjords and erratically meandering water paths in South Patagonia.¹⁸ Similar natural hideouts would have been perfect locations for a secret military station in these labyrinths of channels, and the two Latin-American states troubled about their territorial sovereignty – it was not inconceivable, that Germany will use a covert place in *Tierra del Fuego* to establish a base behind their backs. Although both of the two countries were the symphatizer of the Nazi Germany, this possibility was of course an unacceptable and upsetting option for them. Moreover, „Germany’s intersts in Antarctica had begun to worry the USA. By early 1939 President Franklin D. Roosevelt had come to belive that a German presence near the Antarctic Peninsula posed a potential threat to the solidarity and defence of the Western Hemisphere should a second world war occur.”¹⁹ The Third Reich stirred up the hornet’s nest with its Antarctic expedition; but first and last, its most unrelenting rival was Norway in this question.

For the execution of the polar mission, the German government chartered the catapult ship *Schwabenland* from the *Lufthansa*.²⁰ To choose one of the locations of historical German discoveries as research zone, it would not have been a good choice. Kaiser-Wilhelm-II.-Land was the part of the Australian sector; Prinzregent-Luitpold-Land was located in the British Antarctic Territory²¹ – both of these were under official and strong claims. After a short hesitation, the Germans had decided: the target of the expedition will be the Antarctic region between 12°W and 20°E. Although the Norwegians did more discoveries there in the previous decade, it was formally an unclaimed area. Nevertheless, Wohlthat exactly knew, that the international confrontation is unavoidable and the plan of the expedition cannot be hidden totally before the watchful eyes of the concerned powers. The real tasks of the mission²² were top secret, but the fact of a polar journey itself

¹⁸ FISCHER (2002): 58-60. German ships, as *Meteor*, *Emden*, *Karlsruhe* and *Schlesien* – that executed (officially) training and scientific tasks with the permission of the germanophile Chilean government – collected materials about the area between 1926-1938. Ibid. 60.

¹⁹ LÜDECKE – SUMMERHAYES (2012): 90.

²⁰ *Schwabenland* was originally a steam freighter, but after her reconstruction in 1934, it functioned as „swimming” or „floating” airbase on the Atlantic Ocean. The ship was able to carry seaplanes on her board and – with the help of a steam catapult – launch them into the air. The *Lufthansa* used the *Schwabenland* in the serve of the German transatlantic mail service. The ship’s main task was to put the German mail-planes on her board in the middle of the ocean and after refuelling, launch them towards to their mainland bases on the shores of Africa or South America. MITTERHUBER, S.: *Die deutschen Katapultflugzeuge und Schleuderschiffe. Entwicklung, Einsatz und Technik*. Bonn, 2004. 118.

²¹ The Australian sector located between 45–160°E; the British between 20–80°W. HEADLAND, R. K.: *Chronological List of Antarctic Expeditions and Related Historical Events*. Irthingborough, 1989. (Headland 1989) 291. 263.)

²² Besides territorial claims, whaling and scientific research, the *Kriegsmarine* also ordered a concrete military task for the expedition. On her return journey, the *Schwabanland* had to visit the small islands of Trinidade and Martin Vaz off the coasts of Brasil to observe: „Are there anchorages to give protection for fuel depots, for equipment for auxiliary cruisers, and for other similar military

was not entirely. To guile the opponents, „as Roald Amundsen had done 27 years previously to deceive his rival, Robert Falcon Scott, the expedition was officially listed as directed to the Arctic. Orders for materials specified that they were for an Arctic expedition.“²³ The *Schwabenland* – with two Dornier-10t-Wal seaplanes on her board – finally left the docks of Hamburg on the 17 December 1938 and under the command of veteran polar researcher Alfred Ritscher,²⁴ began the journey to her operation district. Of course, the illusion of an Arctic expedition shortly dissolved – otherwise Norway was very mistrustful about the German goals from the beginning.

