

Chapter 13 – The Charms of Anholt

Per Brüel was the outgoing character at Brüel & Kjær. With his conspicuous sociable manner, he was an adventurer who continually sought opportunities, never seemed to lack ideas or words to extricate himself from difficulties and was never afraid to make the quick decisions necessary to achieve the best of any situation. The following story will show how his creativity turned an awkward situation into a very important political contact.

“It was June 26, 1976. The Russian Secretary of Commerce was to come to Denmark on an official visit. It was scheduled to last for almost a week, from Monday to the following Sunday. By then, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs often used Brüel & Kjær to parade Danish industry in front of foreign guests. I myself had participated in official visits several times with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, often as a representative for the Danish Chamber of Commerce.

“Unfortunately the airplane the Russian Secretary was supposed to travel on broke down and he had to arrive early Saturday morning on a different plane. That created quite some fuss in our Ministry of Foreign Affairs because the schedule they had made for his visit didn’t start until Monday, and they didn’t know what to do with him over the weekend. The Danish Foreign Minister, K. B. Andersen, decided it wasn’t his problem. The Russian Secretary of Commerce would have to take care of himself. From my many trips to Russia I knew the Foreign Minister rather well. Therefore I wasn’t particularly surprised when he paid me an unscheduled visit at the plant in Nærum on the Thursday before the official visit. We closed the door to my office and then surprisingly he asked for my help.”

“What do you need from me”, I asked in wonder? He explained the very difficult situation he was in, that our Ministry of Foreign Affairs couldn’t meet with the Russian Secretary before Monday and that he had no idea what to do with him until then. Could I have the plant running on Saturday?

“Well, I can do a lot, but I cannot get all the men gathered on a Saturday with that short notice.” I said.

“Hmm, but what then are your plans for the weekend?” he went on.

“I’m planning to fly to our summerhouse in Anholt to be with my family.”

“Splendid, couldn’t the Secretary go along as well?” he asked boldly.

A bit hesitatingly I reasoned: “Yes, I guess so.”

Per Brüel is narrating this story in the lush sunroom of his home in Holte, just a few miles from the headquarters of Brüel & Kjær. Thriving ferns in solid white rock pots beside white wickerwork furniture add an Italian feeling to the atmosphere. Brüel is eagerly gesticulating as he recalls this

episode from more than 29 years ago. He obviously has told this story many times. He knows it by heart, but he is an excellent storyteller and he is enjoying the setting to the full. He even changes his voice to speak the different characters in his story. And every now and then he laughs as he recalls his own remarks.

“Back then we had a number of aircraft for use in our business. But they were small ones. We had two small twin-engine planes at that time and a single-engine plane that was even smaller. What the Foreign Minister didn’t tell me up front was that the Secretary was accompanied by four huge bodyguards who were well padded and with pistols in their pockets. They too were supposed to fit into those light aircraft. Consequently we had to go in two planes. My son Niels would pilot one of them and I the other.

“It was Saturday morning. At an open grass airfield outside the town of Allerød we were waiting for the Russian Secretary of Commerce to arrive with his retinue. Finally they showed up in two black limousines. As they approached, it didn’t take me long



A 6-place Piper Aztec similar to the aircraft used to fly the Russians to Anholt and back.

to see that the Secretary was furious. He was rude and impudent! He had expected and wanted an official welcome. Instead he ended up here with the Danish Foreign Minister, me and my small planes. So he was sullenly ill-tempered and unable to be pleased in any regard. Anyway, after a while we managed to maneuver him into my plane and off we went.

“Anholt is a small, sparsely populated island in the Kattegat midway between Denmark and Sweden. Here we had this lovely small house where we’ve spent a lot of time. I would often fly in one evening and leave the next morning; occasionally I would bring guests, but never as many as five. So for this visit we were ill prepared; we didn’t have any proper food to serve the Russians.



Anholt island, 70 nautical miles northwest of Copenhagen in the Kattegat strait.



Per Brüel's summer house on Anholt.

What we did have was some Danish pastry from the previous day and a couple of bottles of Akvavit (Danish schnapps). Well – we sprinkled the pastry with water and put it in the oven to freshen up and you know – Russians are fond of booze. So suddenly everybody was in high spirits!

“At Anholt I was a good friend of Røssel who was commander-in-chief of the local marine office that tracked all ships passing in and out of Danish waters. A wag and an entertainer he was; he knew a lot of funny and naughty stories. When the visit came up, I allied myself with him. Keeping his promise, he took the Russian Secretary and me on a Jeep ride all around the island.

“You see, Anholt is only 27 kilometers in circumference. Accordingly we had time to make some stops on our way. It was a beautiful summer day and the beaches were full of people. If you’ve ever been to Anholt, you know that the people there don’t worry too much about wearing swimsuits. The ladies are very well put together and quite nice looking. From that point on, the Secretary’s mood was at ease. He had never seen anything like it before. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that he was beaming with joy.”

“As we drove on, we chatted cheerfully. The Russian asked Røssel about his job at Anholt.

“I keep an eye on all the ships and submarines you send through our waters,” he answered.

“But how do you do that?”

“Oh, we have various measuring instruments to help us,” he said, to which the Secretary promptly replied: “Why, you can just ask me if you have any doubts at all.”

“That was the Russian Secretary of Commerce speaking! I don’t know if the commander ever took advantage of the offer; but I doubt it.”

“We were preparing to fly back. Because we were heading to a grass field that had no landing lights, we had to be off well before twilight. But now we faced another problem. The Secretary didn’t want to come with us. He said he had such a wonderful time on the island that he wanted to stay. But there were no hotels on Anholt; where could the Russians possibly stay overnight? Our house was way too small. That wouldn’t work. Instead we found some more booze to offer him and after he had gulped it down we were able to maneuver him into the plane once more.

“By then it had become very late. It was dark and we had no runway lights for take-off. But with a little bit of moonlight and light from the Jeep’s headlights positioned at the far end of the runway, we did manage to get airborne. First I took off and then Niels after the dust had settled.

“Well into the air I contacted Roskilde control tower ashore to tell them about the Russian Secretary and his retinue and that we couldn’t return to Allerød as planned. We needed to have access to the larger airport at Roskilde. That was okay. Only I had this other problem, I told the control tower:

“Could you please contact the police and have them go to the grass field in Allerød and pick up those two limousines we left there and then drive them to Roskilde where we’re landing?”

“Again they gave me the green light and arranged for it. We landed long before the limousines arrived, and I kept the Secretary busy by making him help me push my plane into the hangar. Then the cars arrived and they departed.

“Despite all our trouble, everything had a happy ending. On account of my favor to the Russian Secretary of Commerce and to the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I was invited to all the dinners throughout the following week’s official visit. At one time the Foreign Minister, K. B. Andersen, came over and asked me: “What the blazes have you done to him? No matter what we set up and no matter what we show him, he still says that he likes Anholt far better.”

“What can I say? After this experience our trade with Russia doubled, so surely we as a company gained from it. Those girls at the beach on Anholt were worth their weight in gold.”

Stories like this would repeat many times over as the uninitiated and unsuspecting were shown the charms of Danish beaches!

This chapter is an excerpt from the book *Journey to Greatness – The Story of Brüel & Kjær*, Acoustical Publications, Inc., \$70, hard cover, 352 pages, ISBN 978-0-9769816-3-3; www.SandV.com.