

# T-3 , FLETCHER'S ICE ISLAND , 1971

## A NON-SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION BY VETLE JORGENSEN ARCHITECT, 2010

Trying to find information on the fate of T-3, the ice island I visited in 1971, I read on the internet that T-3 supposedly went down the Davis Strait between Canada and Greenland 1983. This was a surprise for me, believing that it would follow "Storisen" (the Great Ice or Big Ice), the North Pole Basin sea ice, going south along the Greenland east coast, and which I had been through as a ship's boy 1950 in the expedition steam bark "Godthaab", built in the same shipyard in Norway as Nansen's and Amundsen's ship "Fram".

T-3 is believed to have originated from Ellesmere Island, Canada , because it had the same undulating surface as the land ice and shelf ice on Ellesmere Island. In the North Pole Basin it used to circulate in the American half, south of the North Pole itself, going clockwise and originally it used about 6 years for a round-trip. It was discovered after World War II and settled under Colonel Joe Fletcher of the U.S. Air Force.

I cannot believe that T-3 could get lost with the US Air Force at any given time having aircraft flying around from Thule Air Force Base and if not before than after M/S "Hans Hedtoft" 1959 went down with about 100 people on its very first return trip from Greenland to Denmark all icebergs and ice islands were supposedly under careful surveillance. The captain was P.L. Rasmussen, the same captain I worked under on "Godthaab" 1950.

As an architect with special interest in arctic conditions and having lived in "real" selfbuilt igloos and other snow shelters for a couple of months and in Greenland Technical Organization (GTO) having proposed the first apartment building to have both Greenlanders of Eskimo origin and Danish expatriates under the same roof and in Alaska State Housing Authority (ASHA) for the Remote Housing Program having designed the "H-Plan House" which later got a Special Mention Award by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, I wanted to study construction on snow and ice and not only on rock and permafrost.

It is known that "Camp Century" built into the Inland Ice, the Greenland ice cap, in the top of Greenland, was disappearing under more and more snow despite of the small precipitation in the high arctic, whereas on T-3 the ice surface was melting down around the buildings leaving these on tall pedestals of ice and for that reason making them useless.

As a project investigator in arctic shelters for the Division of Marine Resources at the University of Washington in Seattle under the Advanced Arctic Technology Program and teaching design for extreme climates at the Architect School at the same University, it was possible to visit Canadian arctic institutes in Victoria in the most "tropical" part of Canada, and the Polar Division of the U.S. Naval Civil Engineering Laboratory, California, involved in Antarctic work.

The apartment building in Greenland for both Greenlanders and foreigners was originally designed as a snaky 3-4 storey building (Quagssunguaq Long-House) following the prevailing very strong winds on the slightly sloping mountain ridge Quagssunguaq along one side of the capital Nuuk/Godthaab. Obviously somebody got cold feet on the feasibility of getting the work done in the short arctic construction season and the design was changed to the huge 6 storey straight building, "Block P", on flat land but across the wind direction hereby increasing the heating expense tremendously.

Block P, one of the biggest buildings in the arctic, is famous or infamous enough to have been shown and described a few times in articles on Greenland in the National Geographic Magazine and despite the best intentions by the Government of Denmark may have contributed to whatever can be said is bad and wrong in Greenland.

About the fate of the H-Plan houses in Alaska I am not aware of what has happened since. One main feature was the introduction of proper access through a double vestibule, i.e. three doors, for minimizing the heat loss, in sharp contrast to the typical American direct access from outside to the living room with no regard to the low temperatures and heat loss in the Alaskan winters. A few H-Plan houses were made in the treeless tundra of rammed earth, North African style, but with tapered outside walls on foundations of loose rocks, whereas in one location 200 units were built in the traditional American wood frame and plywood system, all of imported materials. Already in my final report on the rammed earth houses I wrote that they would probably not have a future in Alaska, because the Eskimo

population would despite all prefer to live like the rich i.e. the white Americans in typical Florida or California style houses being less than perfect for the arctic conditions!

To get work in the arctic organizations “hard” tests had to be passed. To come with the Royal Greenland Trade (KGH) expedition ship “Godthaab” to North East Greenland the captain asked if “I were afraid of working” and to come with the Greenland Geological Survey (GGU) to South West Greenland in the last year of the International Geophysical Year 1957-58 the director, Ellitsgaard Rasmussen asked “what the difference was between glaciology and glacial geology “ and to come up to T-3, at that time between the North Pole and North Greenland, I helped pushing a car for a gentleman I did not know, but who happened to be Colonel Joe Fletcher!

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P.S.

My own bunk on T-3 was in that trailer where the murder had been committed, with the outline of the killed man painted on the floor.

The above story has been put on the internet/ Wikipedia with the list of fine arctic oriented architects. Without my knowledge the story has been translated into several languages incl. Japanese!

Architects having a fine understanding of building in arctic environments would include:

- a. Ralph Erskine, the author of his “Subarctic Elementary Book”, and the architect for the Resolute Bay New Town, Northwest Territories, Canada, and the only western architect mentioned by name in a Russian report on arctic construction.
- b. Buckminster Fuller with his Geodesic D.E.W. Line Domes in the North American Arctic.
- c. Verner Tinning with his Loran station buildings for sloping sites in Greenland for the Danish Navy.
- d. Bo Jorgensen with his gradual access into warmer and warmer rooms in his “Fiskerby”, fisherman’s town, house type in Godthaab / Nuuk, Greenland, built on cross wall foundations.
- e. Henning Jensen & Torben Valeur’s concrete foundation types on very irregular rock in Greenland:  
The cross wall foundations allowing drifting snow and melt-water to pass undisturbed and the sill foundations going up to window level making the standard school buildings designed with Preben Seltoft and Per Koch in GTO looking like ships sailing through the wavy rock landscape.
- f. Edwin Crittinden in Alaska both with own architect office and as Director of Alaska State Housing Authority.

- g. Boris Culjat, Sweden , the author of “Climate and the Built Environment in the North”.
- h. Anne Brit Borve, Norway, the author of “The Design and Function of Single Buildings and Building Clusters in Harsh, Cold Climates”.
- i . Fine American permafrost foundation types were seen in Alaska for raised wood buildings and in Greenland for US Air force buildings with concrete floors on ground with underground ventilation.

Enclosures:

A

Selected pages from my report, “Ice Floe Shelters / Studies on T-3, Fletcher’s Ice Island “, Portable Observation Laboratories for Arctic Research, P.O.L.A.R. Report No.2, Advanced Arctic Technology Program, sponsored by the Advanced Research Projects Agency, 1971. (11 text pages, 4 drawings and 6 photographs + one additional photograph)

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Selected pages from my report, “Ice Floe Shelters/ P.O.L.A.R. Room Modules”, P.O.L.A.R. Report No.3 (7 text pages and 5 drawings)