

# H-Net Reviews

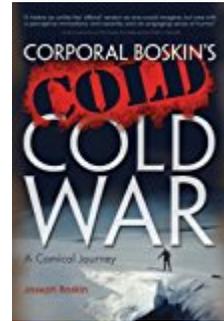
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Joseph Boskin. *Corporal Boskin's Cold Cold War: A Comical Journey*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011. 224 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8156-0964-3.

Reviewed by Javan D. Frazier (Middle Georgia College)

Published on H-War (May, 2013)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



Joseph Boskin provides readers with interesting insights into his service during the Korean War. Boskin did not serve in Korea but was stationed in Greenland while involved in a study to build a new base there. The author provides many of the usual anecdotes of military life, such as the longing for female companionship; the near overwhelming desire to return home; animosities with officers; hostilities with other branches of service; and the mind-numbing duties of drill, patrol, and kitchen patrol. Yet Boskin sets his memoir of service apart from most others by detailing the challenges and frustrations of operating in Greenland and of a historian trying to write the history of an event as it actually occurred and not as some wanted it to be.

Boskin was involved with the Transportation Arctic Group (TRARG), which was a top-secret, scientific, expeditionary group stationed at Thule Air Force Base in northern Greenland. The purpose of the American presence was to monitor Soviet activities and prevent their bombers from approaching American or Western European targets. Since the base was supposed to be secret, it became galling for Boskin and for others stationed there to realize just how much the Soviets knew about the base as they broadcasted this information on their state radio channels.

The book provides vivid portrayals of the dangers and hazards of working in an area within the Arctic Circle. Equipment and men sometimes plummeted into glacial crevices so deep that no one could hear the crash when they reached the bottom. Whiteout conditions imperiled soldiers on the ground as well as in the air. The constant sunlight, as Boskin was stationed there during the summer of 1953, caused havoc with nearly everyone's sys-

tem. Even unique problems of sanitation emerged as no plumbing could be installed underground.

Boskin describes his frustration with the mission; he felt that the money being spent could have been used more efficiently and for other purposes. He could not understand why another base was being constructed in Greenland, given how difficult it was to travel by air and land. Either the weather hampered operations in both areas or crevices meant your end on the ground. Part of the mission was to identify crevices to allow safe transportation but this proved problematic. Too easily, unidentified crevices emerged or previously safe crevices were no longer so.

Boskin's professional frustrations related to his duties of collating various officers' reports on the base and writing the mission's official history. Officers bristled at having to deliver the reports to Boskin and became annoyed at his constant pursuit of these reports. Boskin's most significant challenge came with his dealings with the commanding officer (CO) of the base. Boskin's goal was to write a report that described how things actually were on the base while the CO wanted to show that all was going well. Boskin wonderfully portrays the agony he endured while trying to reconcile the demands of his CO with his professional obligations as an historian. The arguments that he recounts show that the men had different agendas and that one was ultimately going to win: the CO.

*Corporal Boskin's Cold Cold War* provides few details about his service after this Greenland mission. Since the mission's history was written upon his return to the United States, details of his writing endeavor would have been interesting to learn about, especially for historians.

Most of the arguments that Boskin describes occurred in Greenland, but undoubtedly the tensions became much more intense once the business of actually writing the history started.

Boskin also leaves some details out, forcing the reader to make some assumptions. For example, he mentions his involvement with a woman named Sandi prior to and during his time in service. Yet he does not state that he finally married her but the reader must assume. Boskin also describes his reading of the declassified report that he wrote some fifty years earlier and notes that it was bland. The reader must then assume that he lost his battle with his CO. Boskin mentions that a return trip was planned to Greenland after he left in the fall of 1953 but says nothing more about this trip. Again, the reader must assume that he did not return and that he left the service sometime after completing his work with the project in Greenland.

Boskin writes that this work is an example of verisimilitude history, but I think it is much stronger than that. He uses oral history, primary reports from his time in Greenland, personal letters, and other resources that can stand up to scholarly scrutiny. His book provides readers with a strong perspective of what it was like to fight in the Cold War without actually firing a shot. His insights into the frustrations and peculiarities of serving in the military during the Cold War offers readers an interesting and unique perspective. The book includes several pictures of personnel and equipment at Thule along with poems and songs recited and sung by personnel. Though the author was apparently not able to write the history that he wished about his Greenland mission, he has now finished what he wanted to do some fifty years ago, providing a more thorough history of the Thule Air Force Base in 1953.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

**Citation:** Javan D. Frazier. Review of Boskin, Joseph, *Corporal Boskin's Cold Cold War: A Comical Journey*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. May, 2013.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=35980>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.