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**Denmark April 9, 1940-October 1943: Timing as a Factor in the Danish Rescue of  
Danish Jewry**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Résumé	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
<u>Chapter</u>	
I.    Jewish Arrival in Denmark to April 9, 1940	6
II.   The Invasion of Denmark	11
III.  Denmark from April 9, 1940 to August 29, 1943	22
IV.  The Jewish Question in Denmark during the Occupation	63
Conclusion	77
Bibliography	84
<u>Appendix</u>	
I.    Werner Best's Telegram Number 1032, September 8, 1943	90

## ABSTRACT

It has been nearly sixty years since the October 1943 Danish rescue of Danish Jewry. Since this time, no historian has examined the role that the timing of the planned Jewish round-up played in the degree of success of the rescue. Would a National Socialist round-up of the Danish Jews have been successful if it occurred in 1941 for example? As long as the Danish government was in power, no anti-Jewish measures were implemented in Denmark. Within a month of the Danish government's resignation, National Socialist plans to eliminate Danish Jewry were being drafted. This thesis examines the major events in Denmark that led to the resignation of the Danish government in August 1943, and the failed plan to round-up and deport the Danish Jews. The most important conclusion of this thesis is that to a significant degree, the Danish people were successful in their rescue of Danish Jews because of the timing of the anti-Jewish measures.

## RÉSUMÉ

Presque soixante ans se sont écoulées depuis octobre 1943, date où les Danois sont venus à la rescousse de la population juive de ce pays. Dans les années qui ont succédées ces événements, aucun historien s'est questionné sur l'importance du moment choisis par les Nazis pour rassembler les Juifs et si ce moment a contribué à l'accomplissement de l'opération de sauvetage. Est-ce qu'un rassemblement national socialiste des Juifs danois aurait été un succès en 1941 par exemple? En fait, tant et aussi longtemps que le gouvernement danois était au pouvoir, aucunes mesures antisémites n'ont été appliquées au Danemark. Toutefois, un mois après la démission de ce gouvernement, les Nazis commençaient déjà l'ébauche de plans qui visaient l'élimination des Juifs danois. Ce mémoire se penche d'abord sur les événements majeurs qui ont mené à la démission du gouvernement danois en août 1943 et ensuite sur les échecs nazis face au rassemblement et à la déportation de la population juive du Danemark. La conclusion la plus significative de ce mémoire est que l'opération de sauvetage des Juifs du Danemark, par le peuple danois, a été possible en raison du moment choisis par les Nazis pour introduire des mesures antisémites.

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Last, but certainly not least, I am enormously indebted to my parents and friends for all of their support.



## **Introduction**

So numerous are the tragic accounts from World War II that it is difficult to fathom that anything positive occurred during this episode in the history of mankind. The Shoah or Holocaust as it is more commonly referred to, devastated the Jewish population of Europe during Hitler's attempt to create a 'New Order' for the future Aryanized Europe. Six million Jews perished along with countless others in mass execution pits, in concentration camp gas chambers, on the gallows, or in the countless tragedies of war, all a result of the psychotic dream that the National Socialists attempted to fulfill. While Europe was being choked by Hitler's policies, scores of resistance groups and movements sprang up in an attempt to stop the National Socialists. Most of these groups failed. Many historians will agree that no resistance movement succeeded in bringing about an earlier end to the war, and most often did more harm than good to their countrymen. This was a result of the harsh National Socialist retaliatory practices meted out after an attack on German forces had been carried out by resistors.

Most attempts to stop the National Socialist machine failed; that was the norm. The few exceptions to this must be examined in order to determine what it was that they did that others did not. What was it that made them unique?

The history of Denmark from 1940-1945 is unlike the history of any other country that was occupied by Germany in the Second World War. While other countries faced brutal occupation policies, lacked any ability to negotiate with the German authorities, and met harsh reprisal measures for acts carried out by small bands of partisans, Denmark

managed to avoid such policies until the Danish government resigned in August 1943. How is it that this small country was able to maintain its weakened sovereignty while occupied? How was the Danish government able to resist National Socialist attempts to Aryanize their country? Why is it that when the National Socialists decided to move forward with their plans to solve the Jewish Question in Denmark, so many Danes reacted by saving nearly all of their Jewish countrymen by hiding them until the end of the war or alternatively, by secretly moving them across to neutral Sweden? Why didn't the Danish people react in the same manner in 1941 when anti-Communist legislation and arrests were made?

While there have been numerous attempts to explain why the Danes reacted in this manner to the German attempt to impose the solution to the Jewish Question, all of which are plausible as well as probable, it is the issue of the timing of the rescue and of other resistance activities by the Danish populace, or at times government, that I wish to address as a major factor often not adequately dealt with by historians.

Historians have attributed the success of the Danish rescue of the Danish Jews to five key points. As one author states:

1. the small number of Jews in Denmark;
2. the fact that the Danish government remained in power until August 1943;
3. the geographical proximity of neutral Sweden;
4. the timing of the planned persecutions;
5. the Danes' love of freedom and democracy.<sup>1</sup>

While the timing of the operation has been identified as a reason for the success of the rescue, there has been very little written to further develop this crucial component of the

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<sup>1</sup> Leni Yahil, *The Rescue of Danish Jewry: Test of a Democracy*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), p. xviii.

rescue; it has not been adequately examined. Had the German authorities attempted to round up and deport the Danish Jews in 1941 while they were experiencing tremendous successes on the battlefield, for example, it is quite possible that they would have met little or no opposition as was the case with the persecution of Danish Communists in 1941. (The issue of the anti-Communist laws and lack of public opposition will be dealt with in Chapter Three.) In fact, the opposition that the German government most commonly dealt with was internal, coming from Cecil von Renthe-Fink, the first Reich Plenipotentiary in Denmark until late 1942. Will a correlation between specific resistance action in Denmark to German victories and losses in the war emerge?

What role if any did German authorities play in postponing the anti-Jewish action, or refusing to take part in it for various reasons? By discussing the correlation between the planned anti-Jewish action and its correspondence to German battlefield setbacks in 1943, I am by no means attempting to downplay the other motivating factors in the rescue efforts of the Danish people. Had they not cared about their Jews, Jewish history in Denmark during World War II would have been significantly different.

With regard to the occupation, there exist numerous secondary sources, but few unbiased primary sources. Mount Holyoke Library in South Hadley, Massachusetts possesses a World War II and Scandinavia pamphlet collection. In this collection, I was able to access numerous printed pamphlets put out during the occupation by the American Friends of Danish Freedom and Democracy and by the American Scandinavian Foundation. These were unfortunately mostly wartime propaganda. They did however portray the mindset of the common Dane living under the German occupation, or the mindset of the Dane who had escaped Denmark during the occupation.

There are numerous secondary sources on the general occupation. The dissertations of William Dan Andersen *The German Armed Forces in Denmark 1940-1943; A Study in Occupation Policy*, as well as Jerry Livingston Voorhis' *A Study of Official Relations between the German and Danish Governments in the Period between 1940 and 1943*, were helpful, as both are unbiased scholarly works that present both German and Danish viewpoints. Both included letters by the German Generals in charge of the occupation forces in Denmark written to the German High Command.

Relatively few sources deal in a scholarly manner with the rescue of the Danish Jews. Most primary sources available are narratives of individuals who saved Jews or narratives of Jews who were saved. While successful in placing a human touch to the rescue, they do not provide a well-documented history. They provide abundant examples of the lengths that the Danish people were willing to go to in saving Jews. The critical telegrams sent by Werner Best, the Second Reich Plenipotentiary, in September 1943 were available in their original form through the Institute of Documentation in Israel for the Investigation of Nazi War Crimes. For secondary sources, The Resistance Museum in Copenhagen has published an excellent pamphlet about the rescue, but it is not a complete work. It does not go into detail when describing events or provide source references. Leni Yahil's *The Rescue of Danish Jewry* is still by far the most thorough study of Danish Jewry and the Danish rescue in October 1943. Yahil includes the critical telegrams sent by Werner Best to Berlin calling for a date to be set for the Jewish action, as well as the reaction of Best's Shipping Attaché, G.F. Duckwitz. Anyone writing about this topic must not overlook this study. Despite the value of this book, Yahil, much like other authors, does not sufficiently examine timing as a factor in the rescue. She does,

however, go into great depth regarding the role that Germans played in postponing anti-Jewish action.

General works on the Holocaust mention Denmark in a few paragraphs or possibly a chapter. (For instance, Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Yehuda Bauer's *A History of the Holocaust*, etc.) The history of Denmark during the Holocaust is rather minute when compared to the devastation that occurred in the eastern countries. I was however, able to cross-reference dates and events from personal narratives with these general works on the Holocaust.

I was unable to access Werner Best's or G.F. Duckwitz's works due to the language barrier. I was able to retrieve a significant amount of information about Best and Duckwitz from secondary works. I was able to obtain Best's telegrams and historical background in Yahil's *Rescue*, as well as in articles by Hans Kirchhoff and Tatiana Brustin-Berenstein. Additionally, I was unable to access primary sources on the Danish Communist Party for the years preceding the occupation and up to the disbandment of the party in 1941. These documents are available in archives in Denmark. The information that I was able to find on the communists was taken primarily from Nathaniel Hong's *Sparks of Resistance: The Illegal Press in German Occupied Denmark April 1940-August 1943*, Yahil's *Rescue*, the dissertations already mentioned, chapters in the general works on Denmark during the war, and works on the holocaust in Denmark. There are numerous secondary sources available on the invasion of Denmark, life during the occupation, and on the Jewish experience during the war. Many of their authors had access to the aforementioned documents that I did not. With these secondary works, I was able to obtain the necessary information for this thesis.

### **Jewish Arrival in Denmark to April 9, 1940**

In 1622, King Christian IV of Denmark sent notice to Portuguese Sephardic Jewish communities in Amsterdam and Hamburg inviting their members to settle in townships in the Danish duchy of Holstein.<sup>1</sup> The king guaranteed prospective settlers religious autonomy as well as commercial benefits. Upon this offer, the first Jews appeared in Denmark. Denmark was the first of the Scandinavian countries to admit Jews. Throughout the century, as business opportunities in Holstein were slow to develop, Jews migrated to Copenhagen where there was greater commercial opportunity. In return for the guarantees given to the Jews in Denmark, the crown was able to secure for itself loans from the affluent Portuguese Jews. These Jews were well educated, and provided commercial connections. King Christian IV's successor, Frederick III, (1648-1670) was not as accommodating to the Jews. He forbade Jews from coming to Denmark unless they had received a special passport (*Geleitsbrief*). Frederick III was forced to change his position regarding Jews when he needed money to fund his wars. As a result, he removed the restrictions, and permitted Portuguese and German Jews to come and settle in Denmark. They were free to practice their religion and to establish their businesses within the limits of the law.<sup>2</sup> The Jews in Denmark were never forced to live in ghettos as were other Jewish communities in Europe. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, they were allowed

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, (Jerusalem, 1972), entry on Denmark, p. 1536.

<sup>2</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. Volume IV.(New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1910), p. 522.

to attend Danish universities, and many professions that Jews had previously been excluded from opened their doors.<sup>3</sup> In 1814, the Jews were granted additional rights,<sup>4</sup> but still lacked the right to vote. This changed thirty-five years later with the signing of the Danish constitution on June 5, 1849. Jews were now completely equal to their countrymen. Jews became more assimilated throughout the 1800s, and the rate of intermarriage for the years 1894-1903 was listed as high as 45%.<sup>5</sup> There was virtually no Jewish community outside Copenhagen. Even in the capital, the community failed to reach significant numbers prior to the 20th century.

The 1900s brought a change in the origin of Jews immigrating to Denmark. For the first time, Jews from Russia and the Baltics arrived in Denmark. They sought refuge from the constant pogroms that they were subjected to in the east. Approximately 3,000 eastern Jews fled to Denmark, bringing the total number of Jews in Denmark to 6,000 in 1921.<sup>6</sup> These Jews had lived in separation from the native populations in the east. Separated from the general population, they had been able to maintain their religious traditions. Since they were used to living in separation they did not acculturate quickly in

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<sup>3</sup> Leni Yahil, *The Rescue of Danish Jewry: Test of a Democracy*. Translated by Morris Gradel. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Therkel Stræde, *October 1943: The Rescue of Danish Jews from Annihilation*. (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1993), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Stræde, p. 9 and Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 11. Also, see Yahil, "Methods of Persecution: A Comparison of the 'Final Solution' in Holland and Denmark" in *The Nazi Holocaust 4: The Final Solution Outside Germany*. (Vol. 2). (Westport and London: Meckler Publishers, 1989), p. 176.

<sup>6</sup> Stræde, p. 9 and Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 11.

Danish society whereas the western Jews who had been in Denmark for a longer period were by now acculturated, fully integrating themselves into Danish society.<sup>7</sup> Nearly all Jews settled in Copenhagen since that was where the large businesses and industries were located and therefore the greatest opportunities.

There is little mention in the Jewish newspapers in Denmark about the rise of the National Socialist Party in Germany. One group of Danish Jews attempted to publicize the events that were occurring in Germany. In 1934, the Jewish society Forening organized a meeting at which the leaders of the four major political parties were invited to speak. The speakers did not feel that the meeting was necessary but attended anyway. The four stressed that "anti-Semitism and culture are irreconcilable contradictions."<sup>8</sup> The speakers mentioned the valuable role that Jews played in Danish culture and reassured Danish Jews that they had nothing to fear in Denmark. Despite the German Jews' situation, Christmas Möller, the leader of the Conservative Party, announced that it would not be physically possible for Denmark to allow tens of thousands of Jews to immigrate.<sup>9</sup> No one, however, could have predicted the eventual fate of the German and the Eastern and Western European Jews under Hitler's scourge.

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<sup>7</sup> If we compare the Danish Jews to the newly arrived religious eastern Jews, in terms of intermarriage, in 1921: 51.7% of the "old families" intermarried while a mere 6.1% of the Russian immigrants intermarried. Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 11. From this it may be deduced that the Russian immigrants retained their religious traditions and were much slower to assimilate to Danish culture.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



On the evening of November 8-9, 1938, *Kristallnacht*, Hitler's SA destroyed Jewish businesses and synagogues in Germany.<sup>10</sup> This heightened Danish awareness of the seriousness of National Socialist anti-Jewish policies. Many Danes did not understand what had happened during *Kristallnacht*, while others believed that this destruction was carried out by small groups of German citizens and that the *Wehrmacht* had attempted to stop them without success.<sup>11</sup> In response to *Kristallnacht* the Danish government amended the Criminal Law in 1939 to state that anyone who incited hatred against any section of the Danish population by rumors or slander because of that group's religion, race, or citizenship, would be subject to fine or imprisonment.<sup>12</sup> A wave of Jewish refugees was still not permitted to enter Denmark. The government attempted to greatly restrict a mass flood of refugees by placing very strict criteria on immigration. Persons who could prove that they had relatives in Denmark, and who could guarantee funding were granted entry permits. Given the poor economy and high unemployment rate, Denmark could not accommodate many refugees. Fearing the power and size of Germany, Denmark refrained from interfering with German internal affairs and did not pressure Germany in regards to the treatment of German Jews. As long as Denmark remained independent and unoccupied by the German armed forces, the security of the

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<sup>10</sup> Bauer, Yehuda. *A History of the Holocaust*. (New York: Franklin Watts, 1982), p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* The government had previously stated that there was no need for Jews to fear for their safety in Denmark, yet they passed this law. If there was nothing for the Jews to fear, then why the need to pass this law? The Danish National Socialist Party was never a threat to the Jews as they gained a mere 2-3% of the vote at most in elections. Stræde, p. 6. According to Hans Möller, a professor at McGill University who was active in the Danish resistance, this was done to stop the small number of Danish National Socialists' activities that had been taking place. Interview conducted with Hans Möller on January 10, 2000.

