

## PRUSSIA - SECOND CONFLICT

In the meantime, tempers had been brewing again with Prussia over the unresolved situation with the southern duchies. The makeshift settlement of the previous decade had solved nothing, and now Prussia intended to settle the score, using the Duchies as a premise for their aggression.

The ambitions of the German politicians like Bismarck were cause for a good portion of the difficulties. One elderly Dane, born and raised in the Duchy of Slesvig explained that everything had been cordial in the Duchies until the German propaganda began. "We lived together, sir, Dane and German, without ever quarreling, until they came with big books and told us the [maps] were all wrong, and [that] Slesvig was part of [Germany]" (Skinner, 123).

On January 4, 1864, in the midst of these growing tensions, MATHIAS and BENGTA had another son - OLOF PETER MATHIASSEN. MATHIAS blessed him on January 21<sup>st</sup>, but the notation in the LDS Records for this event brings up some questions which shall be addressed shortly.

At the end of that month, Prussian and Austrian troops marched on Denmark's southern border where entrenched Danish troops lay in wait. In less than a week, with only minimal fighting, the Danish high command ordered its own troops to leave its stronghold and withdraw to the north. The decision stunned the soldiers as well as the nation. Many suspected treason, but the troops were forced, in the dead of winter, to begin the humiliating retreat from their hard-built entrenchments and redoubts, dashing their hopes for victory.

"The first of this unlooked-for event nearly caused a revolution in Copenhagen." A boatload of Scandinavian-American volunteers, who had returned from America to fight for Denmark arrived at this time. "All hands crowded to the gangway with eager inquiries, asking in a breath, 'Had there been a battle?' 'Where was the army?' etc. The old pilot shook his head: 'They have left the Danevirke!' said he mournfully. Had a shell exploded in our midst the effect would have been less startling than was this simple announcement. Tears stood in every eye, curses were growled between clenched teeth...and my Danish friends lost all their merriment" (Skinner, 10-13).

Perhaps you can recall the tension and panic of the Cuban missile crisis, or the confusion and despair caused by the crushing defeat at Pearl Harbor. If so, you can perhaps understand to some degree the impact of these developments on the lives of MATHIAS and BENGTA and their neighbors.

Closer to home, perhaps you can recall the spellbound preoccupation in North America for the progression of Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm in Iraq, and can perhaps taste a glimpse of the tension of the day - except for the fact that the Danes, unlike our NATO troops,

were in the same predicament as the Iraqi troops - entrenched in defense of their own borders against a force overwhelmingly more powerful and skilled in war than themselves - and yet overconfident of their own abilities.\\\

Just as that conflict dominated all discussion in North America during the months it escalated, likewise the conflict with Prussia attracted the undivided attention of the Danish populace. "The one topic of conversation in drawing-rooms, in coffee-houses, among people of every class, was General de Meza's retreat from Southern Slesvig" (Skinner, 12-13).

The troops were demoralized by their retreat from their nation's greatest historical shrine. One officer wrote, "The retreat was terrible. No one who had been there could ever forget it." There was snow, sleet, freezing rain and icy roads. But most difficult of all was the overhanging gloom among the troops. Many soldiers simply refused to continue on, and slumped into a snow drift to perish from the cold or be captured by the pursuing Prussians." "It was heartbreaking to see the miserable people," concluded another officer (LaCour, 299-300).

## THE DANISH PATRIOT

With the mood of the nation understood, the LDS Membership record concerning OLOF MATHIASEN's earlier blessing begins to make possible sense. What is different about the clerical entry is that OLOF's name is listed as "OLUF PEDER OMBERG." In addition, his parents are listed as "MATHIAS NIELSEN OMBERG" and "BENTHA OMBERG", the only example I have found of them ever using the name "OMBERG." However, its use is apparently not just a fluke, for its timing suggests a good reason for its appearance.

The name "OMBERG" had been used by other relatives of MATHIAS. His grandfather OLOF JONSSON occasionally used the name OMBERG or ONBERG. The name was even passed on generations after MATHIAS in the example of one of MATHIAS' grandsons, EDGAR OMBERG NELSON (otherwise known as Ted) who was apparently given the Americanized form of "OMBERG."

One likely clue for the possible meaning and use of this name is that in MATHIAS' day, there existed a company within the Swedish Artillery Regiment known as "OMBERG Company." With all this, a logical, but as-yet-unproven possibility starts to fall into place.

Keep in mind that Denmark was at this time besieged by a powerful nation to the south. Not only was MATHIAS a foreigner in Denmark, but he had recently joined what was considered by some to be a foreign faith. He was very possibly treated with suspicion, especially when we take the precarious events of those few weeks into account.

My guess (until I can prove or disprove it) is that MATHIAS likely served in Denmark's defense during the first Danish-Prussian war in Sweden's OMBERG artillery company, and was now, in the midst of the second war, using this military name to remind his Danish neighbors of his Danish service and Danish allegiance. But this is just an educated guess for now, a starting point for further search.