Whaling in the Southern Ocean also was a cardinal issue for Norway: the Scandinavian state was very active in polar questions. In the period of 1929-1937, Norwegian whalers and explorers visited the Antarctica several times between the British and the Australian sector and they also hoisted flags and gave geographical names in the region, from 20°W to 45°E. Aboard the ship *Norvegia*, Captain Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen – commissioned by Norwegian consul and whaler owner Lars Christensen – discovered more areas in the Antarctic continent during his expedition in 1929–30 and named these as „Kronprins Olav Kyst“ (Prince Olav Coast; January 1930; 40–45°E)²⁵ and „Kronprinsesse Märtha Kyst“. (»Crown« Princess Martha Coast; February 1930; between 5°E and 20°W or in the vicinity of 7,5°W).²⁶ Next year, the *Norvegia* cruised off the Antarctic coasts again and Riiser-Larsen mapped a new territory in February 1931 between 20–33°E (or 25–33°E) – it was named as „Prinsesse Ragnhild Kyst“ (or: „Prinsesse Ragnhild Land“; Princess Ragnhild Coast).²⁷ In the same year, „Captain H. Halvorsen on the floating factory *Sevilla*, sighted land in the vicinity of longitude 14°E“.²⁸ He bestowed the name:

requirements?...Are there any installations for telecommunication? Is it possible to supply ships with fresh water? Do the Islands provide animals and plants to supplement U-boat supplies? LÜDECKE – SUMMERHAYES (2012): 76.

²³ Ibid. 24.

²⁴ Ritscher was the member of the so-called Schröder-Stranz Expedition to Svalbard (Spitsbergen) in 1912. GEORGI, J.: *Polarforscher Kapitän Alfred Ritscher (1879-1963)*. Polarforschung 32. 1962. 125. In the First World War, he was the commander of an aircraft company of the German Navy in Flanders. LÜDECKE – SUMMERHAYES (2012): 30. Alfred Ritscher. BAMA MSG 225/137.) As ship captain and pilot, accompanied by his polar experience, he was absolutely the fittest – and perhaps the only – person in the whole Germany to manage the mission.

²⁵ Composite map of Antarctica. NAA, AA1964/7, 28. 26-27. MILLS (2003): 540. HEADLAND (1989): 285. (We need to mention, that there is a contradiction between the sources. Comp. map of A. marks the name „Queen Maud Land“ instead „Prince Olav Coast“. It is strange, because Queen Maud Land is the name of the later announced Norwegian Antarctic sector; Prince Olav Coast is the easternmost part of Queen Maud Land.) Nevertheless, the information is not necessarily incorrect. „There are several accounts of most voyages (commissioned by Lars Christensen) and repetitions have produced some conflict of dates (and occasionally places); further, positions were not always accurate, and features were variously named.“ RIFFENBURGH, Beau: *Encyclopedia of the Antarctic I-II*. New York, 2007. 229.

²⁶ Composite map of Antarctica. NAA, AA1964/7, 28. 26–27. Portion of map of Antarctica. NAA, AA1964/7, 30. MILLS (2003): 535. HEADLAND (1989): 285.

²⁷ Composite map of Antarctica. NAA, AA1964/7, 28. 27. MILLS (2003): 535. HEADLAND (1989): 287.

²⁸ Composite map of Antarctica. NAA, AA1964/7, 28. 28.

„Prinsesse Astrid Land” (or: „Prinsesse Astrid Kyst”; Princess Astrid Coast).²⁹ The above-mentioned Lars Christensen, during his last journey to Antarctica in 1936–1937, discovered „Prins Harald Kyst” (or: „Prins Harald Land”; February 1937; Prince Harald Coast) between 34–40°E.³⁰ Seemingly, the situation was obvious: the discoverers were Norwegians, therefore the Norwegian Kingdom is entitled to announce her legal claims and sovereignty over these areas. But the Germans were ready to query and revise this point of view after their successful expedition. The use of the catapult ship *Schwabenland* and her seaplanes was not a random decision: the main cartographic task of the expedition was to construct a detailed survey map („Übersichtskarte” in German) about the territory between 12°W and 20°E, with the help of aerial photography. In a prospective sovereignty dispute, the German government planned to refer to the following: former Norwegian maps were inaccurate; the locations of geographical objects were not marked precisely; in some cases, the Norwegian „discoveries” were based only on eye-observations without disembarkation; there are lots of natural objects in the areas, which were not seen by the sailors. Of course, the premise of this policy – to vindicate the sovereignty rights on the basis of the *real* discovery – was a very accurate German map – and the Nazi government hoped to have this exactly from Captain Ritscher’s research team and from their hydroplanes.³¹ Moreover, Norway didn’t wield effective sovereignty over Antarctic regions. There were, of course, no Norwegian garrisons or research stations in the region;³² the deployment of a German – for example meteorological – base would have been a strong argument in an international judicial dispute.³³