Danish Jews was guaranteed. Denmark's status, however, was about to undergo a drastic change. From the moment when the German Army occupied Denmark on 9 April 1940, the Jews in Denmark had reason to fear for their safety.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It is difficult to arrive at an accurate number of the number of Jews in Denmark at the time of the German invasion in April 1940. Given the situation in Europe, Jews were coming and going to and from Denmark, often illegally, on their way to other parts of Scandinavia, Britain, the U.S.A., Palestine, etc. The last census that included religious affiliation took place in 1921. Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 25. Most authors estimate the number of Jews at approximately 6,000-7,000, and mention an unknown number of refugees, etc. It is easier to estimate a number in 1943 after the rescue since the Swedes kept records of the number of Danish Jews who arrived in Sweden.

## The Invasion of Denmark

By late spring 1939, Europe was on the brink of war. Germany had already annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia and it was only a matter of time until Hitler demanded more territories. With this in mind, the Danish government signed the Danish-German Non-Aggression Pact on May 31, 1939. It assured Denmark that it would be left out of the Nazi warpath in the event of war. Article 1 of the document read as follows:

The Kingdom of Denmark and the German Reich will  
in no circumstances go to war and neither will they in any  
other way resort to force against each other.<sup>1</sup>

It continued by affirming that in the event a third party took action against either Denmark or Germany, the other would not render any form of support to the aggressor. When the Danish Foreign Minister Munch presented the Non-Aggression Pact to the Danish *Rigsdag* (Parliament) he informed them that it would be of “considerable value” given the “troubled conditions prevailing in the world” at that time.<sup>2</sup> With the stroke of a pen, Denmark’s desire to remain neutral should a war break out in Europe was secured.

When World War II broke out in early September 1939, Denmark maintained neutral status. Should the war turn westward, which it would inevitably have to do, the Danes would be left out.

Unfortunately for the Danes, neutrality and isolation were not to be. Between the outbreak of war in early September 1939, and the German invasion of Denmark on April 9, 1940, a series of events took place that rendered a German invasion of Denmark and

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<sup>1</sup> *British Survey Handbooks No. 5: Denmark*. Edited by John Eppstein. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*. (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), p. 157.

Norway a strategic necessity from the German point of view. This was crucial because Norway, specifically, was a critical strategic stronghold for either side wishing to control vital ports to be used in the Battle of the Atlantic as well as the shipping lanes that were used to send iron ore from Sweden to Germany. It is not possible to understand the full scope of the occupation of Denmark without discussing events as they unfolded with regard to Norway.

In 1939, the British Ministry of Economic Warfare estimated that Germany would have to import 750,000 tons of iron ore per month during the first year of the war to avoid an industrial crisis.<sup>3</sup> Germany received a great deal of its iron ore from Sweden and this came through the Norwegian port of Narvik on its way to Germany.<sup>4</sup> If the Allies could occupy Sweden and Norway, Germany's vital source of iron ore and the shipping route along which it was delivered would be cut off. Aware of this, on September 19, 1939 then First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, advocated the laying of mines in Norwegian waters in the hopes of sinking the German transport ships, or forcing them into international waters where the Royal Fleet could deal with them.<sup>5</sup> The British cabinet, however, rejected Churchill's proposal and called for further studies of the matter. While these studies were underway, the Soviet Union invaded Finland. The British and French believed that the war was the perfect excuse that they needed to

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Petrow, *The Bitter Years; The Invasion and Occupation of Denmark and Norway April 1940-May 1945*. (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1974), p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Narvik could handle approximately 250,000 tons of iron ore per month. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

invade Norway and Sweden. In assisting the Finns, the British and French would have to send troops through Norway and Sweden, which would result in the cutting off of the German supply of iron ore. In early February, plans for "assisting the Finns" were underway. The British and French planned to send three or four divisions to Finland via Norway and Sweden. On their way to Finland, the Allied troops would seize the Swedish iron ore fields.<sup>6</sup>

While Allied planners prepared to invade Scandinavia, German planners were doing the same. From the outset, Hitler feared the possibility that the Allies would use the Russo-Finnish War as an excuse to invade Scandinavia. If Swedish iron ore were no longer accessible to Germany, the result would be devastating to the German war machine. Hitler learned where the Norwegian government's sympathies lay from Vidkund Quisling, an ex-member of the Norwegian government and now member of the Norwegian National Socialist Party. Quisling informed Hitler that:

The present Norwegian government has signed a secret treaty with Britain to the effect that if Norway becomes involved in war with one of the great powers, an invasion by Britain may be carried out with Norwegian consent.<sup>7</sup>

Hitler ordered Major General Alfred Jodl to draw up preliminary plans for a military invasion of Norway.<sup>8</sup> The specifics for this operation, code named *Weserübung*, began in early February 1940 under Captain Theodore Krancke.<sup>9</sup> Krancke's invasion plan called for German troops to land at six Norwegian ports. From these ports, German troops

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> William Dan Andersen, "The German Armed Forces in Denmark 1940-1943; A Study in Occupation Policy." (Dissertation: University of Kansas, 1972), p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> Petrow, p.15.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

would be able to secure Norway. Krancke's plan did not involve an occupation of Denmark, but merely the threat of an invasion in order to persuade the Danes to allow the German Air Force to use Jutland as a staging point for operations.<sup>10</sup> German military planners, however, were forced to hasten their invasion strategy as the *Altmark* affair transpired.

The German refueling ship, the *Altmark*, had eluded the British fleet for weeks on end in the Atlantic. In addition to serving as a refueling ship for the German battleship *Graf Spee*, the *Altmark* served as the holding area for prisoners of war from ships that the *Graf Spee* had sunk.<sup>11</sup> Once the *Graf Spee* was finally captured and the prisoners of war onboard were freed, word of the existence of the *Altmark* and its role reached the appropriate Allied bodies. In light of the situation, the *Altmark* headed back to Germany. What resulted was a long Allied search for the *Altmark*. The crew of the *Altmark* headed home; the journey would take their ship through Norwegian waters. According to international law, in neutral Norwegian waters the Allies would not be able to board the *Altmark*, provided she was not carrying prisoners or conducting war maneuvers. Upon entering Norwegian waters, the captain of the *Altmark*, Captain Dau, informed the Norwegian Navy that the *Altmark* was in fact a German battleship, whose guns had been taken down prior to entering Norwegian territory.<sup>12</sup> Dau successfully convinced four Norwegian search boats that this was the case and even managed to secure a Norwegian escort for the remainder of the journey through Norwegian waters. The Allies, however,

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

finally located the *Altmark* and sent ships to board her. They caught up with the *Altmark* on February 16, 1940 while she was still in Norwegian waters and boarded her without any resistance, freeing 300 Allied prisoners of war detained below deck.<sup>13</sup> The Allies had violated Norwegian neutrality. Hitler was furious for losing the *Altmark* and livid that the Allies had violated Norwegian neutrality so openly. The Allies would probably now do so at will given the fact that the Norwegians could put up only limited defenses. As a result, Hitler expedited plans for an occupation of Norway. Lieutenant General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst was appointed commanding officer for the *Weserübung* Plan.<sup>14</sup> He reviewed Krancke's plans and made only a few modifications. Regarding Denmark, Falkenhorst felt that exerting pressure on the Danes would not be sufficient to secure the Danish airfields. Hence, he recommended that German troops invade Denmark. Falkenhorst submitted his addendum to his superiors at the end of February<sup>15</sup> and chose Air Force General Leonhard Kaupisch as commander of the northern invasion forces.<sup>16</sup>

By mid-March the Allies and Germans had each finalized their plans for a Scandinavian invasion. As the Allies were assembling their troops for Scandinavia, they received word that the Russo-Finnish War had ended. Finland had agreed to an armistice on March 12, 1940 and as a result, the Allies could no longer send troops to Scandinavia under the pretext that they were going to aid Finland.

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<sup>13</sup> Nathaniel Hong, *Sparks of Resistance; The Illegal Press in German Occupied Denmark April 1940-August 1943*. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1996), p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> Petrow, p. 31-32.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Andersen, p. 46. He states that a total of 40,000 men were under the general's command.

The Allies sought justification to continue with their invasion plans. The British intended to begin mining operations off the coast of Norway, hoping later to occupy several Norwegian ports. From their mining positions, the British ships would be able to reach Norway before the Germans at the first sign of a German attack.<sup>17</sup> The Allies were set to commence their mining activities on April 8, 1940. Germany, however, was far ahead of them.

The Allies had breached Norwegian neutrality in the *Altmark* affair and Hitler felt that this violation would be recurring. He could not risk the possibility that the route for his iron ore would be cut off. It was only a matter of time before he would have to proceed with his plan for an invasion and occupation of Scandinavia. Convinced of this, Hitler did not stall his March invasion plans for long. In early April, German ships disguised as commercial vessels, sailed for Norwegian ports. Onboard they carried military supplies for the German troops and battleships that were soon to follow.

In retrospect, the Danes should have expected the German invasion. The Danish government had received word of the forthcoming German attack from a member of the German *Abwehr* (Intelligence) Major General Hans Oster. Oster met with the Dutch Military Attaché, Colonel J.C. Sas and warned him of the forthcoming German invasion. Sas passed this message on to the Danish Naval Attaché, Captain Kjoelsen, who warned his government.<sup>18</sup> The Danish government ignored this warning.

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<sup>17</sup> Petrow, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> Carolsue Holland, "The Foreign Contacts Made by the German Opposition to Hitler." (Dissertation: University of Pennsylvania, 1967), p. 124.



Additionally, Danish intelligence officers noticed that *Wehrmacht* units were gathering along the Danish border and it appeared that they were preparing to launch an offensive.<sup>19</sup> The Danish government ignored these intelligence reports. At the time of the invasion, the Danes had not even fortified their 42-mile border with Germany.<sup>20</sup>

At 11 p.m. on April 8, 1940 German General Himer informed the German Minister to Denmark, Cecil von Renthe-Fink, of the impending action. Himer instructed him to present the Danish government with an ultimatum at the exact time that the German attack began.<sup>21</sup>

On April 9, 1940 at 4:10 a.m., Germany invaded Denmark. Danish troops had no chance of stopping the rapidly advancing German forces. Denmark had been the only European country that had reduced its military personnel at the outbreak of war in 1939.<sup>22</sup> As a result, Danish military resistance would be futile given that the German military outnumbered and outgunned the Danes. The Danish government's policy of signing treaties to maintain neutrality failed.

Given Denmark's flat geography and unfortified 42-mile border with Germany, the German war machine quickly advanced into Denmark.<sup>23</sup> As instructed, within minutes of the start of the invasion Cecil von Renthe-Fink presented the Danish government with the

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<sup>19</sup> Petrow, p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> Andersen, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Petrow, p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45 and Carsten Holbraad, *Danish Neutrality: A Study in the Foreign Policy of a Small State*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), chapter 3.

<sup>23</sup> Andersen, p. 15. German troops met virtually no resistance. In a few cases shots were exchanged but most often Danish troops did not even put up a fight. Petrow, p. 47.

German ultimatum.<sup>24</sup> In this note, the German government informed the Danish government that the invasion was necessary to protect the Danes from the British. If the Danes recognized and accepted the occupation and ceased all resistance, Germany would respect Denmark's independence and neutrality. The Danish government would be allowed to remain in power and attend to their usual matters, since Germany was merely to be the protecting force. If the Danes did not agree to these terms, then the bombers overhead would be ordered to drop their bomb loads throughout Copenhagen and other important areas. Furthermore, the Danish government was briefed on the current military situation in Denmark; German troops already occupied key positions.<sup>25</sup>

The Danish government had little time to debate their options. Resistance was senseless given the manpower and weapon superiority of the German military.<sup>26</sup> It was simply a matter of how many lives were to be lost during the process of defeat. With bombers streaking overhead and gunshots in the background, the Danish government responded to the ultimatum within a few hours. Under protest that the invasion violated the Non-Aggression Pact of May 30, 1939 the Danish government submitted to German demands. Danish troops were instructed to put down their weapons.<sup>27</sup>

The Danish people awoke to the sounds of planes and German troops, but were not aware that their government had accepted the occupation. The King and Prime Minister

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<sup>24</sup> Lemkin, p. 157.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The Danish Army's active strength on April 9, 1940 is listed as: Zealand: 3,300 trained soldiers 4,250 recruits. Jutland: 3,300 trained 3,000 recruits. Funen: 685 recruits. Total- 6,600 trained soldiers, 7,935 recruits. John Oram Thomas, *The Giant Killers: The Danish Resistance Movement 1940-1945*. (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1975), p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Lemkin, p. 158.

had to inform the Danish populace of what had transpired. That afternoon the King and Prime Minister issued the following proclamation:

To the Danish People! German troops last night crossed the Danish frontier and have landed in various places. The Danish Government have decided under protest to arrange the affairs of the country with a view to the occupation which has taken place, in pursuance whereof the following announcement is made:

The German troops which are now present in the country enter into contact with the Danish defense force, and it is the duty of the population to refrain from any resistance to these troops. The Danish Government will endeavor to safeguard the Danish people and our country against the disasters resulting from war conditions and therefore urge the population to adopt a calm and restrained attitude to the conditions which have now arisen. Quiet and order must prevail in the country and a loyal attitude must be displayed to all who have authority to exercise.<sup>28</sup>

The King added a personal statement to the end of this proclamation urging the Danish population to "maintain a perfectly correct and dignified behavior".<sup>29</sup> Although the Danish government remained in power, would they merely be a puppet regime? Danish Jews felt uneasy now that the National Socialists occupied Denmark. Danish Jews had heard of what conditions were like for Jews in other German occupied lands. Would the Danish government be able to protect Danish Jews?

German General Kaupisch issued a proclamation to the Danish Army and Danish people explaining the reasons for the German occupation.<sup>30</sup> He stressed that England had

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> The proclamation read as follows:

Without reason and in opposition to the sincere wishes of the German Government and the German people to live in peace and friendship with the English and French peoples, the rulers of England and France declared war on Germany in September of last year.

repeatedly violated Norwegian and Danish neutrality and that the Allies had "always tried to make Scandinavia a theater of war." According to Kaupisch, the Allies had announced that they would no longer tolerate any German commercial ships in Norwegian or Danish

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Their aim was and is to make decisions in theaters of war which lie far away and are therefore less dangerous for France and England; they hope thereby that it will be impossible for Germany to oppose them with sufficient forces. For this reason England has always, among other things, violated Danish and Norwegian neutrality and their territorial waters. They have always tried to make Scandinavia a theater of war. As further opportunities seemed not to be available after the Russo-Finnish peace, they have now officially declared and threatened that they will no longer tolerate the operation of the German commercial fleet in Danish territorial waters, in the North Sea, and in Norwegian waters. They have announced that they will take over the policing there themselves. All preparations have been made, in order to seize by surprise all strategic points on the coast of Norway, by the greatest warmonger of this century, Churchill, who in the first World War said openly, to the disaster of all humanity, that he would not be restrained by "legal decisions or neutral rights, which are written on scraps of paper." Some days ago he was appointed responsible chief for the whole British conduct of the war.

The German Government has up to now merely observed this man's preparations, but can no longer tolerate the creation of a new war theater to meet the wishes of the English-French warmongers. The Danish and Norwegian governments have for months known about these attempts. Their attitude also is no secret to the German Government. They are neither willing nor capable of making effective resistance against the English invasion. Therefore Germany has decided to forestall the English attack and with its own forces assume the protection of the neutrality of the Kingdoms of Denmark and Norway. It is not the intention of the German Government to obtain strategic points for the battle against England; its exclusive aim is to prevent Scandinavia from becoming a battlefield for the extension of the British war. For this reason strong German military forces have this morning taken possession of the most important military objectives in Denmark and Norway. Beside these measures, agreements are at the present time being negotiated between the Government of the Reich and the Royal Danish Government. The purpose of these arrangements is to make sure that the Danish Kingdom shall continue to exist, that the fleet shall be maintained, that the liberty of the Danish people shall be respected, and that the future independence of that country shall be secured. Until these negotiations have been concluded, it is expected that the Army and Navy will understand this, also that the people and all municipalities will evidence their good will by avoiding either passive or active resistance. Such resistance will be useless and will be broken by all means in our power. All military and civil authorities are therefore asked to enter into contact with the German commanders. The people are requested to continue their daily work and to see to it that tranquility and order are maintained. From now on the German Army and Navy safeguard the security of the country against British violations. Signed Kaupisch, German Commander. Lemkin, pp. 377-378.

waters or in the North Sea. Kaupisch promised the Danes that Germany would not erect bases in Denmark to be used in the war against Britain, that the Danish Army and Navy would be allowed to exist, and lastly, the freedom of the Danish people would not be compromised. Kaupisch assured Denmark of her independence.<sup>31</sup>

Kaupisch presented a persuasive argument for Germany's need to occupy Denmark and Norway. From a purely military perspective it is understandable why German war planners felt an invasion to be necessary. If the Allies occupied Norway and or Denmark, Germany's war machine would be greatly upset.

