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# “Not With an Iron Fist, But With a Velvet Glove”: The ‘Good Germans’ Theory in Nazi Occupied Denmark

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By  
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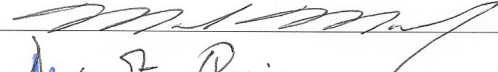
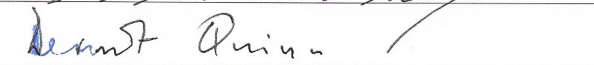
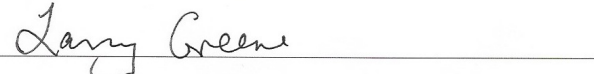
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree:  
Master of Arts  
Department of History  
Seton Hall University  
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## Abstract

During the Second World War, millions of Jews died as the Nazis expanded their power and harsh racial ideology across Europe. As countries fell under Nazi occupation, the civil and human rights of their Jewish citizens were obliterated and many Jews were deported to camps where they most often perished. However, Denmark was an exception. In October 1943, when, after three years of occupation as a model protectorate, news leaked of an upcoming mass deportation of Denmark's Jews, the Danes carried out a rescue operation. By hiding and then taking them by boat to neutral Sweden, they saved about 7,000 of the country's estimated 7,500 Jewish citizens. With just a few days' notice, the Danes were able to foil a plan that took the Germans a month to create.

This result gave rise to a theory conceived by some historians known as the 'Good Germans' Theory. It holds that the deportation in Denmark was initiated and then deliberately sabotaged by the local German administration. These officials, most notably the German plenipotentiary, Werner Best, and a maritime attaché, Georg Duckwitz, took action to alert the Jewish community about the deportation order and then carried out the operation in a way that essentially ensured it would be ineffective. The implication of the theory is that there was some moral imperative driving the actions taken by these Germans.

This thesis explores the 'Good Germans' Theory and examines the role played by the German leaders and soldiers in the history of the Danish rescue. It presents evidence to suggest that while the actions of the Germans were "good" because they allowed for a

rescue of the Danish Jews to succeed, they were likely motivated much more by political and personal considerations.

## Chapter I

**“On principle we will do our utmost to make the operation appear as a peaceful occupation.”<sup>1</sup>**

On the afternoon of September 29, 1943, Herbert Pundik’s childhood ended. On that day, his school’s headmaster dismissed sixteen-year-old Pundik and his fellow Jewish classmates after he learned about the upcoming deportation of Danish Jews. Pundik rushed home and when he arrived, he found his parents and siblings already packed to leave; his father had learned of the news earlier in the day from a friend who attended morning service at the synagogue and heard the rabbi’s warning of impending danger. The warning, although appreciated, sent Copenhagen’s Jewish population into a panic. According to an excerpt from a young Danish girl’s unpublished diary: “But today it is different. Today you are a refugee. The quiet days, they finished yesterday. When the message came, anxiety rose in your body, replacing the blood in your veins. You go out on the street, watching to see if anyone follows you. Yesterday it would have looked strange, a bit silly. Today your life is at stake.”<sup>2</sup> After leaving Copenhagen, the Pundik family was hidden in a fisherman’s cottage along the coast and waited for their turn to be ferried over to neutral Sweden. While they waited, German patrols increased in the area with the help of a Danish informant and search dogs. Every knock on their host’s door brought intense fear to everyone involved. About four days later, on the night of October 3, the family was finally able to cross the Øresund Strait to Sweden. Of this experience,

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<sup>1</sup> Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality. “C-174 Hitler Order for operation “Weseruebung,” 1 March 1940,” *Aggression Against Norway and Denmark*, in *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol. 1 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1946), 745.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Herbert Pundik, “Personal Narrative: Herbert Pundik,” in *The Rescue of the Danish Jews: Moral Courage Under Stress*, ed. Leo Goldberger (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 84.



Pundik recalls the sound of the boat cutting through the water, the fisherman's determination to reach the coast as quickly as possible, and the German patrol boats' searchlights in the sky.<sup>3</sup> Although he remembered the events as the unhappy end of his childhood, Pundik attributed the success of his family's dangerous and terrifying journey to the bravery, quick thinking, and fast work of many of their fellow Danes.

