

Niels Ebbesens Venner

Niels Ebbesen's name is a shining light from Denmark's past reminding us of a time of trouble, unrest, deceit, and action. For centuries the saga of Niels Ebbesen and "The Bald Count" has been a symbol of Danish pursuit of freedom.

The story goes that soon after Niels Ebbesen's death on November 2, 1340, his supporters gathered to form a circle of friends calling themselves "Friends of Niels Ebbesen". Little is known about these men and they quickly disappeared into historical obscurity. But the tale of Niels Ebbesen and his men lives on in many folksongs.

Throughout the centuries, many a young lad has listened when the old folks recounted the story of the hero from Nørreris, who took the fate of the country into his own hand.

In the early 1970s, a group of former resistance fighters in Aarhus used to meet and to commemorate the fellowship of the anti-Nazi Resistance and to lay flowers at memorials and graves of their fallen comrades. They were also deeply engaged in issues of defense policy and especially Denmark's relations to its allies during the cold war.

Once again, the old resistance fighters gave what they had to give. They were active in the Home Guard and in defense-related organizations and worked to strengthen the will to defend the country wherever they could.

Denmark's policies towards the Communist bloc could at best be described as wavering and slowly the idea gained ground that it was time to resurrect the Friends of Niels Ebbesen. Initially the plan was to assemble a group of old resistance fighters, members of The Danish Brigade, soldiers and active members of pro-defense organizations.

In 1977 the initiators decided to set up a committee entitled the Friends of Niels Ebbesen. It was to encompass one hundred carefully selected members. A medal was produced to award members of the organization and to commemorate the 650th anniversary of Niels Ebbesen's death. The organization is democratic with an elected leadership entitled to bestow the Niels Ebbesen Medal on deserving recipients. The number of recipients restricted to one hundred persons who were selected after being nominated by previous recipients. This limitation was rescinded in 2003 though care has been taken not to allow inflation in the number of awards.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the organization's activities have been mostly cultural but fellowship among the members is still held in high regard.

One cannot apply for the Niels Ebbesen Medal. It is still awarded upon recommendations from those who have already received it. The Friends of Niels Ebbesen consists exclusively of recipients of the medal or their surviving spouses or partners. At the death of the recipient, the medal remains in the possession of the heirs.

Jan Fagerlund, former chairman.