On the other hand, the Danes had done nothing to justify the German invasion. They had not violated the neutrality pact signed the previous year and they had not assisted the Allied or Axis war machine. Unfortunately, Denmark's geography placed her where war could not be avoided. In April 1940, Denmark found herself occupied.

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<sup>31</sup> Eppstein, ed., p. 53.

### **Denmark from April 9, 1940 to August 29, 1943**

With the German government's guarantees, life in Denmark should have remained much as it had been prior to the invasion. The German Foreign Office was to serve as the intermediary between the Danish and German governments, and the German military authorities were in charge of protecting Denmark from the Allies. The Danish government remained in power and continued with their daily affairs. Immediately after the Danish government conceded the occupation, the four major political parties in Denmark (Social Democrats, Radical Liberals, Conservatives, and Liberals) formed a coalition government. They felt that it was in Denmark's best interest to govern as a unity government.

The Danes depended on Germany for coal and fuel supplies. The Danish government did not want to do anything that might compromise the transfer of these necessities. Agriculture was a tremendous part of the Danish economy. In fact, in 1930 30% of the Danish work force was involved in the agricultural sector, with an additional 30% of the total work force employed in the industrial sector.<sup>1</sup> The two sectors relied upon one another. Prior to the invasion, Denmark exported a majority of their products to England and a sizeable amount to Germany.<sup>2</sup> Under German occupation, Denmark was no longer permitted to trade with England. The Danes were only allowed to trade with Germany or the other Axis powers. Henceforth, Denmark was economically bound to Germany. This

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<sup>1</sup> William Dan Andersen, "The German Armed Forces in Denmark 1940-1943; A Study in Occupation Policy." (Dissertation: University of Kansas, 1972), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> 52% of their total exports went to England in 1939. 23% went to Germany in the same year. Andersen, p. 3.

was another issue that the German authorities would consistently remind the Danes of during the occupation.

The Danish government continued its administration according to the parliamentary system specified in the Danish constitution. The Danes continued to preside over their courts and the everyday matters of the country. Obviously, the German government was going to make requests of them from time to time, which were passed to the Danish government via the German Minister, Cecil von Renthe-Fink, or the German military commander. This period between the invasion and August 29, 1943 is most often referred to as the period of negotiation. The Danish government's policy was to make the occupation as tolerable as possible for the Danish people. In doing so, they would have to occasionally bow to a German demand. If the Danish government could negotiate these demands, it would appear that they maintained at least residual power in Denmark.

Life for the Danish population continued with some degree of normalcy. They had to adapt to the German soldiers in the streets and other public places, but the Danes were not forced to attend National Socialist schools or anything of the sort. Immediately following the occupation, the German authorities ordered a nighttime blackout to hinder the possibility of the British using the lights of Denmark as navigational aids and to avoid possible British bombing. The Danes were forced to deal with such inconveniences. Danish schools remained open, the army and navy remained, though at a reduced number and under German supervision,<sup>3</sup> and churches and businesses continued to operate much

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<sup>3</sup> The army was reduced to 2,200 recruits and 1,100 unarmed soldiers. In the army officer corps there were 500 commissioned officers, 200 reserve officers, and 600 non-commissioned officers. Forcing the officers out of the army would have hurt later German efforts to recruit them for service alongside the Wehrmacht. Andersen, p. 107.

as they had pre-April 9, 1940. King Christian X continued his daily horseback ride through the streets of Copenhagen. As one author stated:

The Danes as a whole maintained a correct and dignified attitude, co-operating where necessary in order to avoid a direct confrontation with the occupying power and the inevitable taking-over of authority which would result from this.<sup>4</sup>

A number of Danes formed groups to study Danish culture and history. They were primarily organized to provide Danish youth with something to be passionate about and to deter them from giving in to National Socialist propaganda. For example, the Danish theologian, Hal Koch, organized a series of lectures for Danish youth, urging them to think for themselves and not to bow under pressure. His lectures were so popular that auditoriums were filled to capacity. Later, Koch was forced to hold his lectures twice in order to accommodate the overflow of eager listeners.<sup>5</sup>

The German authorities treated Denmark unlike any other occupied country. The Danish government had after all agreed to the occupation and the two countries were not at war with one another. Henceforth, the German authorities granted the Danes a generous measure of freedom. Despite the fact that the Prime Minister of Denmark, Theovald Stauning, was a Socialist, the German government did not oppose his administration. In May 1940, Renthe-Fink noted that:

It was not in Germany's interest to tinker with this political arrangement after it [the Danish government] has just shown

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<sup>4</sup> Glyn W Jones, *Denmark: A Modern History*. (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 155.

<sup>5</sup> Leni Yahil, *The Rescue of Danish Jewry: Test of a Democracy*. Translated by Morris Gradel. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), pp. 38-41.



itself to be compliant to our desires.<sup>6</sup>

Not tinkering with the Danish government would benefit Germany as well. The Danish government was familiar with the necessities of running the day-to-day administration of Denmark. It would not be easy to replace these people. Danish meats and agricultural products flowed into Germany and it was not wise for the German authorities to risk jeopardizing the smooth flow of these valuable sources. The German authorities correctly assumed that the Danish people would be less likely to disobey their own government than a government appointed by Germany. Regarding the German occupation policy in Denmark, Renthe-Fink stated:

[Germany must attempt] to the greatest degree possible to reach our goals with the help of the Danish government's and population's voluntary cooperation. Our means are not the German Wehrmacht's weapons, as in the countries that met us as enemies, but the methods of political influence and persuasion. There is no well organized civil or military administration at the disposal of the plenipotentiary appointed by the Foreign Minister, but only a small staff, that behind the scenes as much as possible, yet in a decisive leading and managing manner ensure that German interests are safeguarded in nearly all areas of Danish social life.<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the German treatment of occupied Denmark, it must also be considered that according to National Socialist racial ideology the Danes were an Aryan people. As such, they were members of a superior race much like the ethnic Germans were believed to be.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nathaniel Hong, *Sparks of Resistance: The Illegal Press in German Occupied Denmark April 1940-August 1943*. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1996), p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> The SS began recruiting in Denmark in mid-April 1940. General Kaupisch objected to this recruitment and informed his superiors. He felt that SS recruitment in Denmark might infuriate the Danish population. Hitler was notified of the Army's objections and in early May he informed Field Marshal Keitel that SS recruitment in Denmark would be postponed until a later date. Danes who joined the SS were transferred to Germany and

German troops stationed in Denmark were forbidden to buy rationed products and the German Army did not publish an occupying forces newspaper in Denmark. German soldiers received instruction to treat Danish women and girls with the utmost respect, to avoid political discussions, and to

remember that Denmark was not an enemy country. The Danes were Germanen, not Poles.<sup>9</sup>

Soldiers were reminded that they were representatives of Germany, and therefore their behavior would determine the Danes' opinion of Germany.<sup>10</sup>

Before the invasion, on March 13, 1940 Falkenhorst composed a list entitled "Guiding Principles for Conduct in Personal Dealings with the Danish Population." Excerpts from this list included the following:

1. The Dane has a strong national consciousness. Therefore avoid anything which may offend the national honor.
2. He [the Dane] has no respect for military discipline and authority. Therefore: avoid giving orders, do not shout.  
-Explain objectively and try to convince!  
-Unnecessary harshness and domineering must be avoided.
6. The commercial-minded Danes show a preference for England. They detest war. They have, with few exceptions, no understanding for the goals of National Socialist Germany.<sup>11</sup>

The German military authorities wanted to maintain the best possible relations with the Danes. It would not be to their benefit to have to live amongst an enemy population.

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later served in units such as SS Division Wiking along with other northern SS recruits. Andersen, pp. 139-141.

<sup>9</sup> Werner Rings, *Life with the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler's Europe 1939-1945*. (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Andersen, p. 135.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135. Original taken from Falkenhorst, March 13, 1940, "Besondere Anordnungen...", Anlage 4, *Beretning*, XII, p. A64.

It appeared that Germany would honor the agreement of April 9, 1940. This however, was not the case for long since the Danish government did not willingly bow to every German request. Since it was wartime, the German authorities would have to constantly adjust their occupation policies. The Danish government and people's attitude of accommodation and acceptance of the occupation force was extremely conditional on the current state of the war.

German pressure on the Danish government began shortly after the invasion. Despite the fact that Denmark was allowed to self-govern, the occupation force could not allow the Danes a free rein in all affairs. Under German pressure, on April 17, 1940, a mere eight days after the invasion, the Danish government passed a law calling for the surrender of certain naval and radio apparatus. Following this, the Danish government passed additional laws such as a law forbidding taking pictures of German military establishments (May 1, 1940), a law prohibiting private firearm possession (May 11, 1940), a law restricting movement in military zones (October 31, 1940), and a law prohibiting taking pictures of bombed areas (December 4, 1940).<sup>12</sup> Censorship of the press was in effect after Dr. Meissner, the German Press Attaché, visited the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Bureau where he informed the Danes of the regulations that were to be imposed on the press. All foreign news and editorials had to be approved by censors. Furthermore, no military news could be printed without the censor's approval, and criticism of the occupation force was prohibited. The Danish government

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<sup>12</sup>Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*. (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), pp. 158-164 and 377-383.

bowed to German demands to pass such laws, however, they did not willingly bow to other German requests. In late 1940, the German government pressured the Danish government to replace Prime Minister Stauning with someone who would be more pro-German. Stauning had not proven himself subservient enough to German demands, and was staunchly anti-National Socialist. The Danish government was able to circumvent this issue through negotiations in January 1941 by which they agreed to implement additional restrictions in Denmark. The laws that they agreed to pass were relatively minor and would probably not infuriate the general population. Dismissing the prime minister, alternatively, would be a gross violation of the April 9, 1940 agreement and might spark great protest from the population. The Danish government's "period of negotiation" was in full swing by the end of 1940, and it appeared negotiations would be the only means to deal with the prime minister issue; there was little alternative. It appeared to many Danish government officials that Germany was going to win the war. The German military forces had not lost any battles to date. Therefore, the Danish government's goal was to bring Denmark through the war as unscathed as possible. They hoped that by bowing to some demands and demanding negotiations on others, they would achieve their goal.<sup>13</sup>

1941 brought new problems into the period of negotiation. In January, Hitler requested that a number<sup>14</sup> of Danish torpedo boats be transferred to the German Navy.

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<sup>13</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>14</sup> The number is 8 boats according to Rings, p.129-130. According to Lemkin this number is 10 torpedo boats. Lemkin, p. 159. According to Petrow, the number is 6. Richard Petrow, *The Bitter Years; The Invasion and Occupation of Denmark and*

Renthe-Fink presented a diplomatic note to the Danish government requesting they temporarily surrender these boats. He assured the Danes that these boats would not be used in the war against Britain, but would merely be used for training purposes. In an effort to appease the Danes on this issue, Renthe-Fink agreed to allow the Danes to call for the return of these ships after the war. The Danish government responded to this request by stating that lending warships would be a violation of the terms of the April 9, 1940 occupational agreement that respected Denmark's neutrality. Specifically, this request constituted a breach of faith. Renthe-Fink appealed directly to King Christian X and advised him that the German authorities would consider stopping coal shipments from Germany if the Danes did not approve the transfer of boats. The Danes had little choice and handed over eight torpedo boats, six line-boats, and two reserve vessels on February 5, 1941 after rendering the guns and weapons systems on them useless.<sup>15</sup> By complying with this request, the Danes were able to ease German pressure in regard to the replacement of Stauning. Negotiations had proven to be fruitful. The Danes conceded the torpedo boats but in return were able to refuse the request to replace Stauning. Both sides had achieved a victory. The German authorities secured the boats and the Danes secured their prime minister.

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*Norway April 1940-May 1945*. (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1974), p. 163.

<sup>15</sup> Jerry Livingston Voorhis, "A Study of Official Relations between the German and Danish Governments in the Period between 1940 and 1943." (Dissertation: Northwestern University, 1968), p. 104.

Greater problems arose for the Danes when Germany opened the eastern front. With the launching of Operation Barbarossa on June 22, 1941 Germany was fighting a two front war.

It would appear that many Danes supported the German attack on the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> Foreign Minister Erik Scavenius referred to it as being in the common interest of Europe.<sup>17</sup> Danish hatred of the Soviet Union can be partially attributed to the Soviet-Finnish War that the Soviet Union had begun against Finland in November 1939. The Danes had sided with Finland, and many Danes had even volunteered for service in the Finnish Army. The four major political parties in Denmark announced that they supported the German invasion of the Soviet Union because of the Soviet-Finnish War of 1939, and stressed that Finland was no longer struggling alone.<sup>18</sup> The declaration left unclear however, whether general support of the German offensive was genuine or whether it was made to satisfy the German government. This can be clarified by examining the Danish government's treatment of the communists in Denmark.

With the opening of the German offensive in the east, Renthe-Fink made a series of requests of the Danish government. He asked the Danes to close the border between Denmark and Sweden to anyone possessing a Soviet passport. Additionally, he requested that the Danes arrest all Soviet males of military age, all Soviet citizens who had at any

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<sup>16</sup> Immediately following the German attack on the Soviet Union a group of Danish officers began recruiting for the *Frikorps Danmark*. The *Frikorps Danmark* was a unit in the German Army composed of Danish volunteers willing to serve on the eastern front in the fight against communism. From July 1941 until the end of January 1944, over 5,000 Danes served in the *Frikorps* unit. The Danish government allowed Danish officers and soldiers to serve in the *Frikorps* without penalty. Voorhis, pp.127-130.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

time been suspected of engaging in underground activities, and all German, foreign, and stateless communists. The arrests were to also be applied to Danish Communist leaders (there were 3 in the *Rigsdag*), and any Danish Communists who had been suspected of committing espionage or sabotage.<sup>19</sup> The Danish government complied with these requests. Additionally, they prohibited the communist newspaper in Denmark and banned the Danish Communist Party.<sup>20</sup> These German requests were passed under Law no. 349 concerning the Prohibition of Communistic Associations and Communistic Activities, August 22, 1941.<sup>21</sup> Ole Bjorn, a member of the Danish People's Party (conservative) remarked that the law "regrettably clashes with the usual Danish sense of justice." He continued however, by accusing the communists of being the perpetrators of "terror and sabotage."<sup>22</sup> There is little mention of any sort of public reaction by the Danish people to their government's treatment of the communists. One newspaper, *Politiken*, protested by stating that if the rights of the communists could so easily be

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that the Danish Communist Party received approximately 40,000 votes in the April 1939 election, 9,000 more votes than the Danish National Socialist Party under the leadership of Fritz Clausen. Andersen, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Excerpts from the law read as follows:

**Section 1-** All communist organizations and associations are prohibited, and existing communistic organizations and associations shall be immediately dissolved.

-Communistic activities or propaganda of any kind are prohibited.

-Violation of the present regulation shall be punished by fine, detention, or imprisonment of up to eight years.