Hanne Goldstein and her young family also needed to flee occupied Denmark. For Goldstein, the advance notice had come directly from a frequent customer of her brother-in-law's tailor shop: the wife of a German trade official. Although he did not believe the threat was real, her husband's employer at a manufacturing firm agreed to help the young family and supplied them with safe housing in Sjælland. After hiding for weeks in the rural countryside, the family was arranged passage to Sweden through the resistance movement. But first they had to return to Copenhagen. This became difficult, as train conductors were now fearful of passengers being inspected by Germans and sometimes refused Jewish riders. It was only after a resistance member held a pistol to a reluctant conductor's head that they were allowed to hide in the baggage car. At the Copenhagen train station waiting for further transportation to the north coast, the Goldstein family encountered a group of German soldiers on the platform. Goldstein panicked; to observers it was obvious that the family was Jewish and running from the Nazis' orders. However, unlike the experience of many other Jews who fled their occupied homelands, when these soldiers confronted them, they not only spared her family but also began to play with her two young children. According to Goldstein, because they were regular soldiers – not Gestapo – they expressed no interest in

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 77 & 90.

apprehending them.<sup>4</sup> The Goldsteins would reach the north coast of Denmark and Sweden safely because of the intervention of both Danes and Germans.

Three years before, in the early morning hours of April 9, 1940, Germany launched ‘*Weseruebung*’, their code name for the invasion of Norway (‘*Weseruebung Nord*’) and Denmark (‘*Weseruebung Sued*’).<sup>5</sup> The attack had been long-expected among many in Denmark’s political and military circles; since January 1940, both Danish and Norwegian governments were repeatedly advised by their delegations in Berlin that the Germans were planning a military action in Scandinavia.<sup>6</sup> According to Hitler’s orders for the invasion, “On principle we will do our utmost to make the operation appear as a peaceful occupation, the object of which is the military protection of the neutrality of the Scandinavian States.”<sup>7</sup> The appearance of a “peaceful occupation” was necessary, as Germany and Denmark had just signed a Treaty of Non-Aggression the year before. Instead of invading for the sake of bringing another country under Nazi control, Germany claimed its reason was to help the Scandinavian countries remain neutral and away from British control.

At 4:00 am, the German ambassador to Denmark, Cecil von Renthe-Fink, called the Danish Foreign Minister, Peter Munch, to notify him that German troops at that very moment were moving in to occupy Denmark. Renthe-Fink presented Munch with an

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Buckser, "Modern Identities and the Creation of History: Stories of Rescue Among the Jews of Denmark," *Anthropological Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (1999): 7.

<sup>5</sup> Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality. “C-174,” 736, 746.

<sup>6</sup> Gunnar Leistikow, "Denmark Under the Nazi Heel," *Foreign Affairs*, 21, no. 2 (1943): 342.

<sup>7</sup> Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality. “C-174,” 745.

ultimatum: submit peacefully and a hostile occupation would be avoided. Germany was more interested in controlling Denmark's western coast than in forcefully governing another country. In return for the Danes preventing any further resistance during the occupation, Germany would not interfere with Denmark's internal government while guaranteeing their political independence by "protecting" Denmark's neutrality against British influence.<sup>8</sup> A meeting between Denmark's King Christian X, Munch, and other senior cabinet and military officials was quickly convened. As German naval and aircraft approached, Denmark, a country with no natural barriers to hold off its attackers and a small military, surrendered and agreed to Germany's terms of occupation. By 6:00 am, within two hours of invasion, Denmark was under Nazi control.

At the time of the German invasion in April 1940, the Jewish population in Denmark was approximately 7,500. More than 95% Of Denmark's Jewish citizens lived in Copenhagen, where they made up 1% of the city's population. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Jewish communities outside of Copenhagen virtually ceased to exist as the younger generations moved to the city.<sup>9</sup> Since then, Copenhagen had become a center for Jewish life and culture. Among the Jewish community's institutions included a school, nursing homes, day care centers, restaurants and cafes, two cemeteries, and a large administration building near the palace.<sup>10</sup> The Great Synagogue of Copenhagen, located in the center of the city, was erected in 1833 and celebrated its one hundredth

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<sup>8</sup> Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, "D-628 Memorandum concerning Germany's attitude towards Denmark before and during occupation," *Aggression Against Norway and Denmark*, in *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1946), 752.

<sup>9</sup> American Jewish Committee, *The Jewish Communities of Nazi-Occupied Europe*, (New York: Howard Fertig, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Buckser, "Religious Practice and Cultural Politics in Jewish Copenhagen," *American Ethnologist* 30 (2003): 103-104.

anniversary in 1933 with a ceremony attended by Denmark's King Christian X.

However, while most Danish Jews in the twentieth century were deeply integrated into the secular community, there were divisions in the Jewish community itself that helped shape their religious identity.

