

HOLOCAUST:

RESISTANCE, RESCUE AND SURVIVAL

Danish Rescue

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The story of the Danish rescue of their Jewish citizens during Nazi occupation of Denmark remains an awesome example of **moral heroism** during one of the darkest times in modern history. Denmark was the only Nazi-occupied country that successfully resisted and thwarted the Nazis' attempts to deport its Jewish citizens.

Germany occupied Denmark on April 9, 1940. However, it was not until 1943 that the Danish Jews were persecuted. The Danes considered Danish Jews equal citizens of Denmark. An attack on the Danish-Jewish population was considered an attack on every Danish citizen.

The government knew that Denmark, a very small country, could not fight the Nazis and win; so they made an agreement with the German Nazis — the Danes could keep control of their government and army, but their foreign affairs office would be controlled by the Germans. Whenever the Nazis tried to pass anti-Jewish legislation in Denmark, the Danes loudly and strongly opposed. Because of these protests, and because there were few Jews in Denmark, the Germans decided to wait until the end of the war to deal with Denmark's "Jewish problem."

In August of 1943, as the Allies gained ground and resistance groups became stronger and more active, the Germans demanded that the Danish government put an end to the resistance activities. The Danish government refused to meet these demands and the entire government resigned in protest.

On September 28, 1943, the German ambassador to Denmark, Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, informed the Danish Resistance that the Germans were going to begin deporting all Jews from Denmark. News of the deportation spread and the Danish people sought out the Jews to warn them of the impending danger. The Danes immediately went into action, and over the next two weeks they helped Jews hide in homes, hospitals, churches and stores until they could be safely ferried to Sweden, away from the Nazi threat. Night after night, with the help of the entire Danish population, the hidden Jews made their way to the fishing boats where the fisherman hid them, often beneath the floors, between the piles of fish and among their fishing gear. In just over three weeks, 7,200 Jews were ferried to Sweden.

King Christian X continuously objected to the Nazi plans to deport the Danish Jews. His visible and outspoken dissent encouraged and provided moral support to the Danish people.

In all, 481 Jews were deported to the concentration camp Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. Those who were deported received food parcels and support from the Danish people. Consequently most survived and returned to Denmark after the war.

"A Rescuer in Our Midst"

— Rabbi Doug Doniel Slotnik & Doris Minor

Rudolph "Rudy" Hansen, together with his family, and especially his father, Mads Hansen, rescued Jews in Denmark prior to their evacuation to Sweden in October 1943.



Danish Rescue Boat. (Courtesy of the USHMM)

Like his father Mads, Rudy became a master baker in Aalborg, Denmark. In his early 20s, Rudy possessed the key to a city building in whose basement the Danish underground held meetings. He distributed underground newspapers on the routes of his bread deliveries, at great personal risk. Rudy worked through the entire war for the Red Cross, helping to organize passive resistance. This assistance helped make possible the Underground's gradually more active resistance. From the summer of 1943 onward, active resistance was the rule; the Nazis responded by imprisoning, torturing, and executing anyone they believed involved in the resistance. On October 1, 1943, preparations had been made to arrest and deport all Danish Jews. Rudy and his family hid Jews in their basement and helped transport them north to ports on the straits opposite Sweden.

Rudy came to Seattle in 1946. He initially worked at the bakery in Frederick & Nelson. Rudy and his wife Gudrun owned and operated Rudy's Danish Bakery for decades on Mercer Island, Washington.

activities

1. How did Denmark's leaders take a very active role in resisting the Nazis? What should be the role of leaders relative to resistance? What kinds of things should countries try to resist and how can their leaders assist in this endeavor? Look through today's Seattle Times for articles/images that demonstrate leaders using their role to resist.
2. Using today's article, discuss "resistance" and what it means. How did people resist the Nazi persecution? What are some ways people resist? Look for examples of resistance in today's Seattle Times. If you are unable to find one, locate an article in which someone is being oppressed. Then, identify ways of resistance that could be taken by the victims of the oppression.
3. Rudy Hansen risked his life to fight the Nazi occupation of Denmark and their goal to kill the Jewish population. One way he did this was by distributing an underground newspaper. You may recall that the Nazis controlled newspapers and other media sources. Why would they want to do this? And how does a free and independent newspaper play a role in resistance in our world and country today?

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