In May of 1864, while both the Danish-Prussian war and the American Civil War were raging, MATHIAS' last brother, OLA, decided to join his two older brothers in America, and took his widowed mother ELNA with him. Where MATHIAS' brothers actually settled in America is not yet known, but the St. Paul, Minnesota region near HANS MATTSON (BENGTA's former neighbor) settled was, due to HANS' own recruiting efforts in Sweden, a place where whole communities from Kristianstad County were transplanted. So it is a likely place to start looking for MATHIAS's brothers and their descendants.

In Denmark, things were looking grim for MATHIAS and BENGTA as the Prussian army rolled northward. In April, two months after the Danish army's humiliating retreat from the Danevirke, the troops were driven from their second line of defense with heavy casualties. One English reporter on site recorded how one brave officer "was in the thick of it. I can fancy, ' says Skinner, "how his loud trumpet-like tones shouted encouragement to the wavering soldiers, and how he threw himself recklessly in advance. His company was cut to pieces in covering the Danish retreat" (58).

In June, the Prussians took the strategic island of Als, Denmark's third line of defense. "The loss of Als," writes Derry, "where the Danish casualties were ten times those of the invading Germans, created such panic in Copenhagen and such despondency in Jutland (where occupying forces were already levying a war tax)" that Prussia's plans of advancing towards Copenhagen were unnecessary (248).

Instead, the Prussian troops chose to advance northward (towards MATHIAS and BENGTA) to capture the whole peninsula of Jutland. Their methods were unforgiving. They levied a war tax on the Danish cities and villages which fell into their hands.\

In addition to the war tax, Danish civilians had even more to worry about from the Prussians. When a surprise "placed twenty Prussians in tgeh hands of a Danish detachment that had landed by night on the Jutish coast; ...in retaliation, the Prussian General burnt the village where his men had been taken" (Skinner, 95). Perhaps you can get a sense of what MATHIAS and his family must have felt as the oppressive Prussian war maching rapidly rolled northwards towards them.

In early July, a hardy Danish detachment attempted to halt the advance of the Prussians just south of Alborg, likely within earshot of MATHIAS and BENGTA. The commander of the Danish detachment ordered an untimely bayonet charge - which led to the slaughter and defeat of scores of his brave Danish soldiers.

Within eight days, Prussian troops occupied Alborg, the city just across the narrow Norre Sound and within view of MATHIAS and BENGTA. Jenson writes, "the victorious Prussians...caused all kinds of trouble to the missionaries who were laboring in that part of Denmark; thus in Alborg, the German troops took possession of the Saints' meeting hall, and thus prevented meetings being held there for some time. The Danish soldiers, fleeing before the superior forces of the Prussians, hastened to Frederikshavn, where they embarked for Copenhagen or other points on the Danish islands. The German tgroops followed in close pursuit

and overran the entire peninsula of Jutland” (Jenson, 182).

“The entire peninsula was now under German allied military administration. The Danish civil authorities were ordered, on pain of severe penalties, to remain at their posts, and [an enormous war tax] was levied on the whole of Jutland” (Westergaard, 72).

In addition, the Prussian occupying army “was to be fed and lodged at the expense of Jutland, supplied with fodder for its cattle, and with such means of transport as might be required” (Skinner, 237). As to the last requirement, it is quite likely that MATHIAS the wheelwright had some unwelcome customers.

During that same year, a fire broke out at Rodslet Manor. MATHIAS likely assisted in fighting the blaze - but thatched roofs made firefighting difficult and dangerous. It is of course quite possible that the blaze may have been a Prussian retaliation similar to the village burnt by the invading Prussian general only weeks earlier.

With Jutland in its firm grasp, Prussia was in a very strong negotiating position, and demanded favorable terms from Denmark. “Did Denmark hesitate,” says Skinner, “she was threatened with the entire ruin of Jutland, and a few German newspapers gave the dastardly advice to grind down this province until Copenhagen submitted” (Skinner, 238).

Fortunately for MATHIAS’ family and the rest of Jutland, the harsh Prussian occupation ended only weeks after it had begun. In October, Denmark surrendered the southern duchies of Slesvig and Holstein to the German Confederations as settlement for the final treaty.

In this final treaty, Prussia, “having used Slesvig-Holstein as a pretense for attacking Denmark...laid aside all barefaced acquisitiveness when the booty [was] handed over.” Article XII of the treaty reveals their initial motive for the conflict: “The Governments of Prussia and Austria shall be repaid the expenses of the war by the Duchies” (Skinner, 239, 240). Once the map had been successfully altered, it became clear that enhanced prestige and increased tax revenues, not idealistic nationalistic goals, were the real aims of the campaign. [Added: Others have noted that the acquisition of ports on the North Sea was also part of the motivation for acquiring the duchies.]

A mile or two east of Rodslet Manor, there stands to this day an earthen bulwark fifty-two meters (over 150 feet!) high; a silent witness to the Prussian occupation of 1864.