Within Denmark's Jewish population there were two very different groups of immigrants that were influential in their community. In the 1790s, the arrival of Jewish merchants from Germany created a Jewish community that was educated, affluent, and constituted the dominant religious force in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> These German, or "Viking," Jews were easily assimilated into Danish society. They spoke the Danish language, had small families, were politically conservative, and fairly wealthy.<sup>12</sup> In the early twentieth century, a new wave of immigrants came from Eastern Europe that were deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and usually impoverished. This group of Jewish immigrants had a difficult time assimilating to secular Danish society: they mainly spoke Yiddish, wore different clothing, had large families, and worked as lower-class tradesmen. Although the immigrants from Eastern Europe made up the majority of the Jewish population by 1940, it was the Viking Jews' assimilated lifestyle that helped them maintain power in the Jewish community.<sup>13</sup> Their influence encouraged Jewish Danes to think of themselves as Danish citizens first and as Jews second.

The majority of Denmark's citizens held loyal feelings towards their Jewish neighbors. After seeing the repercussions of The Night of Broken Glass, *Kristallnacht*, in Germany, the Danish government amended the Criminal Law of 1939 to include a

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<sup>11</sup> Buckser, "Religious Practice and Cultural Politics in Jewish Copenhagen," 104.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Buckser, "Group Identities and the Construction of the 1943 Rescue of the Danish Jews," *Ethnology* 37, no. 3 (1998): 216.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

provision that would imprison anyone who was slanderous to another on the basis of religion, origin, or citizenship.<sup>14</sup> Because of this and hearing of the actions and policies of the Nazi government, such as the belief in Germans' genetic superiority and destiny to expand, the Danish people developed an increasingly negative view of the Nazis and their German sympathizers. For example, Helen Lang, a Holocaust survivor originally from Czechoslovakia, was eventually brought to Denmark by SS doctors while she was posing as a Hungarian gentile. While still maintaining her disguise, Lang went into the city to see if any Jews remained in Denmark. However, because she only spoke German and used German money, the Danes refused to help her; "And here I was afraid to tell 'em I am Jewish... That was my mistake because after I heard that the Danes [sic] – how good they were to Jews".<sup>15</sup> There is no evidence that any inherent anti-Semitism existed in Denmark before the war. The Nazi organizations that were formed in Denmark in the 1930s consisted mainly of Danes with German ancestry from Slesvig, the Danish name for the German town of Schleswig.<sup>16</sup> The Danish Nazi Party was never a popular movement and its leader, Frits Clausen, continuously failed to win government elections.

Hitler considered the Nordic countries to share similar Aryan origins with Germany and should therefore be treated as allies. Ethan Hollander, a political science professor who studies nationalism and ethnic conflict, claims, "To that end, the invasion and occupation were to be undertaken not with an iron fist but with a velvet glove."<sup>17</sup> For

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<sup>14</sup> Myrna Goodman, "Foundations of Resistance in German-Occupied Denmark," in *Resisting the Holocaust*, ed. Ruby Rohrlich (Oxford: Berg, 1998): 216.

<sup>15</sup> Helen Lang, interview by Dr. Sidney Bolkosky, University of Michigan-Dearborn Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, February 23, 1982.

<sup>16</sup> American Jewish Committee, *The Jewish Communities of Nazi-Occupied Europe*, (New York: Howard Fertig, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> Ethan J. Hollander, "The Banality of Goodness: Collaboration and Compromise in the Rescue of Denmark's Jews," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 6, no. 2 (2013): 44.

the first three years of Denmark's occupation, Danish politicians exercised a policy of negotiation and accommodation to prevent any open action against its Jewish citizens. According to Pundik, "Hitler was ready to grant the Danes this wide authority of self-rule as long as they prevented the anti-Nazi underground from getting out of hand, and continued to produce agricultural and industrial products."<sup>18</sup> However, this changed in 1943 after an increase in Danish resistance sabotage efforts. In response, Germany issued new demands, including that Danish saboteurs be tried by German military courts. Unable and unwilling to accept their demands, the Danish government resigned on August 28 and the Germans imposed martial law the next day.

It was during this time that the Nazis decided to finally take action in making their Aryan ally *Judenrein*, or free of Jews. It was decided that a mass roundup of Jews in Copenhagen would take place on the night of October 1-2, when families would be at home celebrating the Jewish holiday. They would then be deported and taken to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. On September 28, Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, a German maritime attaché in Copenhagen, learned the confirmed date of the mass deportation and passed along information to leaders of the Jewish community, who then warned their congregations the following day. Duckwitz is also credited with negotiating with the Swedish government to accept Denmark's refugees. Once the news spread, the Danish people sprung into action to help their Jewish neighbors. Friends, family, and strangers alike were hidden and transported to the coast where they were then smuggled into Sweden in fishing boats. While estimates vary slightly, approximately 7,000 Danish Jews were ferried from Copenhagen to neutral

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<sup>18</sup> Pundik, "Personal Narrative: Herbert Pundik," 78.

Sweden within a couple of weeks. The number of Danish Jews arrested was under five hundred and the number of those who died in the Holocaust was less than two hundred.

