

9. Danish Rescue

Did You Know?

- Germany occupied Denmark on April 9, 1940. However, Danish Jews were not persecuted until the autumn of 1943 (ushmm.org).
- When the German police began searching for and arresting Jews on the night of October 1, 1943, the Danish police refused (ushmm.org).
- When leaders in the Danish church learned of plans to deport the Jews, they sent a letter to German officials. On Sunday, October 3, 1943, that letter was read from every pulpit in the nation. This letter begins, "Wherever Jews are persecuted because of their religion or race it is the duty of the Christian Church to protest against such persecution, because it is in conflict with the sense of justice inherent in the Danish people and inseparable from our Danish Christian culture through centuries" ("Facing History and Ourselves," 396 – 7).
- Approximately 500 Jews were deported from Denmark to the Theresienstadt ghetto in Czechoslovakia. Following protests from their government, these Danish inmates were allowed to receive letters and even some care packages. Most of them survived the Holocaust (ushmm.org).
- After the war, in almost every place in Europe, returning Jews found their homes had been broken into, and everything of value stolen.

When the Danish Jews returned, they discovered that their homes, pets, gardens and personal belongings were cared for by their neighbors (auschwitz.dk/docu/Aftermath.htm).

- In total, approximately 6,000 Danish resisters were deported to German concentration camps, and approximately 600 died there. In Denmark itself, the memorial parks give evidence of courageous freedom fighters who paid the ultimate price that we could live in freedom. The memorial park in Copenhagen is the final resting place for 136 patriots, executed at that location. (ushmm.org)

Did King Christian X of Denmark wear a yellow star in support of the Danish Jews?

According to popular legend, King Christian X chose to wear a yellow star in support of the Danish Jews during the Nazi occupation of Denmark. In another version, the Danish people decided to wear a yellow star for the same reason. Both of these stories are fictional. In fact, unlike Jews in other countries under Nazi rule, the Jews of Denmark were never forced to wear an identification mark such as a yellow star. However, the legend conveys an important historical truth: both the King and the Danish people stood by their Jewish citizens and were instrumental in saving the overwhelming majority of them from Nazi persecution and death.

ushmm.org/research/library

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Rescue of The Jews of Denmark

August 29, 1943 Danish Government Resigns

The Germans occupied Denmark on April 9, 1940. The Danes and the Germans reached an agreement in which the Danish government and army remained in existence. Despite the occupation, the Germans did not initiate deportations from Denmark. In the summer of 1943, with Allied military advances, resistance activity in Denmark increases in the form of sabotage and strikes. These actions, however, cause tension between the occupying German forces and the Danish government. In August 1943, the Germans present the Danish government with new demands to end resistance activities. The Danish government refuses to meet the new demands and resigns, after three years of German occupation. The Germans take over the administration of Denmark and attempt to implement the "Final Solution" by arresting and deporting Jews. The Danes respond with a nationwide rescue operation.