**Section 2-** Persons whose conduct has given special reason for the presumption that they intend to take part in communistic activities or propaganda may, in accordance with the decision of the Minister of Justice or with his approval, be taken into custody when it is deemed necessary for the sake of the security of the state or its relations with foreign states.

**Section 3-** Property which may belong to communistic organizations and associations, as well as archives, protocols, and similar material belonging to them shall be taken over by the public authorities. Lemkin, pp. 381-383.

<sup>22</sup> Petrow, p. 163-164.

stripped, the same fate could befall others in the future.<sup>23</sup> The obvious question here is why the Danish people did not protest this violation of their constitution, of their democratic traditions, and of their promised self-government. Their government simply agreed to this encroachment upon Danish rights. There are several possible answers to this question. According to one source:

Danish Communists had made themselves rather obnoxious to many people not only due to their attacks on the government but also through their shift from bitter antagonism toward Nazi Germany to a policy of tolerance after the Russo-German Treaty of 1939. [reference to the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact]<sup>24</sup>

The timing of the anti-Communist legislation must also be considered. The Danish government passed these laws in late August 1941. By this point in the war, Germany controlled Western Europe. The United States had not entered the war yet, and on the eastern front, the German forces were rapidly advancing towards the gates of Moscow. It appeared that Germany would defeat the Soviet forces in a short time, possibly ending the war. In fact, in March 1941, prior to the opening of the eastern front, Prime Minister Stauning admitted publicly that he believed that Germany would win the war.<sup>25</sup> Protesting the treatment of the Danish Communists as the eastern front opened would achieve nothing except for the possibility of harsher conditions in Denmark. Additionally, the Danes had not forgotten the Soviet attack on Finland in 1939. The Danes' loyalties lay with the Finns, and a successful German attack on the Soviet Union would free Finland from Soviet rule. Lastly, the Danish government had been the ones to pass the laws against the Danish Communists. The German authorities had not imposed

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<sup>23</sup> Voorhis, p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 124.



these laws. On June 9, 1941 the Danish government passed a law which forbade demonstrations that might hinder relations with the Germans.<sup>26</sup> Even if the Danish population had wanted to protest against the treatment of the Danish Communists, they would have been less likely to do so since their government had passed a law forbidding them to do so.

The round-up and arrests of Danish Communists and the banning of the Danish Communist Party would not be the only measures taken in Denmark against communism. In the fall of 1941, the German authorities invited the Danes to sign the Anti-Comintern Pact. Nations who signed this pact would be required to end communist activity within their borders. This was to be achieved through any necessary means. Additionally, the Anti-Comintern nations would report to one another their progress in the struggle versus communism. In an emergency session, the Danish government met to review their options. Those opposed to signing the pact feared that the agreement would bind them to the Axis powers. If they were regarded as another Axis power then they would be dragged further into the war and suffer all of the responsibilities that would come along. They feared that demands would be placed on them to send Danish troops to fight along the eastern front and perhaps major Danish cities would be bombed if the Allies viewed the Danes as Axis supporters.<sup>27</sup>

The Danish government informed German Foreign Minister, Renthe-Fink, of their decision not to sign the pact. On November 23, 1941 Renthe-Fink presented the Danish government with the German reply to this refusal. This note stated that:

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<sup>26</sup> Lemkin, p. 163.

<sup>27</sup> Voorhis, pp. 165-167.

Denmark must immediately sign the Pact. If not, Germany will cancel the agreement of the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, 1940, and Denmark will be regarded as an enemy country and must face the unavoidable consequences.<sup>28</sup>

The German response, or ultimatum rather, left little room for negotiations.<sup>29</sup> The German authorities assured the Danes that signing the pact would not commit Danish troops to the eastern front. The same night, the Danish government bowed to the German demand to sign the pact and Scavenius left for Berlin for the ceremonial signing. On November 25, 1941, Denmark signed along with Finland, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania, and Bulgaria.<sup>30</sup>

The signing of the pact proved to numerous Danes that their government held little power under German occupation. Following the signing, a huge protest took place in the

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<sup>28</sup> Petrow, p. 164.

<sup>29</sup> One source doubts that this ultimatum was ever presented. He states, "One authority alludes to strong German pressure as being the principal factor behind Danish acceptance of the Anti-Comintern Pact. According to him, Renth-Fink delivered an ultimatum which warned the Danes that their country would be treated as an enemy power if she did not sign the agreement. This appears somewhat doubtful in view of the overwhelmingly friendly nature of the German communications regarding Denmark in 1941." Voorhis, p. 167. He continues by stating several instances in which leading Germans wrote of the positive relations between the two countries. Despite this assertion that the communications were quite friendly at this point, there is no doubt that initially, the Danish government rejected the invitation to sign the pact. Why else would they suddenly decide to sign it a few days later if there was no German response or ultimatum to the Danish position? Voorhis argues that the Danish government reconsidered after being assured that no Danish troops would be required to fight in the east. Despite this assurance regarding the troops, other factors led the Danish authorities to originally vote against signing the pact. Would the mere assurance that troops would not be committed quell their fears that they would be viewed as siding with the Axis in Allied eyes? This is doubtful. Realistically, the Danes received this ultimatum and were forced to sign it. There was nothing for them to gain in signing this pact. The Italian Foreign Minister who observed the signing of the pact commented that he "had never seen anybody like the Danish representative look like a fish that had been pulled out of the water and was lying on the ground." Andersen, p. 209. This does not sound like an eager participant in the signing of the treaty.

<sup>30</sup> Petrow, p. 164.

streets of Copenhagen causing minor damage. The German military forces were placed on alert, but were not needed since the Danish police were able to end the demonstrations. In describing the scene in the streets of Copenhagen on November 28, 1941 the *Times* of London reported:

The crowd numbered several thousands. They swept the police aside and demonstrated in many parts of the town with cries of "Down with Scavenius" and "Down with the traitors". They sang patriotic songs, including "Ja vi elsker" [the Norwegian national anthem] and carried Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and Icelandic national flags. The demonstration continued after darkness had fallen. The police used searchlights, charged the crowd with truncheons and fired a number of blank shots, successfully barring the way to the Hotel d'Angleterre, where the German Headquarters were established.<sup>31</sup>

Incidents of sabotage were up in 1941 from the previous year, and continued to escalate throughout the war.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, incidents involving passing around illegal leaflets, the publishing of illegal newspapers, writing anti-German graffiti in public places, and other non-violent forms of resistance escalated.<sup>33</sup>

Several days following the protests in Copenhagen, the Danish government noted their disapproval of the protestors' actions and reminded them that the Anti-Comintern Pact had been signed under the authority of King Christian X.

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<sup>31</sup> *Times*, November 28, 1941.

<sup>32</sup> The number of incidents for 1940 and 1941 are recorded as follows: 1940-2 incidents, 1941-12 incidents. Hong, p. 49. It is unclear to what degree these acts, or other non-violent resistance acts such as dropping illegal leaflets, publishing illegal newspapers, etc. were committed by communists. However, as the Danish people became increasingly disapproving of their government and less tolerant of the Germans, they began to take a greater role in both violent and nonviolent acts of resistance.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

1942

The German *Wehrmacht* began 1942 with a series of military successes. These victories continued for most of the year, but took a turn for the worse in the final months of 1942. During the first half of the year, Germany restarted their offensive in the Soviet Union, regained territories lost by the Italians in Africa, and held El Alamein in Egypt. During this same period, however, events in occupied Denmark were not as positive. New developments led to a change in the leadership of the occupied country and an increasingly strained relationship between Germany and Denmark.

Several factors contributed to the strained relations in Denmark in 1942, one of the most important of which was the role of Allied propaganda. British propaganda via radio broadcasts was transmitted throughout Denmark.<sup>34</sup> These broadcasts attempted to portray the Germans in the worst possible way.<sup>35</sup> Despite the fact that the British government funded the broadcasts, they did not officially back the broadcasters' statements. German attempts to jam the radio frequencies failed, and Danes were easily able to listen to the radio broadcasts every evening on their radios. In January 1942, the head of the German propaganda section in Denmark wrote that,

[the English radio broadcasts had] to a significant degree turned public opinion in Denmark against us."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For a comprehensive study on these broadcasts, see Jeremy Bennett, *British Broadcasting and the Danish Resistance Movement 1940-1945*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

<sup>35</sup> Andersen, p. 206.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

Another crucial factor that contributed to the decline in German-Danish relations was the repeated requests of Germany for Danish commercial ships to arm themselves. As early as September 1941 the German authorities asked that Danish merchant vessels carry anti-aircraft guns when traveling in the North Sea so that they would be able to defend themselves.<sup>37</sup> If Allied planes attacked these vessels, Germany would lose valuable Danish goods that they depended upon. The German authorities expressed their readiness to provide the ships with German guns and manpower to arm the weapons. The Danish government discussed this issue and decided to refuse it.<sup>38</sup> This was not the end of the issue, and it resurfaced throughout 1942.

In late 1941, the German authorities brought up the issue of arming Danish merchant vessels once again. In early January 1942, the Danish cabinet met to once again discuss this matter. Here, it was revealed that Danish sailors and ship owners objected to arming their ships out of fear of possible Allied retaliation.<sup>39</sup> The Danish government responded to the German authorities on March 25, 1942, informing them that the request was once again denied.<sup>40</sup>

Fearing an Allied invasion, German military leaders increased the number of German troops in Denmark.<sup>41</sup> Because of the increasing number of troops, problems arose that

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> According to Andersen the exact numbers of troop buildups are not available. However, he cites the record of Friedrich Filitz (quartermaster) who was responsible for supplying German troops in Jutland during the first half of 1942. The numbers are as follows: January 31, 1942- 17,019 men (of which 2,929 were from the air force.) March 31, 1942: 19,474 men (of which 3,080 were from the air force. June 30, 1942-24,032 men (of which 3,098 were from the air force). Andersen, p. 218. He notes that these figures do not include naval personnel.

infuriated the Danish population. German soldiers began buying products that were supposed to be rationed to the Danes, despite the fact that they had been ordered not to do so. In fact, in the summer of 1942 the Danish authorities requested that the *Wehrmacht* lower the amount of goods that soldiers on furlough could buy. Renthe-Fink agreed, and decreased the amount, only to later be overruled by Hitler. It was common to see German soldiers carrying numerous packages of goods destined for Germany.<sup>42</sup> Denmark's economy began to suffer because of the occupation. The Danes were forced to pay for the German occupation forces in Denmark, and had to ship vast quantities of their agricultural and meat products to Germany.<sup>43</sup>

In April, the German authorities brought up the issue of arming Danish merchant vessels again. This time however, they only requested that Danish ships heading towards Rotterdam on the Dutch coast be armed. This request received no response from the Danish authorities; in essence a refusal to comply.<sup>44</sup> In this case, the Danish policy of stalling for as long as possible paid off. After negotiations, the German authorities agreed to cease requesting the arming of merchant ships in return for the right to ask under special circumstances that individual ships be required to arm.<sup>45</sup>

After Prime Minister Stauning died in May 1942, Vilhelm Buhl, the Danish Socialist Party's Minister of Finance became prime minister.<sup>46</sup> Despite German hopes that the new prime minister would be more accommodating than Stauning, Buhl did not change

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>43</sup> Hong, p. 33.

<sup>44</sup> Andersen, p. 221.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

the Danish government's policy.<sup>47</sup> Buhl strongly objected to many German policies, including the Anti-Comintern Pact, and was not as accommodating as his predecessor had been.

A growing segment of the Danish population began to turn against the occupation force due in part to the increased efforts of the Allies to spark a resistance movement, and due to the fact that the population was becoming more aware of the lack of their government's control over the country. The timing must be considered in assessing this increased agitation. By early 1942, the United States had entered the war. The German military forces had failed in their attempts to take Moscow by the end of 1941. Hitler had hoped that Operation Barbarossa would be a quick and decisive victory. This no longer appeared to be the case. By mid-1942 German victory was no longer a certainty.

The illegal press and the other forms of active resistance in Denmark developed with the support of foreign aid. Beginning in October 1940 contact was established with the Strategic Operations Executive (SOE), the British body responsible for aiding and inciting resistance movements throughout occupied Europe. A group of Danish officers referred to as "the Princes" set up a method for sending information to the SOE through a connection in Stockholm, Sweden. One of the Princes, Captain Volmer Fyth had a connection with Ebbe Munck, a Danish journalist with British associations. The Princes contacted Munck and he agreed to report to his newspaper's Stockholm bureau. There, in November 1940, Munck met with Sir Charles Hambro, a representative of the SOE who assigned an SOE representative to directly aid Munck. Furthermore, Hambro assured

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Munck that the SOE would greatly aid the resistance movement in Denmark in the form of weapons and instructors should an organized resistance movement be established.<sup>48</sup>

The operation was set up and Munck received intelligence reports from the Princes on German troop movements, ship arrivals and departures, etc. Munck then passed this information on to the SOE representative in Stockholm. The Princes received reports from agents throughout Denmark. The reports sent to the Allies were so thorough that the British called off their own network of spying in Denmark.<sup>49</sup>

The Princes provided the first information about Hitler's so called "miracle weapon", the V-1 rocket. In August, during its testing phase, one of the rockets strayed off course and landed unexploded on the Danish island of Bornholm. Several Danes in the Prince's network took pictures and notes. Although some of the pictures were later confiscated, others were smuggled to the Allies via the connection in Sweden.<sup>50</sup>

In 1942 the first Danish parachutists, trained by the SOE in sabotage techniques, were dropped into Denmark to help unite the numerous scattered resistance groups.<sup>51</sup> These initial parachutists were unsuccessful in their attempts, most being caught by Danish police or German authorities. Although this active resistance movement was very slow to develop, now that actual assistance in the form of manpower and supplies was being provided, it escalated over the course of the remainder of the occupation. In 1942, the Danish population as a whole was still not resisting the occupation in an active, violent manner. Their government was still technically in control, not the Germans.

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<sup>48</sup> John Oram Thomas, *The Giant Killers: The Danish Resistance Movement 1940-1945*. (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1975), p. 30.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30-32.

<sup>51</sup> These resistance groups were primarily involved in publishing illegal leaflets. The SOE hoped to turn these passive resistors into active saboteurs.



The illegal press first dealt with the issue of active resistance in 1942 after a group of teenage boys in Aalborg carried out several attacks against German boxcars. Aside from encouraging sabotage, these newspapers advocated humiliating treatment of Danish girls with German boyfriends, and businesses that dealt with Germans.<sup>52</sup>

The sources from which the numerous illegal presses<sup>53</sup> received their information were primarily from the BBC broadcasts that could be listened to illegally, and from Danish government sources. Danish officials either had ties to the illegal press or were sympathetic to their cause. On August 10, 1942, Renthe-Fink stated that:

The propaganda literature's content shows that the publishers must have connections to civil servant circles, even influential parliamentary circles, for otherwise they could not be so well informed about many confidential events.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to attempting to incite the population, the illegal press attempted to pass along the truth of the war situation as it developed. Due to propaganda, the German controlled legal press could not be relied upon for accurate information.

The illegal press' circulation drastically increased. In October 1941, the estimated combined output (copies per month) of the illegal press was less than 10,000 copies. Six months later, this number increased to nearly 50,000 copies.<sup>55</sup> Because of this increase,

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>53</sup> According to Albert Fabritius, "until this day, it is impossible to have a precise idea of the number of leaflets and the number of copies of the illegal press, but it seems correct to say that over 225 different newspapers were edited and a total of 26 million copies were printed." Albert Fabritius, *La Literature Clandestine du Danemark Occupe*. (Copenhagen: Rayons d'or de la pensee libre, 1946), p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Hong, p. 143. For original see "Notits af Renthe\_Fink ang. samtale med direktor Svenningsen om sabotage o. lign." August 10, 1942. *Parliamentary Commission*, XIII vol. 5, p.380.