The German occupation of Denmark during World War II resulted in an impressive act of resistance during a time when collaboration was more common. The sheer number and high degree of success of these rescues indicate the uniqueness of the occupation experience in Denmark. As seen in the previous examples, there is no singular description of the events that remains true for everyone. These two individual accounts of the rescues that took place in Denmark during October 1943 illustrate two different portrayals of the occupying Germans. As a teenager at the time, Pundik was able to understand the dangers facing him and his family. He appreciated the risks that other people – specifically Danes – took to protect them: the headmaster's quick warning, the fisherman who opened his cottage to hide the family, and the fisherman who worked as quickly as possible to get them to safety. In his story, the Danes were the true heroes and the Germans were more obviously the villains.

For Goldstein, however, the Germans in her experience were not all cruel monsters. For example, the warning about the deportation came indirectly from a German official and she described her family's encounter with the German soldiers at the train station as "...young men far from home, more interested in playing with a pair of toddlers than in persecuting Jews."<sup>19</sup> Both families endured the dangerous journey of leaving their homes, going into hiding, and escaping Nazi-occupied Denmark by boat, but with very different experiences at the hands of the Germans.

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<sup>19</sup> Buckser, "Modern Identities and the Creation of History," 8.

## Chapter II

### “The canary bird of a murderer.”<sup>20</sup>

Hitler had special plans for Denmark. He regarded Denmark as a fellow Aryan nation that shared its Nordic roots with Germany. According to Nazi ideology’s scale of racial standing, the Aryan race represented by the German elite was superior. The Nordic race was a close second and “the most authoritative dogmatists [including Nazi Party ideologist Alfred Rosenberg and Joseph Goebbels] of the Nazi creed have repeatedly pointed to Scandinavia as the true home of the glorious Nordic race.”<sup>21</sup> In addition, Hitler also believed specifically that the peninsula that makes up the majority of Denmark, the Jutland, was mythically the ancestral home of the Nordic race.<sup>22</sup> Denmark would therefore not be treated like another conquered country but as an ally. Instead, it would be a model protectorate with its own internal government and small military yet remain under German protection when it came to foreign policy. It would serve as a “showpiece” for what was to come in the Nazis’ new world order.<sup>23</sup>

The occupying German government took cautious measures in dealing with their Danish counterparts. By treating Denmark with a “velvet glove,” Germany would show the world that it knew “how to be generous to a conquered country.”<sup>24</sup> Compared to its other conquered territories, Germany needed very few people to govern Denmark. For example, to control Norway’s 2.8 million citizens, a German administrative force of

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<sup>20</sup> Leistikow, 345.

<sup>21</sup> Joachim Joesten, “The Nazis in Scandinavia,” *Foreign Affairs* 15, no. 4 (1937): 720.

<sup>22</sup> Saul S. Friedman, *A History of the Holocaust* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004), 318.

<sup>23</sup> Buckser, “Group Identities and the Construction of the 1943 Rescue of the Danish Jews,” 211.

<sup>24</sup> Mordecai Paldiel, *Diplomat Heroes of the Holocaust* (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 2007), 89.



3,000 people was required and often proved insufficient. In Denmark there was a German diplomatic administration of just 100-200 people for 4 million Danes.<sup>25</sup> To head this administration, the Reich's Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop appointed Cecil von Renthe-Fink, a career diplomat who had served as the German ambassador in Denmark since 1936, as the chief representative of Nazi interests. In doing so, he did not install a completely new German administration in Denmark but rather utilized German officials who were already known to the Danes.<sup>26</sup>

Although the Danish government did not show much enthusiasm for working with the Germans, they arranged a policy of negotiation that benefited both countries. Unlike some of the other countries under German control, the willingness of Danish leaders to cooperate peacefully with the occupying Germans "gained for Danish citizens (temporarily, at least) a gentler German occupation – one that softened (but did not eliminate) the harsh impact of Nazi policy for nearly everyone in Denmark, Jewish or otherwise."<sup>27</sup> A moderate form of press censorship was introduced, a few politicians lost their jobs due to their anti-German attitudes, and the Wehrmacht appointed a new police minister to their liking. Denmark also had to cut its diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and was pressured in 1941 to sign the Anti-Comintern Pact, which was a treaty that bound its members "in an international struggle against communism."<sup>28</sup> However, these forced concessions were relatively minor and mostly symbolic.

