

How Professor Arne Ness and I Conquered NATO

The History of a Norwegian Nonviolent Action

Jens Bjerneboe

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From Norway, My Norway (1968) Translated by Esther Greenleaf Murer

Jens Bjerneboe (1920–1976) is one of Norway's most noted post-WW authors; a poet, playwright, essayist and novelist. He was a complex personality embodying a variety of influences from anthroposophy to anarchism, who was both banned and honored in his home country. He is best known for his fiction, particularly the trilogy, *The History Of Bestiality: Moment Of Freedom* (1966), *Powderhouse* (1969), and *The Silence* (1973) and his novel *The Sharks* (1974). Philosopher Arne Ness is the founder of Deep Ecology.

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It is some years since Professor Ness and I took NATO by storm. If I have not made this feat public before, it is because doing so at the time could have had unpleasant consequences for subordinates who were mixed up in the affair. Today, however—several years after the event—we need not expect that anyone will be harmed.

It began in the most innocuous manner conceivable: Arne Ness and I had planned a weekend at his cottage on Kolsaas (the mountain where the European NATO headquarters is located). We laid in supplies independently of one another, and met at the train to Kolsaas, where it turned out that one of us had brought a can of Russian crabmeat, together with a tin of caviar from that same excellent land.

“Now we'll only eat between meals!” said Ness. After awhile he became thoughtful: “Do you have white wine?” he said. It turned out that I hadn't thought of that; I may have assumed that he was bringing it. Each of us had counted on the other one thinking of that sort of thing. I mention this because it shows how innocent we both are, but also because the lack of a glass of wine to go with the caviar was the reason for what happened afterward.

Machine Guns, Barbed Wire

“They must have wine at NATO,” Ness asserted. “We'll go there and borrow a bottle. Where there are Americans, there is also strong drink.”

We got off the train at Kolsaas and trudged up the broad road which leads to NATO. The entrance was imposing: It glittered with steel, with helmets and bayonets. Machine guns. Barbed wire. Enormous searchlights. Behind the closed iron gate stood the guards.

“I don't think they like us,” I said. “We'll never get in.” “Where there's a will there's a way!” replied Ness. “You can talk to them first.”

I gulped and went all the way up to the cage. I assumed my very strictest officer face—manly, but friendly and genial. I chose the first English-sounding name which occurred to me. The banana firm Fyffes. “Evening, boyz!” I said. “I'm here for a conference with Mr. Fyffes.” At the same time I gestured lightly and discretely at the closed gate.

The sentries were impressed by my military exterior. The gate opened immediately, and Arne Ness and I strode in while the guards saluted. We gave friendly (but distant!) nods, and saluted them, each with our index finger against his temple;; “The telephone is in the guardroom,” said one of the sentries, and we betook ourselves thither. “How’s the Grub?”

Inside the guardroom sat most of the armed personnel. Ness clapped a couple of them on the shoulder in a fatherly fashion and with military tenderness. He spoke kindly: “Hey, boyz! How’s the grub, then? Ya like it here?” With the objectivity of a basic researcher he began a discussion of the technique of attacking with bayonets. They had an awful lot of weapons on them.

Me, I went to the telephone and called the switchboard, and asked them to connect me with Mr. Fyffes. At the switchboard nobody knew where the old boy Fyffes was at the moment. There was even doubt as to whether anyone had seen him for awhile. I asked them not to give up, but to go on looking for him, since it was a very important call. They didn’t find him. I said loudly that I would then have to find him myself—whereupon I hung up.

We bade farewell to the armed forces and went on—to the next bastion. There, Ness did the talking. It was a new, armored barrier with new and awe-inspiring sentries. Ness took off his rucksack and held it out: “Whadya charge to check things here, boyz?” He handed them the rucksack, smiling, but with dignity. It struck me how much he, in fact, resembled a high-ranking officer in mufti.

The guards smiled with pleasure at our speaking to them so casually and democratically. I underscored the fraternization by taking off my own rucksack as well. The steel gate opened amid the flash of bayonets. Under taut and trusting salutes we sauntered in. Our rucksacks we sat down inside. “Take good care of them!” continued Ness; “Nobody knows who may be roaming around here!”

The guards smiled and straightened their backs even more stiffly. It was dark around us, aside from the places which were lit by bright searchlights. We went in. We had only to follow the road; then we came to the third and last barrier. It was less imposing than the previous ones. It was my turn now. Wholly at random I chose something which I felt might work in the situation. “I’m sorry, boyz, but I’ve forgotten the passes. You can get them later.” I smiled broadly, but politely, just in case there were no such things as passes. In that event, my mention of them could be taken as a soldiers’ in-group joke.

