

RUINER & AFMAGT RUINS & POWERLESSNESS

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Nr. 39, september 2026

No. 39, September 2026



Ruiner & afmagt

De militære bygninger i Narsarsuaq i Sydgrønland står, som om tiden gik i stå en dag i midten af forrige århundrede. Bag rustne døre og knækkede vinduer aner man stadig konturerne af et amerikansk militærliv, der engang udfyldte disse rum med soldater og våben. Nu er der kun stilheden tilbage, og den forvitring, som et arktisk klima udfører med stædig grundighed. Militæret rejste, men glemte at rydde op efter sig — som om stedet, når først opgaven var løst, ikke længere krævede omtanke.

De fotografier, jeg har udvalgt, er ikke blot dokumentation af forfald. De er spørgsmål stillet til bygninger, der ikke selv kan svare. Hvad betød det for et lille grønlandsk samfund at have en fremmed stormagt boende i baghaven i årtier — og hvad betyder det, at den samme stormagt nu vender tilbage?

For det gør den. USA, Danmark og Grønland har underskrevet en ny militæraftale, og om få år vil amerikanske soldater igen gå rundt i og omkring Narsarsuaq. Men aftalen

er ikke indgået mellem ligeværdige parter. Den er forhandlet i skyggen af en asymmetri, hvor den ene part har flåder, atomvåben og en stormagts vægt at lægge i vægtskålen, og den anden — Grønland, og i sidste ende bygdens egne indbyggere — har måttet forholde sig til vilkår, de ingen indflydelse har haft på at forme. Det er ikke nyt i den arktiske historie, men det er værd at holde fast i, når historien om vores tid en gang skal skrives.

Bygdens borgere håber på et samvær som mennesker. Det er en besked og rimelig forventning — måske den mest menneskelige af alle forventninger. Man ønsker sig naboskab, ikke blot naboskab på papiret. Man ønsker sig soldater, der ser stedet som andet end en base, og et lokalsamfund, der ikke blot bliver kulisser for andres strategiske interesser.

Historien, som den står skrevet i disse bygningers rustne skelet og knuste ruder, giver ikke grund til optimisme. Sidst militæret var her, efterlod det kun affald, forladte konstruktioner og skjulte hemme-

ligheder om, hvad der egentlig skete i disse rum. Resultatet taler for sig selv: Et stort maskineri kom, brugte stedet, og drog videre.

Vil det gå anderledes denne gang? Det er det spørgsmål, fotografierne stiller. Ruinerne er ikke advarsler i streng forstand — de er snarere en påmindelse om, at gode intentioner på begge sider ikke i sig selv er nogen garanti. Et samvær som mennesker kræver mere end tilstedeværelse. Det kræver, at den stærke part husker, at den svage part også har krav på værdighed, ansvarlighed og eftertanke — også efter at flagene er taget ned, og soldaterne er rejst hjem igen.

Måske er det den fortælling, disse fotografier til syvende og sidst handler om: Ikke kun om, hvad der stod her engang, men om hvad det kræver af os — af dem, der kommer, og af dem, der bliver tilbage — hvis historien ikke skal gentage sig.

Mine fotografier fra Narsarsuaq i Sydgrønland er fotograferet i perioden 2001 til 2017.

Ruins & Powerlessness

The military buildings in Narsarsuaq in South Greenland stand as though time stopped one day in the middle of the last century. Behind rusty doors and broken windows, one can still discern the outlines of an American military life that once filled these rooms with soldiers and weapons. Now there is only silence left, and the decay that an Arctic climate carries out with stubborn thoroughness. The military left but forgot to clean up after itself — as though, once the task had been completed, the place no longer required any consideration.

The photographs I have selected are not merely documentation of decay. They are questions posed to buildings that cannot answer for themselves. What did it mean for a small Greenlandic community to have a foreign superpower living in its backyard for decades — and what does it mean that the same superpower is now returning?

Because it is. The United States, Denmark, and Greenland have signed a new military agreement, and in a few years American soldiers will once again be moving around in

and near Narsarsuaq. But the agreement was not concluded between equal parties. It was negotiated in the shadow of an asymmetry in which one party has fleets, nuclear weapons, and the weight of a superpower to place on the scales, while the other — Greenland, and ultimately the local community itself — has had to contend with terms over which it has had no influence. This is nothing new in Arctic history, but it is worth remembering when the history of our time is eventually written.

The people of the community hope for a relationship as human beings. It is a modest and reasonable expectation — perhaps the most human of all expectations. They want neighbourliness, not merely neighbourliness on paper. They want soldiers who see the place as more than a base, and a local community that does not simply become a backdrop for the strategic interests of others.

The history written into the rusted skeletons and shattered windows of these buildings gives little reason for optimism. The last time the military was here, it left behind nothing but

rubbish, abandoned structures, and hidden secrets about what happened in these rooms. The result speaks for itself: A vast machine arrived, used the place, and moved on.

Will it be different this time? That is the question the photographs ask. The ruins are not warnings in the strict sense — rather, they are a reminder that good intentions on both sides are not, in themselves, any guarantee. Living together as human beings requires more than mere presence. It requires the stronger party to remember that the weaker party is also entitled to dignity, accountability, and reflection — even after the flags have been taken down and the soldiers have returned home.

Perhaps that is ultimately what these photographs are about: Not only what once stood here, but what it requires of us — of those who come, and of those who remain — if history is not to repeat itself.

My photographs from Narsarsuaq in South Greenland were taken between 2001 and 2017.



Narsarsuaq, juli 2017

Narsarsuaq, July 2017



Narsarsuaq, juli 2016

Narsarsuaq, July 2016



Narsarsuaq, juni 2014

Narsarsuaq, June 2014





Narsarsuaq, april 2014

Narsarsuaq, April 2014



Narsarsuaq, april 2014

Narsarsuaq, April 2014



Narsarsuaq, juni 2014

Narsarsuaq, June 2014



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Narsarsuaq, June 2014



Narsarsuaq, juni 2014

Narsarsuaq, June 2014



Narsarsuaq, december 2016

Narsarsuaq, December 2016



Narsarsuaq, februar 2001

Narsarsuaq, February 2001



Narsarsuaq, december 2015

Narsarsuaq, December 2015



Narsarsuaq, december 2013

Narsarsuaq, December 2013

KOLOFON

Ugens foto: Ruiner & afmagt
Af Keld Jensen

PDF Version 1
Oprindeligt publiceret september 2026

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COLOPHON

Photo of the week: Ruins & Powerlessness
By Keld Jensen

PDF Version 1
Originally Published September 2026

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