Denmark also benefitted from the cooperative relationship between the two countries. Aside from the strategic access they now had to the Baltic Sea, Denmark was

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<sup>25</sup> Hollander, 46.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 46.

also a rich source of agricultural product for the Germans. Danish records indicated that “3.6 million Germans received their meat, pork, and butter rations from Denmark in 1942, 4.6 million in 1943, and 8.4 million in 1944.”<sup>29</sup> German authorities, including Renthe-Fink, knew that in order to maintain the supply of Danish agricultural resources in the quantities needed to support the German population in wartime conditions, they needed to allow Denmark a certain amount of independence. Because of this, the German occupation’s presence in Denmark was lighter than in most other occupied countries. German soldiers stationed in Denmark called it “the Whipped Cream Front,” suggesting it was a much easier and enjoyable assignment than fighting on the other fronts.<sup>30</sup> Danish citizens found the Wehrmacht soldiers sent to Denmark to be a more lenient occupation force than those sent to occupy most other countries in Europe. Many of these soldiers were older men in their forties and fifties and did not place as much conviction in Hitler’s plans for the Third Reich as the younger generation did. German soldiers wounded on the Eastern Front were also sent to Denmark in order to recuperate while being tasked with easier jobs.<sup>31</sup> For many Danes, their German occupiers would not be a problem.

Perhaps most significant in their lenient behavior was the fact that German officials did not press the issue of the Jewish population in Denmark. In other occupied countries, a German administration governed the nation and implemented Nazi racial policies and restricted the rights of the country’s citizens. For example, immediately

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<sup>29</sup> Leni Yahil, *The Rescue of Danish Jewry: Test of a Democracy*, trans. Morris Gradel (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 117-118.

<sup>30</sup> Philip Hoose, *The Boys Who Challenged Hitler: Knud Pedersen and the Churchill Club* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2015), 26.

<sup>31</sup> Emmy E. Werner, *A Conspiracy of Decency: The Rescue of the Danish Jews During World War II* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), 171.

after the occupation of Belgium in May 1940 – just one month after Germany invaded Denmark – the Nazis instituted harsh anti-Semitic laws that restricted the rights of Belgian Jews, confiscated their property, and forced them to wear a yellow Star of David. In the Netherlands, Jewish citizens were segregated from the gentile population, required to register themselves as Jewish, forced to wear the Star of David on their clothing, and were sent to concentration camps. However, none of these actions were taken against the Jews of Denmark.

Before the war, the Danish authorities did not view their Jewish citizens as a domestic problem. This changed only with the occupation, when, according to historian Leni Yahil, “the Jewish question became a kind of symbol, a barometer of principle in theory and practice.”<sup>32</sup> The occupying German government acknowledged the importance of this new concern for the Danish community and its leaders. As early as April 15, 1940 – only six days after the invasion – Renthe-Fink sent a report to Ribbentrop’s Foreign Ministry that said:

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 the Jews... and create a special police organ to this end. If we do anything more in this respect than is strictly necessary, this will cause paralysis of or serious disturbances in political and economic life. The importance of the problem should not therefore be underestimated.<sup>33</sup>

From this point on, Renthe-Fink would continue to play a crucial role in protecting the rights of Danish Jews. When the SS-*Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler visited Copenhagen in 1941, Renthe-Fink met with him privately to discuss the Jews in Denmark. He told Himmler that, while the already limited influence of Danish Jews had started to decline, it

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<sup>32</sup> Yahil, 41.

<sup>33</sup> *Beretning til Folketinget, Afgivet af den af Tinget Under 19. Dec. 1945 Nedsatte Kommission i Henhold til Grundlovens [section] 45, bilag XII* (København: J.H. Schultz A/S, Universitets-Bogtrykkeri, 1946), 216, quoted in Yahil, 42.

would be in Germany's best interests to wait until after the final victory to address the Jewish question in Denmark. Otherwise, they would be jeopardizing the collaborative relationship achieved so far. His remark that the enrollment of Danish volunteers for the *Waffen-SS* would not succeed if the Jews were to be persecuted particularly impressed Himmler.<sup>34</sup> The following year, Renthe-Fink remarked "If it transpires that Germany can in fact force Denmark to elevate the Jewish question to its current agenda, it should be acknowledged that Denmark can no longer follow the path it has taken so far."<sup>35</sup> This meant that, if the Nazis were to impose any anti-Semitic measures, the Danish government and people would cease to cooperate as they had been doing. He went on to say, "In my opinion, we would do best not to intervene in this internal political controversy, which will bring the Jewish problem to the Danish public consciousness more intensively than ever before. Instead, we should continue to follow the line we have pursued thus far."<sup>36</sup>

However, as time went on, tensions on both sides began to rise. From 1940 to 1943, Danish politicians maintained a passive negotiation policy in order to avoid open confrontation with the Germans. But the preferential treatment the Danes received made them feel trapped as if they were "the canary bird of a murderer."<sup>37</sup> According to historian and journalist, Joachim Joesten, being a part of the German war effort was an unpleasant situation for the Danes as "the Scandinavian peoples are, as everybody knows, pacifists to the core. There is nothing they dislike more heartily than martial airs and bellicose gestures like the goosestep. But they passionately love freedom and