<sup>55</sup> Hong, p. 161.

the Danish government passed a law in May 1942 that increased the punishment for spreading rumors to a three-year prison term.<sup>56</sup>

Incidents of sabotage increased from the previous year. In 1942, there were recorded 59 cases of sabotage, compared to 12 in 1941.<sup>57</sup> Passive resistance acts were also on the rise in 1942. The German authorities worried about these increasing numbers. If a well-trained resistance movement began in Denmark, it would be a short time before it would become an increasing threat to the security of the German occupation force. Despite this threat, and the fact that the Danish courts were lenient in their sentencing, the German authorities still allowed Danish courts to preside in cases involving saboteurs.<sup>58</sup> This German policy did not change until late 1942. Previously, the German authorities had hoped that the Danish population would view the saboteurs as criminals acting against the Danish government. The German authorities did not want to impose overly harsh sentences on Danes out of fear that this would persuade other Danes to join the resistance movement. As the rate of sabotage increased through 1942, the German authorities became increasingly agitated with the Danish court's leniency.<sup>59</sup>

On July 26, 1942 Renthe-Fink met with Scavenius and stressed that the German authorities felt that the Danes had not done enough to combat the increase in sabotage.

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<sup>56</sup> Lemkin, pp. 163-164.

<sup>57</sup> Hong, p. 49. This number is low compared to the figure given by Andersen. He writes, "during the first six months [1942] 21 cases occurred; in July there were 14, in August 29 and in September 18." Andersen, p. 227. He cites Wendt, *Besaettelse og Atomtid*, p. 134. I assume that the definition of sabotage would differ from one person to the next, therefore justifying the discrepancy in numbers.

<sup>58</sup> For example, the Danish courts sentenced the men who helped Christmas Moller escape to Sweden to three years and one year respectively. This was quite lenient compared to what would have happened to these men had they done the same in France for example.

<sup>59</sup> Andersen, p. 231.

He continued by citing numerous examples of Danish leniency in sentencing convicted saboteurs, and the laxness of the Danish police.<sup>60</sup> After meeting with his superiors in Germany in August to discuss the situation in Denmark, Renthe-Fink met with Danish officials to question them as to whether they would be able to stem the increase in cases of sabotage. Renthe-Fink warned the Danish authorities that if they were unable to successfully combat this threat, German military courts would be forced to step in and preside in cases involving sabotage. German military law dictated that convicted saboteurs be put to death.<sup>61</sup> Renthe-Fink stressed that he was displeased with Danish counter-measures to date, and was upset by Buhl's lack of vehemence in cracking down on the communist illegal presses. Additionally, Renthe-Fink stressed his frustration stating that "in his opinion, [the Danish government] did not do enough to guide Danish public opinion."<sup>62</sup>

The German military authorities were forced to take measures to combat sabotage. Beginning on August 15, 1942 they increased the amount of money to be paid to Danish informants who provided them with useful information that resulted in the capture of saboteurs.<sup>63</sup>

As the SOE's activity slowly increased in Denmark, the German authorities requested that the Danish police assist them in capturing Allied agents. The Danish police agreed to this only after receiving assurances from the Germans that those captured would not be executed.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

The German authorities brought up the issue of arming Danish merchant vessels from Rotterdam once again in September 1942. The German authorities informed the Danes that if they did not arm these ships, serious consequences would result, including an end to the coal shipments from Rotterdam to Denmark. Debates were held in the Danish cabinet throughout September. The Danes finally agreed to settle the issue by transferring the registry of the ships traveling to Rotterdam to Germany.<sup>65</sup> The issue had finally been settled. Although relations between the two countries were already strained, in September 1942 the situation worsened.

### The Telegram Crisis

On September 26, 1942 King Christian X celebrated his seventy-second birthday. As usual, the King received congratulatory notes from leaders across the world. In keeping with political etiquette Hitler also sent Christian X birthday wishes. He telegraphed: *"Euer Majestät übermittle ich zum Geburtstag meine aufrichtigen Glückwünsche."*<sup>66</sup> ["Your Majesty, I send to you my sincere congratulations on your birthday."] The response Hitler received in return greatly infuriated him. Christian X thanked Hitler for his note by writing, *"Spreche meinen besten Dank aus"*.<sup>67</sup> ["Thank you very much"]. In

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

response to this exchange, on September 29, 1942 Renthe-Fink presented Scavenius with a note from Berlin. It read:

The Führer has sent the King of Denmark friendly congratulations on his birthday. The King has acknowledged this by merely transmitting a kind brief receipt. It consequently appears that the Danish King, completely mistaking his own importance, does not realize that congratulations from the Führer of the Greater German Reich to a King of Denmark represents a very special honor.

The form of the King of Denmark's answer therefore is a deliberate insult to the Führer and the Greater German Reich; and means and ways will be found to make repetitions of such an incident impossible once and for all. The Führer has ordered that the German Minister in Copenhagen be recalled at once and that the Danish Minister in Berlin likewise leave his post.<sup>68</sup>

It is doubtful that King Christian X deliberately meant to humiliate or offend Hitler in any way. It is possible that due to the already strained relations between the two countries, Hitler took the King's brief response as an insult. Perhaps Hitler was merely waiting for an excuse to impose stricter conditions in Denmark. In the two previous years, Hitler sent birthday wishes to King Christian X and the King sent brief responses on both occasions. Hitler did not react in either 1940 or 1941 in a manner comparable to his anger with the King's response in 1942. Hitler made no objections to the King's reply in 1940. In 1941, Renthe-Fink simply informed Scavenius that the King's brief reply was inappropriate.<sup>69</sup>

The examination of the circumstances surrounding the "Telegram Crisis", makes it evident that Hitler had already decided to change German policy in Denmark and the King's response presented the excuse to do so.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

Relations between the two countries were deteriorating as evident from Renthe-Fink's warning at the end of July. Since Hitler disapproved of the handling of affairs in Denmark, he replaced General Erich Lüdke, the German Military Commander in Denmark, with General (Infantry) Hermann von Hanneken on September 27, 1942,<sup>70</sup> the same day that King Christian X's brief acknowledgement arrived. Hitler must have already been planning to appoint von Hanneken as it would seem most unlikely that a new appointee would be chosen so quickly without prior consideration. Before departing for Denmark, von Hanneken was informed that he would be given full control over military matters in Denmark and that German soldiers would no longer be permitted to socialize with Danes, a break from the previous policy.

In an effort to calm the strained relations between the two countries and explain the misunderstanding, King Christian X sent another telegram to Hitler on September 30, 1942 in which he attempted to explain that insulting Hitler and Germany was not his intention.<sup>71</sup> Hitler ignored this apology.<sup>72</sup> Renthe-Fink returned to Berlin, and the Danish Minister was ordered to return to Denmark. This "Telegram Crisis" marked a crucial turning point in Germany's dealings with Denmark.

After Hitler ordered von Hanneken to accelerate the fortification of Denmark in anticipation of an Allied invasion, on October 12, 1942 von Hanneken ordered all Danish troops off of Jutland. Von Hanneken insisted that this evacuation be completed by November 12, 1942.<sup>73</sup> German policy in Denmark had tensed. Hitler's replacement of

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* For original see Ernst von Weizsäcker, September 30, 1942, *Beretning*, XIII (2), p. A688.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

the Military Commander of Denmark was merely the beginning. He wanted a new government appointed that would merely be a puppet to Germany's desires. In addition, Renthe-Fink was to be replaced by someone who would be better able to implement Hitler's plans for integrating Denmark into the "New Order". Werner Best arrived in Copenhagen on November 5, 1942.<sup>74</sup> He had been appointed the new German Plenipotentiary.

The choice of Best was to be a crucial one as events developed throughout the rest of the war. A lawyer by trade, Best joined the National Socialist Party in 1930, later enlisting with the SS<sup>75</sup> In March 1933 Best was appointed special commissar on police matters in Hessen with the rank of *Regierungsrat* (governmental counselor). In late 1933, Best was sent to Southwestern Germany where he was appointed deputy to SS *Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich.<sup>76</sup> During Hitler's violent overthrow of the SA leadership in 1934, Best ordered numerous executions in Southern Germany.<sup>77</sup> In 1938, Best ordered the expulsion of 17,000 Polish Jews from Germany, and was intricately involved in ethnic cleansing operations in Poland at the outbreak of World War II.<sup>78</sup> Upon the German occupation of France in 1940, Dr. Best was promoted to the position of

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<sup>74</sup> Tatiana Brustin-Berenstein, "The Historiographic Treatment of the Abortive Attempt to Deport the Danish Jews" in *Nazi Holocaust. 5. Public Opinion and Relations to the Jews in Nazi Europe*. (Vol. 2). Michael R. Marcus ed. (Westport and London: Meckler, 1989), p. 573.

<sup>75</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, pp. 407-408.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 408.

<sup>77</sup> Hans Kirchhoff, "SS Gruppenführer Werner Best and the action against the Danish Jews: October 1943" in *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance*. 24, (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1994), p. 212.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* Kirchhoff notes that many new details have emerged regarding Dr. Best's career that were previously unknown. For example, Kirschhoff cites the biography of Best written by Dr. Ulrich Herbert. Ulrich Herbert, *Werner Best. Ein biographische studie uber Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft*, Essen, 1991.

*Ministerialdirektor* and became head of Germany's military administration in Paris.<sup>79</sup> He helped organize the deportation of Jews from France to Auschwitz. Dr. Best had proven to be an effective National Socialist administrator. Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's Foreign Minister, took an interest in Best and persuaded him to join the diplomatic service. Best spent August through October in Berlin at the Foreign Ministry. With his strong National Socialist background, Best was not necessarily the Foreign Ministry's obvious choice to run Denmark, however, the Foreign Ministry approved of Best's views with regard to the best methods for dealing with Denmark. Best believed that it would be wise to win the war first and then turn to internal matters in occupied countries. By placing an SS man in this position, the German Foreign Office appeased and resisted extreme National Socialists' desires for harsher conditions in Denmark.<sup>80</sup>

One of Best's first acts as Reich Plenipotentiary was to see that a new government in Denmark was established. Hitler insisted that Prime Minister Buhl was replaced.<sup>81</sup> In late October, the Danish Foreign Minister, Erik Scavenius, was summoned to Berlin to discuss the formation of a new Danish government. He was Germany's first choice to head the new Danish administration despite the fact that he was not a National Socialist. The leader of the Danish National Socialist Party, Fritz Clausen, had proven himself a failure in Denmark. At best, the Danish National Socialists received 2-3% of the vote in elections.<sup>82</sup> Realizing that he lacked experience in such a key position, Scavenius did not

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<sup>79</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 409.

<sup>80</sup> Rings, p. 30.

<sup>81</sup> Andersen, p. 257.

<sup>82</sup> Therkel Stræde, *October 1943. The Rescue of the Danish Jews from Annihilation*. (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1993), p. 7.



want to accept the appointment.<sup>83</sup> Best reported that he would only accept Scavenius as Prime Minister. Scavenius finally accepted the post on November 9, 1942 after being requested to do so by King Christian X.<sup>84</sup> The Danish Parliament had no choice but to agree to the German demand for the new cabinet. It was a choice of either accepting the change peacefully, thereby keeping Denmark under a Danish leader, or risk having Hitler place a National Socialist government in control of Denmark. Scavenius proceeded by appointing his cabinet with Dr. Best's approval. No member of the new cabinet was a member of the National Socialist Party.<sup>85</sup> Now that Hitler had completely switched his key leaders in Denmark and had changed the Danish government, perhaps Denmark would fall into the "New Order" of Europe.

As autumn 1942 progressed, the tide of war began to turn against Germany. In Africa the Axis powers were forced to retreat. The attempt to defeat the Soviets quickly in the east had failed. The Soviets began to counter the Germans at Stalingrad, eventually leading to the German 6<sup>th</sup> Army's surrender there in early 1943. In Denmark, resistance activities did not cease with the change of Military Commander, Reich Plenipotentiary, and government, however, cases of sabotage in Denmark remained rare throughout 1942.<sup>86</sup> With the change in their attitude, the German authorities had fewer qualms about making greater demands on the Danish government. Prior to the "Telegram Crisis", Germany had not made significant attempts to obtain Danish weaponry for the war. In fact, Renthe-Fink had advised against making this request for fear that the political

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<sup>83</sup> Andersen, p. 258.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 259-260.

<sup>85</sup> Voorhis, p. 235.

<sup>86</sup> In 1942 there were reported 59 cases of sabotage. Hong, p. 201.

repercussions would not support it. He felt that the Danish cabinet would not approve this transfer of weaponry for fear of British reprisals.<sup>87</sup> The Allies could easily interpret a transfer of weapons as an enemy act. Following the crisis in late September 1942, the German authorities no longer worried about Danish fears. Von Hanneken wanted to seize all Danish military equipment. Doing so would not only provide the German war machine with additional supplies, but would put von Hanneken in a positive light in German circles. Moreover, this confiscation of weaponry would weaken the Danish military forces, thereby removing a potential threat to the German occupation forces. Von Hanneken was granted authority to insist upon the surrender of Danish military weaponry not currently being used. He presented this demand to the Danish authorities on November 18, 1942.<sup>88</sup> The Danish authorities had little choice in this matter. If they refused to concede, von Hanneken threatened to confiscate the weapons by force. Through negotiations with von Hanneken, however, the Danes agreed to "lend" Germany military equipment with the guarantee that it would be replaced after the war. The fact that the Danish government was able to negotiate at all demonstrates that the German authorities still needed them in power. It is evident though that the German authorities no longer cared about Danish neutrality or independence.

Von Hanneken feared an increase in the number of cases of sabotage. He realized the threat this presented. Valuable war material being shipped from Norway might be lost. To deter saboteurs, von Hanneken placed the Danish police in charge of guarding the rail lines in communities throughout Denmark since the police were considered more loyal to

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<sup>87</sup> Andersen, p. 263.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

the German authorities than the Danish Army. In addition, von Hanneken demanded that convicted persons serving extended prison sentences be interned in German prisons. The Danish prisons were far too lenient and on several occasions, convicts had escaped.

At the end of December 1942, 36,645 German Army and Air Force personnel were stationed in Denmark, an increase from 21,969 at the end of September of the same year.<sup>89</sup> Evidently, Hitler's fear of an Allied invasion of Denmark had increased along with the German authorities' distrust of the Danish population.

#### 1943: From Cooperation to Disbandment

On January 25, 1943, Scavenius informed Best that according to the Danish constitution an election had to be held every four years and that the time for elections was approaching.<sup>90</sup> If an election did not take place before April 3, 1943 all laws passed by Danish parliament would be considered void. Best wanted to allow the elections, but could not give approval without first consulting his superiors. Best felt that by allowing the elections, the German authorities would appear in a favorable light throughout the world for their generous treatment of an occupied country. Additionally, he hoped that he would gain popularity among the Danish people.<sup>91</sup> Best's superiors approved the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>90</sup> Voorhis, p. 253.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

elections under certain conditions, specifically, that there was to be no active campaigning or demonstrations. The Danish government and people were informed of the date of the election a mere month and a half in advance. The election took place on March 23, 1943 in which 96.7% of the electorate cast their ballots for democratic candidates.<sup>92</sup> The Danish National Socialist Party received a mere 2.1% of the vote.<sup>93</sup> After nearly three years of German occupation, the Danish National Socialist Party received this embarrassingly low number of votes. They had failed to gain favor among their countrymen.

1943 presented the most dramatic increase in acts of sabotage in Denmark. In 1942 there had been 59 reported cases and in 1943 there were 816 reported cases.<sup>94</sup> If the numbers for 1943 are broken down by month through August, the following chart is established:

January: 24	May: 80
February: 38	June: 47
March: 68	July: 94
April: 80	August: 213 <sup>95</sup>

In January, the German Army began a withdrawal from the Caucasus. Far more significant however, was the German 6<sup>th</sup> Army's surrender at Stalingrad. Additionally, Churchill and Roosevelt met at the Casablanca conference and decided that the war would only end with the unconditional surrender of Germany. In February, Soviet troops

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<sup>92</sup> Andersen, p. 278.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Hong, p. 49.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. He has taken these figures from: Hans Kirchhoff, *Augustoproret 1943*, vol. 1, p. 173. Kirchhoff notes that he arrived at these numbers through his research in the Special Prosecutor's files.

recaptured Kursk. Elsewhere, the German Army was forced to begin a withdrawal from Tunisia. In May, the Axis surrendered in North Africa, and in July, American troops landed in Italy. By late August, the Soviets had retaken Kharkov. The Danish people were well aware of these German losses because of the British and Swedish radio broadcasts and the Danish illegal press. It is reasonable to assume that more Danes were willing to join the resistance once they realized that Germany was losing the war.