October 2, 1943 Sweden Offers Asylum to Jews of Denmark

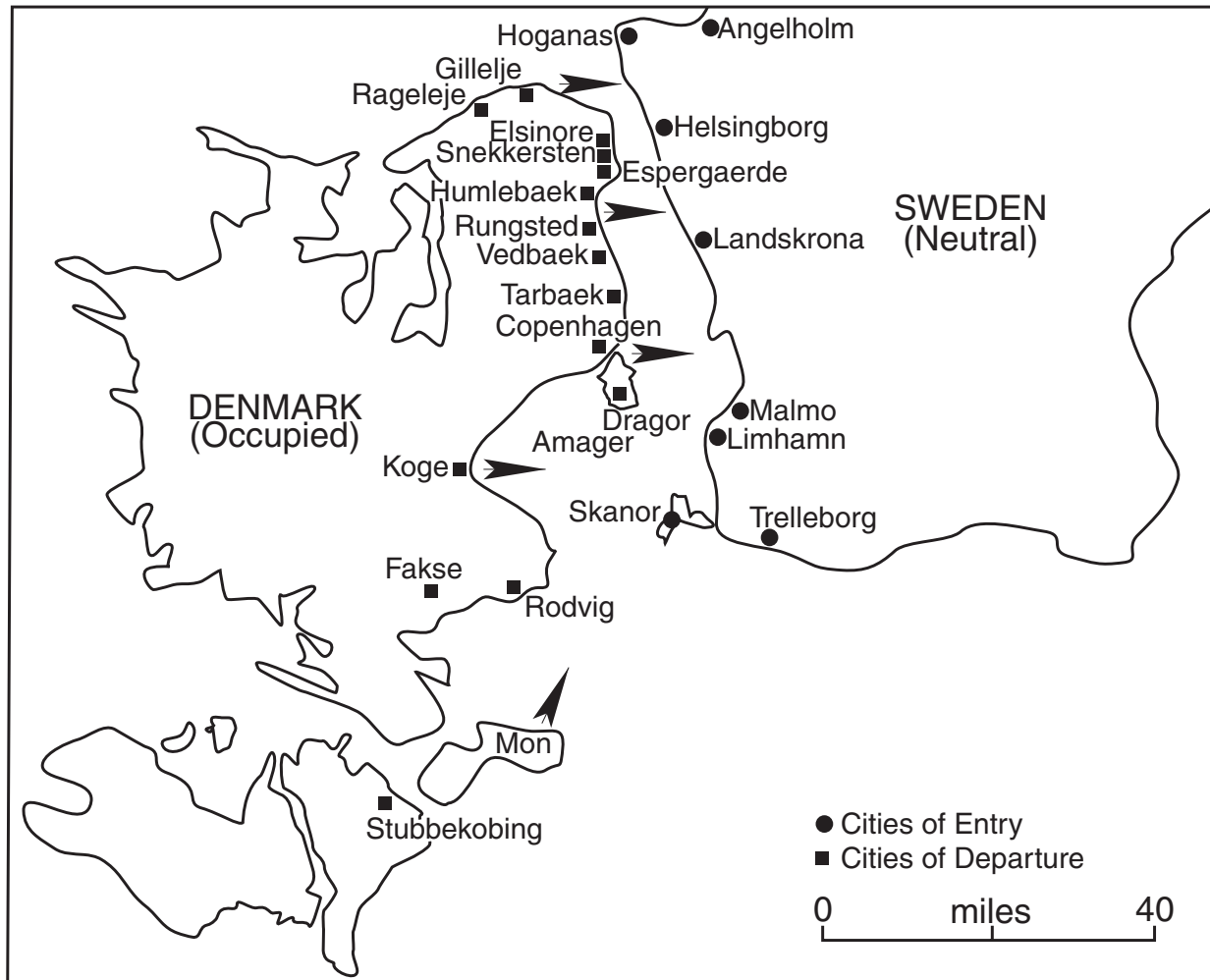
In a report to German officials in Berlin, the Swedish government offers asylum to some 7,000 Jews in Denmark. At the end of September 1943, the German plan to arrest and deport Danish Jews is leaked to Danish authorities who warn the Jewish population in Denmark and urge them to go into hiding. In response, the Danish underground and general population spontaneously organize a nationwide effort to smuggle Jews to the coast where Danish fisherman ferry them to Sweden. In little more than three weeks, the Danes ferry more than 7,000 Jews and close to 700 of their non-Jewish relatives to Sweden. Despite the Danish efforts, some 500 Jews are arrested by the Germans and deported to Theresienstadt ghetto.

June 23, 1944 Danish Delegation Visits Theresienstadt

A Danish delegation joins representatives of the International Red Cross on a visit to the Theresienstadt ghetto in Bohemia. To deceive both these visitors and world opinion about Nazi treatment of the Jews, the SS beautifies the ghetto and creates the impression that Theresienstadt is a self-governing Jewish settlement. Unlike other prisoners in Theresienstadt, the 500 Danish prisoners there are not deported to concentration camps and are permitted to receive parcels from the Red Cross. On April 15, 1945, the Danish prisoners are released from the ghetto into the hands of the Swedish Red Cross. This is a result of negotiations between Swedish government representatives and Nazi officials in which Scandinavian prisoners in camps, including Jews, are transferred to a holding camp in northern Germany. These prisoners are eventually sent to Sweden where they stay until the end of the war. Out of the some 500 Danish Jews deported, about 450 survive.