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<sup>34</sup> Yahil, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Cecil von Renthe-Fink, "First Public Discussion of the Jewish Question in Occupied Denmark," As cited in Yad Vashem Archives JM/2503.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Leistikow, 345.

independence.”<sup>38</sup> The German occupation and the economic consequences of war were taking their toll on the Danish people. The Nazi government was also feeling additional pressure. Germany soon found itself facing new enemies – the United States and the Soviet Union. It was also suffering devastating losses on the battlefield, in contrast to its earlier victories. It became more dependent on the economic and military assistance of their occupied countries and “slowly removed its velvet gloves” in Denmark.<sup>39</sup> As a result, the Danes began to experience a tougher occupying administration.

Until 1942, the Danish government and its citizens had dealt with their German occupiers through means of negotiation and accommodation but the rising tensions gave way to more obvious forms of opposition. The spirit and opinion of the Danish people at this time could be observed at the May 1942 funeral of their popular Prime Minister, Thorvald Stauning. The funeral was held in the largest hall existing in Copenhagen at the time – Forum Hall – and was attended by over 8,000 people. As the crowds waited for King Christian X to arrive, a movement was detected by the entrance. Thinking it was the king, the people stood but it was only Renthe-Fink who entered. Of the event, Danish politician Hartvig Frisch wrote, “It is impossible to describe with what speed the people sat down again, and as the hall was large the movement was like a ripple and became a unique demonstration of silence.”<sup>40</sup> When the king finally arrived, he ignored the saluting Germans and warmly greeted the Danish crowd.

Problems between the two countries continued into the summer. Small resistance groups that were not only opposed to the Nazis but also the collaboration policy their

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<sup>38</sup> Joesten, 721.

<sup>39</sup> Hollander, 50.

<sup>40</sup> Hartvig Frisch, *Danmark Besat og Befriet*, vol. I (København: Forlaget Fremad, 1945), 231, quoted in Yahil, 64.

government accepted began to take action. The illegal Communist Party of Denmark organized a resistance movement of “sabotage cells” mostly made up of veterans from anti-Franco brigades of the Spanish Civil War.<sup>41</sup> These cells were known as Borgerlige Partisaner (Civil Partisans) or BOPA, and used gasoline and matches to carry out their operations. Another resistance group that received much attention at the time was comprised of teenage schoolboys who called themselves the “Churchill Club.” This group of teenagers carried out arson attacks and stole German weapons. Although the Danish police caught them in May 1942, two of the boys would manage to escape and continue their resistance efforts at night before returning to their cells for the day. After escaping 19 times, the two boys were caught by German soldiers and put before a German court martial. They were sentenced to 10 to 15 years in German prisons, as their ability to escape was “perceived by the occupying power as an example of Danish negligence in the face of sabotage.”<sup>42</sup> By 1942, resistance groups also began to receive help from Great Britain, which trained members of the Danish underground in Britain and parachuted back into Denmark with additional arms and explosives. The number and effectiveness of sabotages greatly increased with the help of their foreign allies.<sup>43</sup>

The relationship between Denmark and Germany reached a turning-point in the early fall during a diplomatic crisis known as “The Telegram Incident.” On the occasion of Denmark’s King Christian X’s 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday on September 26, 1942, Hitler sent a

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<sup>41</sup> Hans Holmskov Schlüter, “Danish Resistance During the Holocaust,” *Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team*, last modified 2007, <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/revolt/danishresistance.html>

<sup>42</sup> *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy: The Consequences of the German Invasion for the Scandinavian Countries, Then and Now*, ed. Jill Stephenson and John Gilmour (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 61.

<sup>43</sup> Jørgen H. Barford, *The Holocaust Failed in Denmark* (Copenhagen: Frihedsmuseets Venners, 1985), 11.

warm note congratulating the king. In response, Hitler received a telegram that simply said, “MY UTMOST THANKS, CHRISTIAN REX.”<sup>44</sup> Although the actual German text (“SPRECHE MEINEN BESTEN DANK AUS”) was no different than his replies from previous years, Hitler went into a rage.<sup>45</sup> With the encouragement of some of his advisors in Berlin, Hitler adopted the idea that Denmark had become too defiant and uncooperative in its role as a protectorate. According to several German officials, such as Gestapo senior official Rudolf Mildner, “And ever since then Hitler hated Denmark.”<sup>46</sup> Ribbentrop ordered Renthe-Fink to deliver a message of protest to the Danish government on September 29 and recalled him immediately back to Berlin. The Danish envoy stationed in Berlin was also requested to return to Copenhagen.<sup>47</sup> The cordial diplomatic relationship between the two countries was shaken.

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Yahil, 74.