After over two years of occupation, rationing became increasingly strict as the war continued and Germany needed additional agricultural and raw materials from Denmark. This rationing led to food shortages for the Danes. As a result, more Danes became frustrated with the situation and were more likely to join or sympathize with the resistance. The SOE dropped 8 parachutists into Denmark between January and March.<sup>96</sup> These agents were able to unite the various scattered resistance groups and establish radio contact with Britain. Now that resistance began to take shape, the British began dropping additional supplies to resistance groups in March. Because of the additional supplies and SOE trained agents, the Danish resistance groups became better organized and better armed, increasing their sabotage acts. They were quickly becoming a greater threat to the German occupation forces in Denmark.

Von Hanneken reported the deteriorating situation to his superiors. On January 28, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel passed a directive that placed additional authority with von Hanneken. According to Keitel's order, a German court martial would deal with any Dane who attacked the German Armed Forces or German equipment. The Danish courts

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<sup>96</sup> Petrow, p. 187.

would still have authority over minor cases of sabotage, including attacks on individual German troops.<sup>97</sup>

Von Hanneken still feared the Danish Army as a major threat to his troops. Should the Allies land in Denmark, von Hanneken was positive that the Danish troops would fight alongside them. Furthermore, von Hanneken believed that the Danish Army was sending information to the Allies. This suspicion was in fact correct, as previously mentioned regarding the information supplied by the "Princes". In a letter dated January 22, 1943, von Hanneken wrote to his superiors that the Danish Army had failed to cooperate with the German military forces. The Danish Army had only provided men to disarm unexploded British bombs in Denmark. The Danish Navy, on the other hand, had helped to a limited extent in minesweeping operations.<sup>98</sup> Von Hanneken continued by listing the number of officers in the Danish Army (1,422) as a potential threat, since they could easily be used to command forces should an Allied invasion occur. Because of his fears, von Hanneken recommended the disbandment of the Danish Army and a complete confiscation of their weapons for the German war effort.<sup>99</sup>

Dr. Best disagreed with von Hanneken's recommendation. Best felt that if the Danish Army was disbanded, the Danish people would revolt, viewing the disbandment as a nullification of their rights guaranteed under the invasion agreement. Furthermore, Best felt that the situation was improving in Denmark. For instance, under his jurisdiction the volume of exports to Germany had increased. In 1942, according to Danish figures, 3.6 million Germans received their rations of meats and butter from Denmark. In 1943,

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<sup>97</sup> Andersen, p. 271. He cites Werner Best, June 1943, *Beretning*, XIII (3), p. A1291.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

under Best, this figure increased to 4.6 million.<sup>100</sup> If the Danes were to revolt, the flow of these crucial goods to Germany would be greatly disturbed. Best argued that the Danish government would not accept a demand to disband their army, and it would be impossible to install a Danish government that would be willing to concede such a violation. Best reasoned that if von Hanneken demanded the disbandment of the Danish Army, then the Danish government would dissolve itself, and therefore, additional German forces and manpower would be needed to administer the country. To illustrate his point, Best drew upon the example of Norway where the German governor needed 3,000 persons to govern 2.8 million people compared to the mere 200 persons Best needed to govern the 4 million Danes. Logically, it did not make sense to risk the possibility that the Danish government might dissolve itself.<sup>101</sup> Best still believed that it would be sensible to deal with internal matters in Denmark after the war had been won.

The German military and Foreign Ministry heads read both points of view and agreed that it would not be wise to risk the possible repercussions that would occur if the Danish Army were dissolved. Best's superiors knew that Germany depended on many Danish supplies and they did not wish to jeopardize the flow of these goods, nor did they wish to place their soldiers in another militarily hostile zone. Best's arguments outweighed von Hanneken's and the Danish Army remained intact.

Von Hanneken's letter was not completely ignored however. The Foreign Ministry prepared a warning to the Danish government concerning the unreliability of the Danish

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<sup>100</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 118.

<sup>101</sup> Andersen, p. 276. Original from Dr. Best to the German Foreign Ministry, January 25, 1943. The National Archives of the United States. World War II Records Division. Records filmed for the Danish Rigsarkiv (1960), Alexandria, Virginia, reel 1, frames 334-335.

Army. They asked that steps be taken to ease the negative attitude of the Danish Army towards German soldiers. In this warning the German authorities stated that if relations continued to deteriorate and a hostile attitude was maintained, Germany would be forced to dissolve the Danish Army and arrest the officers as prisoners of war.<sup>102</sup> Before this warning was sent however, the German authorities discovered what appeared to be a mobilization of the Danish Army. This was discovered when the German Intelligence Agency (*Abwehr*) read a letter from a Danish soldier that detailed where he was to report if a mobilization was ordered. Von Hanneken immediately questioned Danish General Gortz on this matter. Gortz replied that every year Danish officers traveled in civilian clothing throughout the country taking surveys of equipment and other goods in case of a mobilization. These surveys took place as a matter of routine, and had taken place in the previous years of the occupation.<sup>103</sup>

The warning that the Foreign Ministry had drawn up was in draft form and about to be delivered. Von Hanneken wanted this warning to be discarded, and harsh measures to be inflicted in light of this new discovery. Hitler agreed that the drafted warning was not serious enough given these recent developments. In addition to the previous demands made in the warning, a section was added that demanded that the Danish Army cease their mobilization exercises. Best received the new draft of the warning on March 26, 1943, but did not deliver it to the Danish authorities until April 14, 1943.<sup>104</sup> In between the time when Best received the text and delivered it, another section was added calling

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279. Original from WFSt/Qu (III) to Hanneken, March 1, 1943, The National Archives of the United States. World War II Records Division. Records filmed for the Danish Rigsarkiv (1960), Alexandria, Virginia, reel 1, frame 603.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.



on the Danish government to put an end to mutiny in their navy through any necessary means. This section was added after an incident occurred aboard a Danish ship in which several Danish seamen overtook the vessel and forced the captain to sail them to neutral Sweden.<sup>105</sup>

After the Danes received the warning, on May 7, 1943 Scavenius replied that the Danish mobilization exercises would cease and that attempts would be made to quell anti-German feelings in the Danish Army, including sending officers for training in Germany.<sup>106</sup> Von Hanneken was still not satisfied. When he met with Danish General Rolsted on May 10, 1943 he mentioned that should the Danes send a division, or a mere 100 officers to the eastern front, it would be viewed as a great step towards healing German-Danish relations. Rolsted replied that this was unacceptable. Additionally, Rolsted informed von Hanneken that no Danish officer had volunteered for any sort of training in Germany.<sup>107</sup> Any hope von Hanneken may have still held in regards to cooperation between the two armies was crushed.

Incidents of sabotage continued to increase and it appeared that little could be done to stop them as long as the Danish government maintained jurisdiction in Denmark. The Danish cabinet realized that something had to be done in order not to infuriate von Hanneken further. On June 1, 1943 the Danish parliament approved a memorandum that stated that any Danish officer who wished to fight for the German or Finnish forces could

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

do so without negative consequences.<sup>108</sup> The Danish government did no more to improve relations between the two armies.

Von Hanneken still feared the possibility that the Danish forces would assist the Allies in the event of a northern invasion. He sent an order to his commanding officers on July 20, 1943 detailing the measures to be taken in the event of an invasion. Despite the fact that an agreement had been reached between Germany and Denmark that stated that the Danish Army would refrain from joining the Allies and would remain in their barracks, von Hanneken did not trust them. In his orders, he issued plans for the possibility of the German military having to overpower the Danish Army.<sup>109</sup>

While von Hanneken worried about an Allied invasion and the possible reaction of the Danish Army in such an event, clashes between civilians and German military personnel became more frequent. Through the BBC and Radio Denmark, the British informed the Danish people that if they did not destroy the factories that were producing goods for the German war effort, then the British would have to destroy these factories in bombing raids.<sup>110</sup>

The increase in resistance activity in 1943 that has been mentioned was not unique to Denmark. Resistance throughout occupied Europe intensified when it became clear that Germany would lose the war.

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305. See Heeresoberarchivrat Goes, "Die Grunde ...," *Beretning*, XIII (2), p. A850.

August 1943

As previously mentioned, incidents of sabotage skyrocketed in the month of August to 213 cases, up from 94 cases in July.<sup>111</sup> The Danish populace continued to take matters into their own hands once they realized that Germany would lose the war and that their government was relatively powerless to resist German demands.

In response to the destruction of a ship being built for the German Navy in Odense, the German commander of the port posted German guards throughout the shipyard to prevent further unrest. Because of this, the Danish ship workers went on strike. Ship workers throughout Odense followed suit and refused to work for the German war effort.<sup>112</sup>

In another case, General von Hanneken imposed a curfew on the city of Esbjerg after Danish saboteurs destroyed a fish storehouse. The town reacted by going on strike and violently clashing with German troops. Von Hanneken was forced to remove the curfew, and the strike ceased.<sup>113</sup>

It appeared that the citizens of Odense had struck a blow against the German occupation forces, and so, other Danish workers in towns throughout Denmark followed suit. In Odense, workers went on strike once again, frequently clashing with German troops. The situation was so grave that it was unsafe for German troops to be in the streets alone. Von Hanneken sent a report to his superiors on August 23, 1943 stating that the German Army's honor and pride demanded an end to the mayhem in

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<sup>111</sup> Hong, p. 49.

<sup>112</sup> Andersen, p. 302.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

Denmark.<sup>114</sup> He wrote that if the Danish government was unable to quickly end the chaos, then German troops would have to step in or risk appearing weak. Additionally, von Hanneken documented the numerous cases of sabotage that had occurred during the month, and reiterated his proposal to disband the Danish Army to which Werner Best now agreed. As a result of the arguments put forth, General Alfred Jodl gave von Hanneken the authority to disband the Danish military on approximately August 25, 1943. Hitler, however, had harsher plans.

Dr. Best flew to Berlin on August 24, 1943 to discuss matters in Denmark. Unsuccessfully, he pleaded with Hitler not to take military action against the Danes, arguing that a policy of moderation might still have a chance. For Hitler, it was time for his military forces to act. He sent Dr. Best back to Copenhagen on August 27, 1943 with instructions to present the Danish government with an ultimatum. The following morning, Best presented Scavenius with a document calling for the Danes to implement a state of emergency. Under this state of emergency there was to be a curfew, a ban on strikes and public gatherings, a confiscation of all privately held weapons, and the imposition of the death penalty for saboteurs and violators of the weapons ban.<sup>115</sup> The text read as follows:

**The Reich Government's Demands:**

Immediate proclamation by the Danish government of martial law in the entire country.

The martial law must include the following measures:

1. Prohibition of all public gatherings of more than five persons.

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>115</sup> Jurgen Hæstrup, *Panorama Denmark: From Occupied to Ally: Danish Resistance Movement 1940-1945*. (Copenhagen: The Press and Information Department of the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1963), p. 30.

2. Prohibition of all strikes and any support to persons on strike.
3. Prohibition of all open air meetings and meetings behind closed doors.
  - a. Curfew between 8:30 P.M. and 5:30 A.M.; closing of restaurants at 7:30 P.M.
  - b. Delivery before September 1, 1943 of all firearms and explosives still in private hands.
4. Prohibition of any discrimination against Danish citizens or their relatives because of cooperation with German offices or connection with Germans.
5. Introduction of press censorship with German participation.
6. Establishment of Danish summary courts for cases involving offenses against measures to maintain security and order.

A warning that offenses against the above measures will be punished with the most severe sentences allowed by the temporary law which empowers the government to take steps to maintain peace, order and security.

Immediate introduction of the death penalty for sabotage, for attacks on the German armed forces and persons indirectly associated with same as well as for possession of firearms and explosives after September 1, 1943.

The Reich government expects the Danish government to accept the above demands before 4 P.M. today

Copenhagen August 28, 1943.<sup>116</sup>

If the Danish government did not accept the ultimatum, the German military would declare martial law and von Hanneken would assume executive authority in Denmark. Clearly, he would disband the Danish military forces if placed in command. Under a state of emergency, Dr. Best would be subservient to von Hanneken. The two had vied for power ever since they had assumed their respective roles in Denmark.

The Danish government met on the same day to discuss the ultimatum. They unanimously rejected it, stating that:

An implementation of the measures demanded by Germany would destroy any possibilities that the government might have of keeping the population calm, and the government therefore finds that it would be irresponsible to assist with the implementation of these measures.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> As printed in Andersen, p. 309. Original in *Beretning*, IV, p. A284.

<sup>117</sup> As printed in Andersen, p. 311. Original: (Erik Scavenius), "Aufzeichnung," August 28, 1943, *Beretning*, IV, p. A290.

At 4AM on the morning of August 29, 1943 von Hanneken sent a letter to Scavenius informing him that he and his cabinet were no longer in office and that Denmark had been placed under German martial law. Von Hanneken ordered the immediate disarmament and confinement of the Danish military forces. Telephone lines to Sweden were cut, and German squads arrested influential Danes including professors, politicians, and businessmen.<sup>118</sup> The Danish Army surrendered relatively peacefully, although members of the Danish Navy scuttled their ships or headed to Sweden. As a result, the German authorities were able to confiscate few Danish ships.<sup>119</sup>

The Danish government was no longer in power, and so, Danes who had previously refrained from engaging in resistance activities out of respect for the laws of their government found themselves in a position from which they could actively resist the German occupation forces. Resistance became the national duty of the Danish people. With the German authorities in control of Denmark, the National Socialists could begin to implement anti-Jewish measures.

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<sup>118</sup> Petrow, p. 192.

<sup>119</sup> Petrow lists the following numbers: 29 Danish vessels sunk or heavily damaged, 13 small naval craft fell into German hands undamaged, 13 others escaped to Sweden. Petrow, pp. 193-194.

### **The Jewish Question in Denmark during the Occupation**

The German authorities attempted to solve the Jewish Question in all occupied territories. What initially began with restrictive measures, ended with Jews in concentration and death camps. The Danish government was well aware of National Socialist anti-Jewish laws, and so questioned the German authorities regarding their intentions for the Jews of Denmark. Six days after the occupation, German Minister Renthe-Fink wrote to his Foreign Ministry that

The Danish authorities are apprehensive as to whether we will, for all that, show too much interest in the internal situation and take steps against Jews, refugees and extreme left groups, and create a special police organ to this end.<sup>1</sup>

Renthe-Fink continued by warning of the political and economic consequences that would result should such measures be introduced.<sup>2</sup> Before the German authorities had even brought up the issue of the Jews, the Danish government interjected by stating that no anti-Jewish measure would be tolerated.

In September 1941 in Germany, the National Socialists declared that Jews must wear a yellow star as a means of being identified. Renthe-Fink and the German Military Commander in Denmark, General Lüdke, agreed that it was not wise to enforce this law in Denmark. They were right in their assumption, for approximately sixteen months later, the head of the German Foreign Office's Jewish Affairs Department, Martin Luther, wrote that Frits Clausen, the leader of the Danish National Socialists stated:

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<sup>1</sup> Leni Yahil, *The Rescue of Danish Jewry: Test of a Democracy*. Translated by Morris Gradel. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

if the Jewish star were introduced, 10,000 Danes would wear it in protest.<sup>3</sup>

The issue of forcing the Jews in Denmark to wear a special marking was never formally discussed during the occupation.