*From the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:
ushmm.org/outreach/denchr.htm*

The Rescue of Danish Jews



From the Florida Center for Instructional Technology. Used with permission.
fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/MAPS/map010b.pdf

Studying the Holocaust

RESISTANCE, RESCUE AND SURVIVAL

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the Danish rescue story unique?
2. What were the risks to a non-Jewish person to participate in the rescue efforts?
3. How did such a large percentage of Danish Jews survive the Holocaust?
4. Do you think that one person can make a difference?

Questions adapted from "Rescue in October ... the Rescue of the Danish Jews," a teacher guide made by the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. 2003. For more information, or to download the guide, please visit jfr.org.

Resources

Suggested Web Sites

- **Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center:** wsherc.org

From the homepage, click on "Suggested Resources" and then select "rescue."

- **The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous:** jfr.org

This Web site provides information on The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous and includes a unit of study on the Danish rescue. From the homepage, click on "Stories of Moral Courage" and then select "Denmark."

- **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:** ushmm.org

At the bottom of the homepage, click on "History." Select "encyclopedia" and then click "rescue."

- **Rescue of the Jews in Denmark** copenhagen1943.org

This Web site for a film on the Danish rescue contains maps, chronology and a summary of the history.

- **To see the exhibit "A Living Wall — October 1943: Rescue of the Danish Jews" go to** judaica.org/denmark/index.html

Studying the Holocaust

RESISTANCE, RESCUE AND SURVIVAL

Films

**Most of these films are available to borrow at the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center.*

■ An Act of Faith

Recounting the story of the Danish rescue of the Jews during the German occupation of Denmark, this video clearly presents the Danish resistance to following Hitler's orders and the courage and compassion by the Danes as they organized and hid Jews on boats, taking them to Sweden.

■ The Danish Solution: The Rescue of the Jews in Denmark

(Running time: 57 minutes.)

■ Miracle at Midnight (Disney)

A historical drama recounting the story of how one Danish family risked their lives in the remarkable effort to save thousands of their Jewish countrymen. (Running time: 89 minutes.)

■ The Power of Conscience: The Danish Resistance and the Rescue of the Jews

This video features the testimony of prisoners and saboteurs, the rescuers and the rescued, to tell the story of a people who refused to cooperate, placing the dictates of their conscience above an immoral authority. (Running time: 55 minutes.)

■ Rescue in October

Produced by the Anti-Defamation League. (Running time: 30 minutes.)

■ Rescue in Scandinavia

"A chronicle of extraordinary courage by ordinary people in and from Scandinavia during the Holocaust period."

"This program combines personal interviews of some of these courageous people with dramatic archival footage of events of the time. Together with its enclosed Discussion Guide and Bibliography it is an exceptional educational program for studies relating to WWII and the impact of the Holocaust in Scandinavia, and for studies on social values and inter-cultural understanding." (Running time: 55 minutes.)

Films about Rescue during the Holocaust

■ Courage to Care

A documentary about non-Jews who risked their lives to rescue Jews from Nazi persecution. (Running time: 29 minutes.)

■ Rescuers: Stories of Moral Courage

A three-part series (each can be watched individually) about "Two Families," "Two Women," and "Two Couples" who risk everything to help Jewish refugees during the Holocaust.

■ Weapons of the Spirit: The Astonishing Story of a Unique Conspiracy of Goodness

During WWII, in and around one village in Nazi-occupied France, 5,000 Jews were sheltered by 5,000 Christians. Pierre Sauvage, born and protected in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, returns there to tell the story. (Running time: 60 minutes.)