<sup>45</sup> Yahil, 446-447.

<sup>46</sup> Rudolf Mildner, interview by Leon Goldensohn, Feb. 12, 1946, in *The Nuremberg Interviews*, ed. Robert Gellately (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 379.

<sup>47</sup> Yahil, 74.

### Chapter III

**“I gather a situation that must be characterized as critical has arisen because of the somewhat lax and feeble manner in which the Danes were handled by the Reich's Plenipotentiary, Dr. Best”<sup>48</sup>**

The riots and increased tensions in Denmark called for some changes in its Nazi representatives. The Germans pressured the Danish government to remove Prime Minister Vilhelm Buhl, the Social Democrat who succeeded Thorvald Stauning, and installed the pro-German Foreign Minister Erik Scavenius in his place. The commander of the German military in Denmark, General Erich Ludke, was seen as too lenient and was replaced by General Hermann von Hanneken, whose job was to take a tougher stance on the Danish resistance movement.<sup>49</sup> Rente-Fink was also replaced with SS-*Obergruppenführer* Werner Best, who was personally handpicked by Heinrich Himmler in November 1942 to be the new plenipotentiary.<sup>50</sup> Best's role in the failed deportations is significant but his motives and actions are unclear and often called into question.

Dr. Karl Rudolf Werner Best was an ambitious man. Born in 1903, he earned a doctorate in law from the University of Heidelberg in 1927 and became a judge in 1929 in the Hessian court. He was fired in December 1931 for his connection to the Boxheim Documents, which were part of a failed effort to overthrow the Weimar Republic.<sup>51</sup> In 1930, he joined the Nazi Party and worked closely with SS-*Reichsführer* Himmler and the head of the security police, Reinhard Heydrich. He worked his way up to a few

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<sup>48</sup> Joseph Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries: 1942-1943*, trans. & ed. Louis P. Lochner (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1948), 426.

<sup>49</sup> Hollander, 51.

<sup>50</sup> Paldiel, 92.

<sup>51</sup> Department of State: Division of Biographic Information, “Best, Karl Rudolf Werner,” *Central Intelligence Agency, Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act*, document no. 519a6b2a993294098d511846: 1-2, [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/1705143/BEST,%20KARL%20RUDOLF%20WERNER\\_0001.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/BEST,%20KARL%20RUDOLF%20WERNER_0001.pdf).



senior positions in the Gestapo, eventually serving as head of the Administration and Law department of the Reich Main Security Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt* or RSHA).<sup>52</sup> In this capacity, “Both Himmler and Heydrich relied on Best to develop the legalities of their actions against the enemies of the state and the Jewish problem.”<sup>53</sup> Best was sent to Paris in 1940 where he was appointed head of the civilian administration of the German Military Command and issued *Judenverordnung* (Jews Regulations), which initiated strict regulations on Jewish citizens and deportations to detention camps and then to Auschwitz.<sup>54</sup> It was in France that Best earned the nickname, “Bloodhound of Paris.”<sup>55</sup>

Best arrived in Denmark on November 5, 1942 after being reassigned in late October. According to Best, he was transferred to Denmark because of the political instability after King Christian X’s telegram to Hitler, which was not well received.<sup>56</sup> Before he left, Best met with Hitler, Ribbentrop, and Renthe-Fink to discuss the current situation of the German occupation in Denmark. At this meeting, Hitler told him to keep relations between the two countries as peaceful as possible and that his goal was to establish a new, legal government. In an interview after the war, Best claimed that it was his “absolute intention...in accordance with his views on the relations between Germany and the occupied countries, to conduct a considerate policy of agreements, even though

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<sup>52</sup> Dr. Karl Rudolf Werner Best, interview by Dr. Rudolf Merkel (counsel for the Gestapo), July 31, 1946, quoted in *The Gestapo on Trial: Evidence From Nuremberg*, ed. Bob Carruthers, (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword: 2014), 148.

<sup>53</sup> *The Gestapo on Trial: Evidence From Nuremberg*, ed. Bob Carruthers, (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword: 2014), 4.

<sup>54</sup> Bo Lidegaard, *Countrymen: The Untold Story of How Denmark's Jews Escaped the Nazis*, trans. Robert Maass (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 32.

<sup>55</sup> Department of State: Division of Biographic Information, “Best, Karl Rudolf Werner.”

<sup>56</sup> “Interrogation of the former Plenipotentiary of the German Government in Denmark, Dr. Werner Best, in Kastell: Copenhagen, 1 August 1945” in *Nuremberg, Germany: International Military Tribunal, 1945-08-01* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Law Library’s Donovan Nuremberg Trial Collection), 1.

he might come in conflict with the general wishes of the German National-socialist [sic] Party.”<sup>57</sup> If true, this statement might account for the tactics he took in running his occupying administration and his actions during the fall of 1943.