There were no problems. The guards were kind and opened, politely for us. They saluted nicely. And, it may be appropriate in this connection to add that one cannot complain of lack of courtesy in the junior workers within NATO in Norway. It was among the people managing the hotel that we first met with mistrust and resistance.

We were now up to the main building, and it was dark and cozy. We could have laid a dozen bombs along the walls, carefully lit their fuses, and then gone our way. But we didn’t think of that. Instead we went to the main entrance, opened the door and went into the vestibule. There stood a porter to take uniform coats and other things. He was a civilian. He looked at us, and something happened in him. He was thinking.

Discovered and Unmasked

“Excuse me,” he said, “what in the world are you doing here?” “We just are here,” I said. We smiled. But he didn’t smile back. He looked coldly at us. There was no doubt what had happened: We were discovered and unmasked. We had forced quantities of armed troops and sentries, we had outwitted an ingenious alarm and security system, but now here we stood before a non-uniformed porter. What machine guns and barbed-wire couldn’t do, this miserable civilian from the hotel management branch could. He had thought for himself.

“We only wanted a bottle of wine,” said Professor Ness. “Please fetch the commanding officer of this place. The commandant. Il commandante!” The man was fetched, and it happened very fast. As if to a bayonet attack, il commandante came storming down the stairs. “How did you get in here?” he yelled. “Per pedes,” replied Professor Ness, “on foot.”

“How did *you* get in?”

I don’t know who or what il commandante was, but he was quite certainly higher than a sergeant. His uniform was imposing, and on his sleeve or chest he bore a lovely badge portraying a Viking ship. Perhaps he was a general or some such. “How did you get in?” he repeated, in a rather loud voice. “We just walked in,” I replied. But Ness cut

me off. "Excuse me," he said, pointing to the Viking ship, "it's possible that we've come to the wrong place. We were going to NATO, but perhaps this is the nautical branch. I mean the Navy, of course, not the Merchant Marine."

For a while, the two gentlemen stood looking at each other. It was a most impressive sight: military power confronting professorial authority. "Do you mean that you simply walked in through the gates?" asked the general doubtfully. "Of course!" replied Ness. "How else could we have come here? Have you seen all that barbed wire out there? Not even to mention the machine guns and bayonets."

"What is your name?" said the major-general. "Arne Ness, professor of philosophy at the University of Oslo." The generalissimo now turned to me: "And yours?" "Jens Bjorneboe. I write a bit for the newspapers and such now and then."

Some kind of transformation took place with the generalissimo. He smiled, but the smile was wry and wan. "And why did you come here? What is the purpose of this?" "We're bringing an atom bomb," I said; "but it's nothing to worry about. It's not the big kind, just the tactical sort. It doesn't hurt much."

Ness cut me off anew: "Don't listen to him!" he said. "He's just kidding. We came to get a bottle of wine, that's all." "Wine?" said the general. "Wine?" "Yes," Ness went on, "We've bought caviar, but we don't have any wine. And it would be a pity if this lovely caviar should be eaten without wine. Don't you agree, general?" "How can you imagine that you could get wine here? At NATO headquarters? Wine?" "Of course we could take brandy," said Ness; "but we think that would be overdoing it. And you don't have vodka, do you? We could settle for whiskey if need be, but not rye, only Scotch."

Further we did not get. Probably an alarm was sounded; the reception area filled with armed troops. Thereafter, we were escorted to the door accompanied by several dozen people with guns and God knows what in their belts. A few minutes later we stood outside the barbed wire, and the same evening we partook of our caviar with a strong and good-tasting cup of tea. We drank it out of glasses, so that it would be a little more Russian.

Afterwards, Ness caught a live mouse with his hands, a sight I have never witnessed before. And, he did it with a deftness which could only come from many years' training in logical empiricism and climbing the Himalayas. But that is another story.

The above is the full and complete truth about how Professor Arne Ness and I together conquered NATO. The passage of time may have resulted in this or that detail being forgotten or omitted, but in broad outline it was precisely thus that our campaign proceeded. I have often since shuddered to think what Might have happened had the conquerors not been so peaceable and harmless as we both are.

A solitary and determined anarcho-syndicalist could have sown a whole bouquet of bombs in the middle of the flower beds, or anywhere for that matter. And, the first officer who went to pick his morning tulip could have chanced to touch the detonator.

That would have been a great story for the press!



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