After the *Schwabenland* had left Hamburg in the second half of December 1938 and turned to South, the Norwegians realized, that their interests in the South

²⁹ MILLS (2003): 534. HEADLAND (1989): 288. Portion of map of Antarctica. NAA, AA1964/7, 30. Because of the contradictions between the sources, the detailed history of the Norwegian discoveries is chaotic. For example: in 1933-1934, Lars Christensen discovered an *another* Princess Astrid Land, but it was „not Halvorsens »Prinsesse Astrid Land«...now called Queen Leopold and Queen Astrid Coast.” HEADLAND (1989): 292.

³⁰ Composite map of Antarctica. NAA, AA1964/7, 28. 30. MILLS (2003) 531. HEADLAND 1989, 297.

³¹ Mention must be made, that the Norwegians – during the expeditions, organised by Lars Christensen – also used seaplanes for aerial survey. (Composite map of Antarctica. NAA, AA1964/7, 28. 26-30.) Nevertheless, the subsequent German „Übersichtskarte” was really more accurate compared to Norwegian maps.

³² On the basis of the international law, effective sovereignty is an important criteria for legal territorial claims. Because of climatic factors, it was not easy to achieve in the Antarctica. CSATLÓS, E.: *A szuverenitás gyakorlatának nemzetközi közjogban felmerült problémái az Antarktiszon.* Iustum Aequum Salutare, 8/1. 2012. 118. For example, Great Britain established small meteorological or supply stations in the region (not in the mainland, but on small islands off the Antarctic coasts) to enhance its claims. The administration centre of the South Atlantic territories were the Falkland Islands – but of course, this was an administration trick. The Falklands were not uninhabited – although geographically not an Antarctic region, neither, they are not so far from the White Continent –, therefore the effective sovereignty – formally – came true over the British Antarctic Territory.

³³ Otherwise, as we mentioned above, the construction of a German base was not planned in 1938/39 or in 1939/40 – but theoretically it was not impossible.

Atlantic are in great danger. They had at the moment only theoretical rights, but not officially announced and recognized claims. Adolf Hoel, director of the *Norway's Svalbard and Arctic Ocean Survey* was the best informed Norwegian person about the planned German expedition. Although originally he also only suspected, that the *Schwabenland's* real target will be not the Arctic, last on 22 December Hoel informed the Norwegian Foreign Ministry about his doubts, and capacitated them to find a quick solution.³⁴ His efforts were not useless and the Norwegian parliament took up the German challenge: on 14 January 1939, by right of its former discoveries, Norway – not only announced its claims, but – formally annexed the *whole* territory (20°W to 45°E) between the British and Australian sectors in a royal decree.³⁵ The ca. 2,7 million square kilometres large area was named as „*Dronning Maud Land*“ (Queen Maud Land). On the same day „*the Norwegian Government formally recognised the boundaries of the Australian Antarctic Territory, as defined in British Order in Council of 7 February 1933.*“³⁶

