

OVE HERMANSEN'S NOBILE ARCHIVE

Nobile and the airship *Norge* and *Italia*

In September 1925, Umberto Nobile, Roald Amundsen and sponsor Lincoln Ellsworth came to an agreement about the collaborative project *Norge*. The engineer/officer Nobile (1885-1978) had developed the zeppelin into a more agile airship..

The expedition started from Rome in April 1926. Nobile led the airship and its Italian crew up to Svalbard, where Amundsen came aboard with his Norwegian team. The *Norge* flew over the North Pole and arrived at Teller, Alaska, on 14 May. Success!

But it soon became apparent that Nobile and Amundsen were antagonists, even nemeses. Amundsen didn't want to share the honour for the great achievement. This struck Nobile as very unfair. It was he who had planned and led the expedition.

Nobile wanted to show that he could carry out polar expeditions without Amundsen. The new airship *Italia* was of the same type as the *Norge*. In April 1928, Nobile's expedition started out from Rome, with a strong scientific profile. The crew was Italian, with the addition of the Swedish meteorologist Malmgren and the [Czech](#) radiologist Behounek.

On the 25th of May, the *Italia* crashed on the ice on its way back from the North Pole to Svalbard. Six men were carried off with the still-airborne envelope after the impact separated it from the gondola. Of the ten men in the gondola, nine survived the collision. Nobile broke his right leg and his right arm.

Ove Hermansen (b. 1933) was Nobile's Danish friend. He has donated his large Nobile archive to the Norwegian Polar Institute. Among other things in this collection is a day-by-day collation of the events of 1928. [Here is the entry for 26 May "Day 2 on the ice"](#).

Hermansen's Nobile collection also includes some interesting **book manuscripts**.

The contents mostly ended up being published. But there are differences between these manuscripts and what came out later in book form. There is material here for future Nobile research. "Five years with the dirigiblestroi in Soviet Russia" is a very interesting, and entertaining, account of the period 1931-36. Nobile, who wanted to get away from the Fascist regime in Italy, was engaged by the Soviet Union to lead the development of a Russian airship industry from the ground up.

An important part of the Nobile archive is **the correspondence** between Umberto Nobile and Ove Hermansen. The collection contains the original letters from Nobile and copies of letters from Hermansen.

Here is the [correspondence in the period from July to November 1970](#). It is clear that Nobile was still expending energy to defend himself against various attacks, and that he used his capable Danish friend as an advisor.