In a speech on October 16, 1941 Christmas Möller, leader of the Conservative Party in Denmark, announced that “the treatment of Jews, as practiced in Germany, is completely unsuitable for the Danish character.”<sup>4</sup>

To quell Jewish concerns as to their fate in occupied Denmark, the Danish Minister of Religion brought the Chief Rabbi of Copenhagen, Rabbi Friediger, to a conference and reassured him that the Jews had nothing to fear as long as the Danish government was in power.<sup>5</sup> The Nuremberg Laws would not be forced on Denmark.

At the Wannsee Conference of January 20, 1942 the number of Jews in Denmark was listed at 5,600.<sup>6</sup> This however, was an inaccurate figure.<sup>7</sup> Due to the small number of Jews in Denmark and the possible repercussions of executing a Jewish round-up, including having to send in additional German troops to completely control the Danish population, the National Socialists left Denmark out of the Final Solution for the time being. The Danish Jews could be dealt with later.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office*. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978), p.160.

<sup>4</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> Protocol of the Wannsee Conference, January 20, 1942. [www.yad-vashem.org.il/holocaust/documents/117.html](http://www.yad-vashem.org.il/holocaust/documents/117.html).

<sup>7</sup> Therkel Stræde, *October 1943. The Rescue of the Danish Jews from Annihilation*. (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1993), p. 2. Most sources list the number of Jews between 7,000 and 7,300.

<sup>8</sup> On this point, Undersecretary of State Luther, head of the department for Jewish affairs in the German Foreign Office, spoke of “...difficulties in some countries, such as the



Occasionally during the occupation, Martin Luther's assistant, Franz Rademacher, and the head of the German Foreign Office's Northern Department, Werner Grundherr, pressed Renthe-Fink to remind the Danish government of the Jewish issue. Renthe-Fink's only response to this request was a suggestion that "Jewish firms in Denmark no longer receive allocations of coal and fuel from Germany."<sup>9</sup>

Not wanting to jeopardize relations between Germany and Denmark during his reign as Reich Plenipotentiary, Renthe-Fink constantly advocated a postponement of anti-Jewish action.<sup>10</sup> Were it not for his objections it is likely that the Jewish Question would have been dealt with much earlier in the occupation. In January 1941, he convinced Ribbentrop not to move forward with anti-Jewish measures in Denmark.<sup>11</sup> When German military security zones were established, the German High Command ordered that Jews were forbidden to enter these areas. Renthe-Fink, and Generals Kaupisch and his successor, General Lüdke, agreed not to take measures against Jews in these areas, nor would they mark Jew's identification tags in any way.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of what the intentions of the generals and Renthe-Fink were, they undoubtedly succeeded in convincing their superiors not to take action against the Jews of Denmark.

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Nordic States, and that it was therefore advisable to postpone action in these countries for the present. In view of the small number of Jews involved there, the postponement will in any case not occasion any significant curtailment..." Protocol of the Wannsee Conference.

<sup>9</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Vol. 2. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), p. 559.

<sup>10</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, pp.45-61.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Werner Best, Renthe-Fink's successor, concurred with his predecessor's soft Jewish policy, and Best reported, presumably to Luther, that Prime Minister Scavenius and his entire cabinet threatened to resign if the German authorities introduced anti-Jewish actions.<sup>13</sup> Best, however, proposed the implementation of three anti-Jewish measures to Foreign Minister Ribbentrop in an effort to slowly remove Jews from Denmark. Best's plan called for a removal of Jews from public positions by reporting to the Danish government on a case-by-case basis, that individual Jews were uncooperative. This would continue until all Jews were removed from public positions. Furthermore, Best suggested forbidding all German companies from engaging in business activities with Jewish owned companies. Lastly, Jews were to be arrested for political or criminal activities.<sup>14</sup> Although Ribbentrop approved Best's plan, it was never implemented. Upon researching the sphere of Jewish influence in Denmark, Best found that there was little, and decided not to move forward with his plans to remove Jews from public positions in Denmark.<sup>15</sup>

Events had proven that the Danish government would never willingly employ anti-Jewish measures and would certainly never turn Jews over to the German authorities for deportation. In an effort to gain Danish support during a proposed Jewish round-up, the German government announced its intention to release Danish soldiers (not officers) who had been arrested when the Danish Army was disbanded in August 1943.<sup>16</sup> Despite the

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<sup>13</sup> Hilberg, p. 559.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> According to Hilberg there were no Jews in Parliament, 31 in public administration positions, 35 lawyers, 21 artists, and 14 editors. There were 345 Jews in business, but none in large roles. Hilberg, p. 560.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 565.

fact that the German authorities released many Danish soldiers, the Danes did not agree to implement anti-Jewish measures.

The events of August 1943 that led to the resignation of the Danish government (see previous chapter) prompted Best to seek a conclusion to the Jewish question in Denmark. Under the state of emergency General von Hanneken was in control. Best wished to round-up and deport the Jews during the state of emergency for he believed that the German soldiers stationed in Denmark would provide the necessary force to carry out the liquidation and he would be able to reclaim his authority in Denmark from von Hanneken.<sup>17</sup> Best told his superiors that he would be able to round-up the Jews if they sent additional police forces under his command.<sup>18</sup> Best would then have a respectable force and would hold more weight in his struggle for power with von Hanneken. Best proceeded with his plan.

On September 8, 1943 Best sent telegram number 1032 to the Foreign Ministry in Germany. The telegram suggested that the round-up and deportation of the Danish Jews move forward during the current state of emergency. Best wrote that if the National Socialists waited until after the state of emergency, "reactions" could be expected throughout the country. He continued by stating that if the National Socialists were to proceed during the state of emergency, it might be necessary to set up an administrative council under his leadership. He would then "rule by decree".<sup>19</sup> Here we see Best's self

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<sup>17</sup> Von Moltke writes in his letter dated 5 October, 1943 to his wife Freya, "the conflict between H (Hanneken) and B (Best) is the chief feature of the Danish situation and in my opinion much of what has happened must be understood as a result of that conflict." Von Moltke, *Letters to Freya*. Edited and translated by Beate Ruhm von Oppen. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 351.

<sup>18</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, pp. 138-140.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

serving motivations, for if he ruled by decree, he would in reality be the Dictator of Denmark. Best concluded his telegram by requesting additional police forces and military assistance during the round-up.<sup>20</sup> The Foreign Ministry approved Best's suggestion and passed it on to Hitler who concurred and ordered the round-up. Best received a telegram stating this on September 17, 1943. When General von Hanneken received word on September 20, 1943 that his troops were to aid in the round-up of Jews, he sent a cable to General Staff Headquarters objecting to the use of his forces.<sup>21</sup> He felt that the population would become agitated and the military forces would be required to act. Additionally, von Hanneken doubted that Danish civil servants would cooperate in the future after anti-Jewish actions had occurred. His objections, which were agreed upon by his military superiors, accomplished nothing.<sup>22</sup> The deportations had already been approved and were to proceed during the evening of October 1, 1943. Initially it was planned for the Jews to report to *Wehrmacht* offices under the false notion that they were reporting for "work detail". This would make the round-up process considerably easier. Von Hanneken, however, refused to allow his offices to be used for such purposes. He cabled Berlin on September 23, 1943 in an attempt to delay the action. He stated that:

The implementation of the Jewish deportations during the military state of emergency impairs the prestige of the Wehrmacht in foreign countries.<sup>23</sup>

His requests were denied. As far as military support for the operation was concerned, Best wanted to have army field intelligence men and other troops placed under his

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154, 158-159.

<sup>23</sup> Hilberg, p.562.

command. The army, however, denied this request.<sup>24</sup> The army wanted nothing to do with the round-up of the Jews, and in the end offered minimal support during the period when the deportations were to take place.<sup>25</sup> Von Hanneken in fact offered a mere fifty men to watch the harbors from which Jews were to be loaded on to boats and sent off to camps.<sup>26</sup> Since von Hanneken had refused to allow his offices to be used as round-up spots, the German police would be forced to go door to door to capture Jews. The Gestapo were already in possession of a list of Jews, which they had stolen from the offices of the Jewish Community Organization in late August.<sup>27</sup> In an effort to avoid problems with the Danish police and population, the German police received orders not to break down any doors during the round-up; to only take Jews who willingly opened their doors.

Best informed his Shipping Attaché, G.F. Duckwitz, of the forthcoming Jewish action, who in turn informed Hans Hedtoft, a well-known Dane. Hedtoft in turn relayed the

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<sup>24</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 166.

<sup>25</sup> Von Hanneken did not want a Jewish round-up to take place during the state of emergency as the blame would therefore lay with the army as opposed to with Best. Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 165.

<sup>26</sup> Hilberg, p. 563.

<sup>27</sup> I have been unable to find a definite answer as to why this list had not been destroyed. I asked Hendrik Lundbak, Assistant Curator at the Resistance Museum in Denmark this question. His reply was that we must assess this by determining what the people knew or wished to believe at this time. They had been under state protection and had had no reason to fear for their lives. Additionally, he suggested to me that the Jewish community might not have been able to uphold their activity as a part of Danish society if they had destroyed their membership records. Regardless, the list that the Germans stole was not up to date and they left the offices with an older version of the list. Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 169 and Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*. (New York: Franklin Watts, 1982), p. 294. Breaking in and stealing this list was not in keeping with the covert methods that the National Socialists employed in other countries. Yahil argues that this served as a warning to the Jews and Danes of what was to come. If this were a warning, it was typical of Best, who on the one hand took actions against Jews, but on the other hand helped warn them about the forthcoming round-up. (Best's "double-dealing" will be discussed further in this chapter.)

message to C.B. Henriques, President of the Jewish Community, on September 28, 1943. Initially, Henriques did not believe Hedtoft, but after much discussion was convinced to move into action. The following day, coincidentally the Jewish New Year, rabbis warned Jews in synagogue of the imminent danger. They were urged to warn others and then to go into hiding. Word of the forthcoming round-up spread amongst the Danish population through various means. For instance, the Danish Social Democrats utilized their trade union movement to spread the warning, and members of various professions passed the warning on to their countrymen.<sup>28</sup>

During the night of October 1, 1943 when German round-up attempts proceeded, they were successful in catching less than 10% of the Jewish population.<sup>29</sup> Four hundred seventy seven Jews were deported to Theresienstadt.<sup>30</sup> Obviously, the Jews in hiding could not remain hidden in neighbors' homes forever. There would come a point when German police would be willing to break down doors. A full-fledged rescue of the Jews was needed. With the announcement of the Swedish government on October 2, 1943 that they would grant freedom and asylum to Danish Jews, the rescue could proceed. On October 3, 1943 a letter was read on behalf of Danish bishops in churches throughout Denmark:

we will struggle for the right of our Jewish brothers and sisters to preserve the same liberty that we prize more highly than life itself.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 239.

<sup>29</sup> Hilberg, p. 565.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* It is unclear if 477 is representative of all Jews captured, or merely those deported to Theresienstadt.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 566.

Initially, the problem that confronted the rescue movement was how to get the Jews over to Sweden, a distance of between 5-15 miles over water. Fishing boats would have to be used and the fishermen would have to be reimbursed for the risk that they were taking. If caught, they would lose their vessels among other repercussions. These fishermen were paid with funds raised in donations from the Danish population, rich Jews would pay a greater fee to supplement poorer Jew's fares, and often, fishermen simply granted Jews free passage.<sup>32</sup>

The problem that remained was the issue of getting the Jews to the harbors and onto boats undetected. There are countless examples of Danes opening their doors to house Jews, and many instances in which Danes simply gave complete strangers the keys to their homes.<sup>33</sup> In the town of Gilleleje for example, residents hid a number of Jews equal to the town's entire population. Jews were led from hiding place to hiding place on the way to points north and south of Copenhagen.<sup>34</sup>

From these points, taxi drivers, ambulances, fire trucks, etc. brought Jews to the fishing boats. In case of capture, priests handed out blank certificates of proof of baptism. Druggists provided stimulants free of charge to help keep Jews awake and alert.<sup>35</sup>

On October 3, 1943 Danish universities closed for a week so that students could aid in the rescue. At the University of Copenhagen, for example, faculty and students utilized

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<sup>32</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, pp. 261-263.

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Hans Möller conveyed to me several instances in which he would come home and there were many Jews being hidden in his home that his family had taken in. These Jews would then leave for their next hiding place and others filled their spots.- Interview with Hans Möller Montreal, Canada, January 10, 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Hilberg, p. 567.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

two student clubs, the Academic Rifle Club and the Cross Country Sports Club, to find Jews hiding in the woods and then to lead them to the harbors via predetermined safety routes.<sup>36</sup>

Danish doctors and nurses played a crucial role in the rescue. One hundred and forty Jews were hidden in Bispebjerg hospital on October 7, 1943. The doctors hid them in the psychiatric wards and the nurses gave up their residences to house Jews. Jews were then brought to fishing boats by ambulances, fire engines, and sanitation trucks. To keep babies silent, doctors sedated them to minimize the risk of being detected.<sup>37</sup>

Fishing boats left for Sweden throughout October full of Jews. By operation's end seven thousand two hundred and twenty Jews, and six hundred eighty six non-Jewish spouses had reached Sweden.<sup>38</sup>

At the end of 1944, Adolf Eichmann announced that, "for various reasons the action against the Jews in Denmark has been a failure."<sup>39</sup> Danish Jews were safely awaiting war's end in Sweden.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 243.

<sup>37</sup> Leo Goldberger, *The Rescue of the Danish Jews; Moral Courage Under Stress*. (New York: New York University Press, 1987), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Hilberg, p. 568. Also Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 263.

<sup>39</sup> Nora Levin, *The Holocaust*. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), p. 399.

<sup>40</sup> Curiously, Best argued that the anti-Jewish action had not been a failure since there were no longer Jews in Denmark, which was after all the National Socialist's objective.



### The German Reaction before and during the Rescue

The Danes would not have been aware of plans to arrest and deport the Jews had it not been for the warnings of a few Germans. On several occasions, prominent Danes were forewarned about forthcoming German actions.

On September 11, 1943 Werner Best told his Shipping Attaché, Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz that he had sent telegram number 1032 to Berlin. Duckwitz held strong connections in Denmark since he had worked there as a business representative prior to the outbreak of war. He spoke fluent Danish and had a great deal of contact with many prominent Danish Social Democrats. Upon hearing Best's news, Duckwitz became furious and threatened to resign.<sup>41</sup> Duckwitz decided to try to intercept the telegram and left for Berlin on September 13, 1943.<sup>42</sup> He arrived too late; the telegram had already been sent on to Hitler and had been approved. Back in Denmark, on September 19, 1943 Duckwitz read the official reply from Berlin. He immediately moved into action. On September 22, 1943 he left for Stockholm on "official business". There, he met with the Swedish Prime Minister, Per Albin Hansson, and proposed that Sweden officially intervene on behalf of the Danish Jews.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 150.

<sup>42</sup> Best approved Duckwitz's desire to make the trip to Berlin for this purpose. See Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 150. Perhaps Best realized the repercussions that would result from his telegram. For additional information about Best, see Tatiana Brustin-Berenstein's "The Historiographic Treatment..." and Hans Kirchhoff's "SS Gruppenführer Werner Best...".

<sup>43</sup> Sweden officially informed the German government that they would accept all of Denmark's Jews during the day on October 1, 1943. The reply from Germany was that no round-up order existed. That same night the German police went out in search of Jews. This led to the Swedish announcement to Denmark on 2 October that they would accept all of Denmark's Jews.

Plans for the round-up were finalized by September 28, 1943.<sup>44</sup> It was to take place during the first week of October, depending on when the ship that was to deport the Jews arrived. Duckwitz passed this information on to Hans Hedtoft and H.C. Hansen, two leading Danish Social Democratic politicians. Duckwitz then went to the Danish Foreign Ministry on September 29, 1943 and warned the Director-General. Thanks to Duckwitz's warnings the Danes were able to warn the head of the Jewish Community. After the war, Duckwitz became the first German Ambassador to Denmark.