The unconcealed annexation of Queen Maud Land – five days before the German expedition had reached his operation zone – was an unexpected and intrepid step. The unification of the former Norwegian discoveries in a large geographical sector was a troublesome development for Germany – although the real strength of the Norwegian announcement depended on the reactions of the true and concerned world powers. Normally, the recognition of this claim wouldn't have been so obvious. But against Nazi Germany – together with its suspicious activities in the Atlantic region –, the answer was not really questionable. After some cogitation, Great Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand had recognized the annexation, although only in the moment of the beginning of the Second World war, exactly on 1 September 1939.³⁷ Of course, the Germans ignored the royal proclamation. „*Councillor of State Wohlthat informed Ritscher personally by encoded radio transmission on January 17 about the Norwegian claim*“,³⁸ and he told the following to the expedition leader: „*Your instructions remains unchanged, stop.*“³⁹ The *Schwabenland* operated in the Antarctic area between 19 January and 6 February 1939.⁴⁰ Under the excellent lead of Captain Ritscher – and also thanks to the good weather –, the German research team successfully accomplished the mission and achieved great and unexampled results. Between 12°W and 20°E

³⁴ LÜDECKE – SUMMERHAYES (2012): 50-51.

³⁵ HEADLAND (1989): 300.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Previously, the attitude of the Scandinavian state about the boundaries of the British and Australian sector was not unambiguous. But the Norwegian recognition on 14 January 1939 solved this problem. On 1 September 1939, the British Foreign Office informed the Norwegians, that „*His Majesty's governments in the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth of Australia and New Zealand, recognise Norwegian sovereignty over the territory in question.*“ Norwegian Claims Part 3. NAA A981, ANT 51 PART3.

³⁸ LÜDECKE – SUMMERHAYES (2012): 50.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 53. 66.

„350,000 square kilometres of territory were photographed and in all 600,000 square kilometres recommoitred by eye-observation and photography. Material was collected in the course of routine flights totalling in all over 10,000 kilometres, a distance corresponding to a quarter of the world's circumference. A further 2,000 kilometres were covered in seven special flights.”⁴¹ The territory was named as „Neu-Schwabenland” (New Swabia) and geographical objects got German names.⁴² During the aerial survey flights, „darts with inscribed swastikas were dropped every 16 miles”.⁴³ The Germans also executed two demonstrative landing and hoisted their flags on the mainland.⁴⁴ It was a broad hint, but after all only an informal territorial pretension, because „the German claim to ownership...never pursued through parliamentary process.”⁴⁵ The air photos and the later constructed preliminary survey map exceeded all expectations: „The mapping of the district is more exact than that any other country making claims in the Antarctic. The Expedition is proud to have contributed towards the results that Germany must be consulted regarding the sovereignty of the Antarctic continent”⁴⁶ – wrote the above-mentioned German press article about the success of the expedition. After the *Schwabenland* on 11 April put into the port of Cuxhaven, the German government had began the organization of the follow-up Antarctic expedition immediately – under Alfred Ritscher’s lead again. The expedition in 1938/39, first of all was a reconnaissance mission; Wohlthat planned a more grandioze manœuvre in 1939/40 with the participation of *Schwabenland*, steamboat *Kehdingen* and *Wal I* whale catcher.⁴⁷ In the end, because of the outbreak of the Second World War, the new mission was dropped. No need to emphasize, that the sovereignty dispute between Norway and Germany never continued before an international forum. In the year of 1940, German troops invaded Norway – but after the fall of the Third Reich, Germany had absolutely lost all of its – theoretical or informal – rights in the Antarctica again. The Norwegian annexation was secured by Germany’s defeat – and Queen Maud Land formally remained under Norwegian sovereignty.⁴⁸

The broad contexts of the expedition are also interesting. The *Kriegsmarine*

⁴¹ German Antarctic Expedition. TNA CO 78/211/2. This archival source contains the official accounts of the German press reports about the expedition with British annotations. The documents were sent in May 1939 by the British Embassy at Berlin for the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs at London.

⁴² For example: Mühlig-Hoffman-Gebirge, Drygalskiberge, Wohlthatmassiv, Alexander-v.-Humboldt-Gebirge, Ritschergipfel. BRUNK (1986): 26. 33. 35. 38.

⁴³ MILLS (2003): 535.

⁴⁴ LÜDECKE – SUMMERHAYES (2012): 64.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 51.

⁴⁶ German Antarctic Expedition. TNA CO 78/211/2. A British employee appended the following comment to the last sentence: „I should imagine, that this is the chief object.” Ibid.

⁴⁷ Richtlinien für die Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Deutschen Antarktis-Expedition. BABL R 2/18372. 2-3.

⁴⁸ As we mentioned above, nowadays – because of the Antarctic Treaty – it is a „frozen” territorial claim.

exactly knew, that the German whaling – because of the British naval superiority in the Atlantic Ocean – will be impossible in war times.⁴⁹ They ordered therefore auxiliary cruisers to the Antarctic area during the whaling seasons to destroy or capture the whaling ships of their enemies. In February 1941, auxiliary cruiser *Pinguin*, under the command of Captain Ernst-Felix Krüder, really captured the whole – and absolutely unsuspecting – Norwegian whaling fleet (two factory and one supply ships with lots of whale catchers) in the far South Atlantic region.⁵⁰ Because of the Schwabenland-expedition and similar military manoeuvres, before and during the war, the Royal Navy – as we mentioned above –, worried about the establishment of a secret German supply depot in the area. Moreover, for the United Kingdom, there was also the problem of the two Latin-American states, Chile and – especially – Argentina. Chile announced its claim on the area between 53–90°W – which was the part of the British Antarctic Territory – in 1940; Argentina did the same in 1942 on the territory between 25–39°W – also the portion of the British region.⁵¹ These were very unfriendly, but not surprising steps in the middle of the Second World War war against Great Britain. But finally, the South American countries didn't risk their neutral status and the open confrontation, although Argentina was very close to get into a military conflict with the United Kingdom about the question of the Deception Island, located off the coasts of the Antarctic Peninsula. In 1941, the British „destroyed oil fuel installations and coal stock on Deception Island to deny their use to enemy raiders.“⁵² Between 1942–1944, Argentinian and British ships visited the island several times: the sailors hoisted their national flags and removed their opponent's emblems – but in the end, the British replanted their banners and established there a permanent meteorological station.⁵³ On the whole, Argentina couldn't size the opportunity during the war to enhance its Antarctic claims.

The Norwegians didn't forget the incompleteness of their former discoveries. Between 1949–1952, a combined Norwegian–British–Swedish expedition operated in the area of Queen Maud Land. Besides widespread scientific research, one of the unvoiced political goal of this expedition was to revise to results of the German Antarctic Expedition 1938/39⁵⁴. „The German maps were used to guide the NBSA expedition, and, later the expeditions of countries planning to set up bases in Dronning Maud Land.“⁵⁵ Although the German threat ceased, the British

⁴⁹ Handelskrieg zur See. Walfangfragen. BAMA RW 19/1556. 297.

⁵⁰ Kriegstagebuch des Hilfskreuzers „Schiff 33“ („Pinguin“). BAMA RM 100/3. 107–137.

⁵¹ Stunz 2008, 18.; Headland 1989, 303. Of course, Chile and Argentina also were opponents in this question. The pretensions of the three countries partially covered each other, because the Argentinian claim later was extended to 74°W. MILLS (2003): 35.

⁵² HEADLAND (1989): 304.

⁵³ Ibid 304–308.

⁵⁴ NAYLOR – DEAN – SIEGERT: *The IGY and the ice sheet: surveying Antarctica*. Journal of Historical Geography, 34/4. 2008. 574.

⁵⁵ SUMMERHAYES, C. – BEECHING, P.: *Hitler's Antarctic base: the myth and the reality*. Polar Record 43/1. 2007. 5.

and Norwegians exactly knew, that there are also other possible rivals. The expedition „*provided an opportunity to investigate the region before other, less-friendly wartime neutrals like Argentina or Chile, or emerging world powers like the USA or USSR, had to chance to do so.*”⁵⁶ The shadow of „*Neu-Schwabenland*” disappeared for Norway only after the success of the international polar expedition between 1949-1952.

56 NAYLOR – DEAN – SIEGERT (2008): 574.