The actions of Helmuth James von Moltke, a lawyer in the *Abwehr's* Foreign Countries Division, brought official confirmation to the Danes that a Jewish action was about to take place. Von Moltke learned of the forthcoming action and so, stopped in Copenhagen on his way to Oslo and Stockholm. Upon arriving in Denmark on October 1, 1943, von Moltke went straight to the home of Merete Bonnesen, a Danish journalist whom he knew from his days as an international lawyer in Austria.<sup>45</sup> There, von Moltke met Merete and her brother Kim and told them of the German round-up plans. Kim was a civil servant in the Danish Ministry of Social Security. Upon hearing the news, Kim immediately went to the Danish Foreign Ministry and spoke to a senior official. This official promised to pass the warning on to the highest levels. Von Moltke did not cease his activities there. On the same day,<sup>46</sup> von Moltke went to see General von Hanneken

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<sup>44</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 161.

<sup>45</sup> Ger van Roon, *German Resistance to Hitler: Count von Moltke and the Kreisau Circle*. (London: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1971), p.212.

<sup>46</sup> It is unclear to me whether von Moltke went to see Merete first to give the warning or whether he went to see von Hanneken. According to van Roon, p. 212, he went straight to Merete's home. However, according to von Moltke's letters he initially went to meet von Hanneken, and then went to meet Merete. It is possible that he did not mention his initial visit to provide the warning, for it would seem a bit awkward that he not go to the German offices first. Alternatively, he did in fact go to see von Hanneken first to try and

whose army troops were supposed to guard the harbors during the round-up. Upon meeting von Hanneken, Moltke said to him: "You must have gone mad. You'll pay dearly for this one day. Don't you understand that?"<sup>47</sup> As has already been indicated, von Hanneken disapproved of having to use his troops in any capacity during the Jewish arrests. Von Moltke greatly disliked von Hanneken. He had written to his wife Freya that von Hanneken was a "foolish, loud man, entirely out of place, fit at most for a barrack square."<sup>48</sup>

Although von Moltke's warning arrived late and the Danes had already been warned, it provided confirmation that the round-up was going to take place. On October 2, 1943, the day following the unsuccessful attempt to arrest the Jews, von Moltke returned to the Bonnesens' home. When Kim answered the door von Moltke said to him, "he [Hitler] wanted to get 6,000 but he's not even got four hundred".<sup>49</sup>

There are several other instances of German soldiers and policeman looking the other way while the rescue took place.<sup>50</sup> John Oram Thomas writes:

In justice it must be recorded that not a few Germans who disapproved of Gestapo terrorism helped if and when they could if only by a certain blindness at the right moment.<sup>51</sup>

The action of the German commander of the port of Copenhagen was crucial. He made sure that all of the German patrol boats were being repaired while Jews crossed over to

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gauge the extent of the situation and the general's position. Moltke, *Letters to Freya*, pp. 350-352. Confirmed in Balfour & Frisby, *Helmuth von Moltke: A Leader Against Hitler*. (London: MacMillan, 1972), p.268.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945*. (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1996), p. 241.

<sup>48</sup> Von Moltke, Letter dated 5 October 1943, p. 351.

<sup>49</sup> Van Roon, p. 212 and Balfour & Frisby, p. 268.

<sup>50</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 268.

<sup>51</sup> John Oram Thomas, *The Giant Killers: The Danish Resistance Movement 1940-1945*. (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1975), p. 110.

Sweden.<sup>52</sup> His deeds certainly saved many persons from being captured and sent to the concentration camp.

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<sup>52</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 267. The specific details of this commander's actions, or his name are not given, nor does a source reference appear.

## Conclusion

The time factor, also, had its effect. What was impossible or inexpedient in 1940 could be possible and expedient in 1943 or 1944. Circumstances changed in the course of a few years. War conditions changed, public opinion changed or stiffened, and organizations came into being which could both make fairly exact plans for the Resistance work, and create the conditions for their becoming realizable.<sup>1</sup>

The Danish authorities succeeded in maintaining a government for over three years following the German invasion. They had kept their country from being bombed and had kept daily life fairly normal for the Danish population in spite of the occupation. They had kept the valuable coal shipments flowing in from Germany and kept anti-Jewish measures from being introduced. Many Danish industries were now entirely dependent on Germany, such as shipbuilding and munitions. The Danish government kept their people working; a feat that would have been less likely had the German authorities imposed their own government.

From the German perspective, they had succeeded in keeping the Danish population peaceful and had been able to secure weaponry, agricultural products, cattle, etc. from Denmark in the process. They were able to accomplish this by permitting the Danish government to remain in power and by negotiating and placing demands on this government when necessary. On numerous occasions, the German authorities placed these demands in the form of ultimatums exploiting the Danish government's fear of losing their "independence" and authority.

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<sup>1</sup> Jurgen Hæstrup, *Europe Ablaze: An Analysis of the History of the European Resistance Movements 1939-45*. (Odense University Press, 1978), p. 401.

As the war escalated, however, the German government placed greater demands on the Danish government and people. While the Danish government repeatedly agreed to many of these demands, the population became increasingly frustrated, realizing that their government held little power and that they were being exploited for the German war effort. The resistance movement in Denmark began to grow, slowly, coinciding with the developments of the war at large, and with the Danish government's lack of authority. As acts of sabotage and other active and passive forms of resistance increased in Denmark, the German authorities placed greater requests on the Danish authorities to control this resistance. The Danish authorities were unable to discourage this resistance, if they even attempted to. Henceforth, the German authorities were forced to step in to prevent the situation in Denmark from getting further out of control. They put an end to the Danish government and military forces and imposed martial law.

Until late 1943 Danish resistance groups were numerous and scattered throughout the country. After the resignation of the Danish government on August 29, 1943 the window of opportunity was opened for the German and Danish National Socialists to forcefully impose their solution of the Jewish Question upon Denmark as was done throughout occupied Europe.

The Danish reaction to the German decision to solve the Jewish question in Denmark is fascinating. Since Denmark had not been subject to the same German occupation policies as other occupied countries, and since Denmark had not resisted the occupation, the Danish government was able to remain in power and resist the German initiative to

remove Jews. Had the Danes uselessly resisted the German military forces in 1940, conditions would likely have been much different in Denmark and it would seem plausible and probable that the Danish Jews would have been captured and sent to extermination camps.

The rescue of the Jews in October 1943 has already been discussed, but the factors that led to the success of the rescue must be examined.

There was little resistance in Denmark from the occupation in April 1940 through 1942. I refer to the chart in chapter three on the reported cases of sabotage actions through 1943:

1940: 2  
1941: 12  
1942: 59  
1943: 816<sup>2</sup>

The few who engaged in resistance between the occupation and the end of 1942 usually engaged in passive resistance, such as wearing the colors of the British Royal Air Force or writing anti-German slogans in public places.<sup>3</sup>

Numerous factors contributed to these low numbers. For instance, the fact that the Danish population overwhelmingly adhered to the policies laid down by their government; a government that maintained control under the German-Danish agreement that followed the initial invasion. The factor that must be further examined is that Germany was winning the war until late 1942. In the early years of the war, the German military forces lost no major battles. They had captured the majority of the Western

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<sup>2</sup> Nathaniel Hong, *Sparks of Resistance: The Illegal Press in German Occupied Denmark April 1940-August 1943*. (Odense University Press, 1996), p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

European Continent, a sizeable portion of Africa, and most important, they had reached the gates of Moscow. It appeared to citizens living under German occupation that Germany was going to win the war; they had no reason to think otherwise. In fact, several Danish authorities had stated their belief that Germany was going to do just that.<sup>4</sup>

Unless someone was an incredibly devoted patriot, why would one attempt to attack this German machine that appeared to be, and had so far proven to be, invincible? Doing so would be strategically ineffective. If the German military forces could defeat the French, Belgian, Dutch, and numerous other armies, what chance would a poorly trained internal resistance have against them?

At the time of the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the German authorities in Denmark demanded that the Danes impose anti-Communist legislation and arrest leading Danish Communists. Although there are numerous reasons suggested for the lack of response by any segment of the Danish populace to this crackdown on the communist minority, a population that held the same rights as everyone else under the Danish constitution, the timing of this request was inevitably a factor in the lack of public reaction. The German military forces were obliterating their enemy in the east and it appeared that the eastern front would achieve a quick and decisive German victory. Authors of the Danish occupation have, however, acknowledged this correlation between the lack of resistance activity and German victories in the war.

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<sup>4</sup> Jerry Livingston Voorhis, "A Study of Official Relations between the German and Danish Governments in the Period between 1940 and 1943." (Dissertation: Northwestern University, 1968), p. 124.



Authors have also acknowledged the correlation between the increase in resistance activity and German losses in the war. When the National Socialists decided to implement the Final Solution in Denmark in October 1943, circumstances were quite different than in late 1941. Aside from the fact that the Danish government was no longer in control, timing was a crucial factor. One month earlier, the Danish government had resigned and the populace was placed under German military rule, which the Danish people did not respect. At this juncture in the war the German military forces were retreating in the east as the Soviet war machine was driving them back. Elsewhere, the Allies had captured Africa, and American, Canadian and British troops were fighting their way northward in Italy. Obviously, the tide of war had turned. It now appeared that the Allies would win the war. In October 1943 when the National Socialists attempted to implement the Final Solution in Denmark, the Danes resisted.

Timing was not by any means the motivational force in the Danes' decision to attempt to rescue the Danish Jews. All indications are that had the National Socialists implemented anti-Jewish measures earlier in the occupation, the Danish people would have attempted to save their Jews. After all, as early as six days following the German occupation of Denmark, Renth-Fink wrote to his Foreign Ministry that the Danish authorities were apprehensive as to whether or not Jewish measures would be introduced.<sup>5</sup> In several other instances, the Danish authorities informed the Reich Plenipotentiary that they would not implement anti-Jewish measures of any sort. At the Wannsee Conference in early 1942, the German authorities had even decided to leave Denmark out of the Final Solution for the time being due to the small number of Jews in

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<sup>5</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, p. 42.

Denmark. The repercussions of executing a Jewish round-up, including having to send in German troops to completely control the Danish population did not warrant implementing the Final Solution in Denmark. Renthe-Fink continuously advocated a postponement of anti-Jewish measures in Denmark, as did his successor, Werner Best, until September 1943. Both knew the mood of the Danish population and government and informed their superiors that the Danish government would resign if anti-Jewish measures were introduced. Had they not advocated a postponement of the Final Solution on several occasions, it is possible that the National Socialists would have attempted to remove the Danish Jews prior to October 1943.

Undoubtedly, timing was a key factor in the degree of success of the rescue. In October 1943, the Danes possessed the ability to resist. Even if the Danish population had wanted to resist in 1941 when the anti-Communist legislation was employed, they would have failed, as German troops would have easily destroyed them. These same German troops were no longer available en masse in late 1943 to control the Danish population, as they were desperately needed on the eastern front or in Italy. The German war machine could no longer assign numerous quantities of troops to oversee occupied nations.

To further illustrate the role that timing played in the success of the rescue, the fact remains that even Best was double-dealing with regard to the anti Jewish action in Denmark. On the one hand, he had initiated the entire action by sending telegram number 1032 to Berlin advocating a round-up of the Danish Jews during the state of emergency, while at the same time he allowed Duckwitz to warn the Jews about the

forthcoming action.<sup>6</sup> Best's actions may easily be interpreted as designed to establish an alibi that he could rely upon after the war when facing an Allied court. Additionally, as has already been noted, many Germans looked the other way during the rescue. In fact, arguably, the rescue would have been a complete failure had the German authorities in Denmark made any genuine attempt to hinder it. Furthermore many German soldiers escaped to Sweden with Jews. Clearly, they must have realized that their army was losing the war and they wanted to get out before the inevitable dreaded relocation to the eastern front.

The timing of the planned deportation of the Jews of Denmark was a significant factor in the success of the rescue that followed. 1943 marked a crucial turning point in the history of World War II, both for the Allies who fought on the front lines and the resistance movements that fought under the shadow of National Socialism. Hopefully, future authors writing about Denmark during the Holocaust will examine more comprehensively the role that timing played.

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<sup>6</sup> Yahil, *Rescue*, pp. 138-139 and Hilberg, p. 563.

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## Appendix

### I. Werner Best's Telegram Number 1032, September 8, 1943:

I REQUEST THAT THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION BE PASSED ON TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER:

WITH REFERENCE TO YOUR TELEGRAM NO. 537 OF 4/19/43 AND MY REPORT OF 4/24/43-IC 102/43- I HEREBY BEG, IN LIGHT OF THE NEW SITUATION, TO REPORT ON THE JEWISH PROBLEM IN DENMARK AS FOLLOWS: IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONSISTENT APPLICATION OF THE NEW POLICY IN DENMARK, IT IS MY OPINION THAT MEASURES SHOULD NOW BE TAKEN TOWARD A SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEMS OF THE JEWS AND THE FREEMASONS. THE NECESSARY STEPS SHOULD BE TAKEN AS LONG AS THE PRESENT STATE OF EMERGENCY EXISTS, FOR AFTERWARD THEY WILL BE LIABLE TO CAUSE REACTION IN THE COUNTRY, WHICH IN TURN MAY LEAD TO A REIMPOSITION OF A GENERAL STATE OF EMERGENCY UNDER CONDITIONS WHICH WILL PRESUMABLY BE LESS CONVENIENT THAN THOSE OF TODAY. IN PARTICULAR, AS I HAVE BEEN INFORMED FROM MANY SOURCES, THE CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT-SHOULD IT EXIST- WOULD RESIGN. THE KING AND THE RIGSDAG WOULD ALSO CEASE THEIR PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT OF THE COUNTRY. IT MAY BE ASSUMED, MOREOVER, THAT IN SUCH AN EVENT A GENERAL STRIKE WOULD BREAK OUT, FOR THE TRADE UNIONS WOULD CEASE THEIR ACTIVITIES AND THEIR RESTRAINING INFLUENCE ON THE WORKERS WOULD BE REMOVED. IF MEASURES ARE TAKEN DURING THE PRESENT STATE OF EMERGENCY, IT MAY BE THAT THE FORMATION OF A LEGALLY CONSTITUTED GOVERNMENT WILL BE RENDERED IMPOSSIBLE AND IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO SET UP AN ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL UNDER MY LEADERSHIP. I WOULD THEN HAVE TO LEGISLATE BY MEANS OF DECREE. IN ORDER TO ARREST AND DEPORT SOME 6,000 JEWS (INCLUDING WOMEN AND CHILDREN) AT ONE SWEEP IT IS NECESSARY TO HAVE THE POLICE FORCES I REQUESTED IN MY TELEGRAM NO. 1001 OF 9/1. ALMOST ALL OF THEM SHOULD BE PUT TO WORK IN GREATER COPENHAGEN WHERE THE MAJORITY OF THE LOCAL JEWS LIVE. SUPPLEMENTARY FORCES SHOULD BE PROVIDED BY THE GERMAN MILITARY COMMANDER IN DENMARK. FOR TRANSPORTATION, SHIPS MUST BE CONSIDERED A PRIME NECESSITY AND SHOULD BE ORDERED IN TIME. AS REGARDS THE FREEMASONS, A POSSIBLE SOLUTION IS THE FORMAL CLOSURE OF ALL THEIR LODGES (TO WHICH ALL THE LEADING PERSONALITIES OF THE COUNTRY BELONG) AND THE TEMPORARY ARREST OF THE MOST PROMINENT FREEMASONS AND CONFISCATION OF LODGE PROPERTY. TO THIS END STRONG OPERATIONAL FORCES ARE ALSO NECESSARY. I BEG TO REQUEST A DECISION AS TO THE STEPS I SHOULD TAKE OR WHAT I HAVE TO PREPARE IN CONNECTION WITH THE JEWISH AND FREEMASON PROBLEMS.

DR. BEST<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leni Yahil, *The Rescue of Danish Jewry: Test of a Democracy*. Translated by Morris Gradel. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), pp. 138-139.