Like Renthe-Fink, Best maintained a passive approach in governing Denmark. His superior, Ribbentrop, remained indifferent to and possibly supported his methods, even though they both received pressure from other leading Nazi officials, such as Himmler and SS-*Obersturmbannführer* Adolf Eichmann, to change their policy.<sup>58</sup> Also like his predecessor, Best was not eager to confront the Jewish question in Denmark. He reasserted Renthe-Fink’s belief that “Danish society regards the Jewish question above all as a legal and constitutional issue. If the German side were to demand special treatment of certain Danish citizens – that is, Jews who hold Danish citizenship – the Danes would regard this above all as an assault on their constitution.”<sup>59</sup> The Germans would only face more resistance from the Danish people if actions against the Jews were taken. Furthermore, Best said:

The Jewish problem commands so little importance in Denmark, in terms of quantity and interest, that there is no practical need to take special action for the time being... it may be stated that neither political nor economic behavior in Denmark is substantively influenced by Jews; that German interests do not require measures against the Jews in Denmark at the present time; that since the Jews in Denmark are so few and so unimportant, summary actions against them would seem unfounded and incomprehensible.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Ackerman and Jack Duvall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 222.

<sup>59</sup> “Report on the Situation of Danish Jewry and Public Opinion Memorandum from the Reich Minister to Denmark, Werner Best,” Werner Best to the Reich’s Foreign Ministry in Berlin, April 24, 1943, as cited in Yad Vashem Archive JM/2216.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

In Best's opinion, the Jewish situation in Denmark was not a threat to German interests. Instead of creating unnecessary political unrest and further straining Danish-German relations, action against the Danish Jews could wait for the time being.

However, the new German administration did not successfully eliminate the acts of sabotage in Denmark; in fact, the amount of sabotage increased in 1943 and became more organized. In Best's opinion, these instances of sabotage were only an effort to disrupt his authority in Denmark in order to force political change and were of no importance to the German war effort.<sup>61</sup> In a May 1943 report to Berlin, Best called recent events a "Sabotage Wave" (*Sabotagewelle*) and claimed that the Danish police were "energetically and successfully" fighting the problem.<sup>62</sup> But this was not the case. Resistance had continued to grow throughout the year and reached a breaking point in the summer. While there were a recorded number of 120 acts of sabotage for the entire year of 1942, there were 181 in the second quarter of 1943 and 185 in August 1943 alone.<sup>63</sup> After a set of German military defeats – particularly the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943 – and a break in Swedish-German relations, the Danish people became more defiant. In August, Danish dock workers in Odense (the third largest city in Denmark) refused to repair German ships and went on strike, which sparked more strikes, riots, and acts of sabotage throughout the country.<sup>64</sup> Later that same month, Danish resistance members blew up Forum Hall, which was to be converted into barracks for the German

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<sup>61</sup> "Interrogation of the Former Commissioner of the German Reich in Denmark, Dr. Werner Best, in the Castel Copenhagen, 3 August 1945" in *Nuremberg, Germany: International Military Tribunal, 1945-08-03* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Law Library's Donovan Nuremberg Trial Collection), 1.

<sup>62</sup> Hollander, 52.

<sup>63</sup> Gunnar S. Paulsson, "The 'Bridge over the over the Øresund': The Historiography on the Expulsion of the Jews from Nazi-Occupied Denmark," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30, no. 3 (1995): 446.

<sup>64</sup> Hollander, 52.

Army.<sup>65</sup> German officials in Denmark were finding it more and more difficult to control the Danish population.

Throughout the month of August, General von Hanneken, who did not get along with Best, sent numerous reports to Berlin about the increasing unrest in Denmark. In his accounts he “characterized Denmark as a country on the edge of revolt” and called for harsher measures to be taken against saboteurs.<sup>66</sup> Hitler and his Foreign Ministry were appalled by the situation von Hanneken described. On August 24, Best was summoned to meet Ribbentrop at Hitler’s Wolf Lair in East Prussia. In a journal entry made on September 8, 1943, the Reich’s Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels said, “I gather a situation that must be characterized as critical has arisen because of the somewhat lax and feeble manner in which the Danes were handled by the Reich's Plenipotentiary, Dr. Best. The Danes put a wrong interpretation on the generous treatment accorded them.”<sup>67</sup> He also recalled Best’s visit to Hitler’s headquarters an “an energetic dressing down” for how the situation was being handled in Denmark.<sup>68</sup> Goebbels, as well as many other Nazi officials, concluded that the preferential treatment shown to Denmark had not been repaid and the Danes had misused Germany’s generosity.

According to Best, Ribbentrop reprimanded him for the stressful situation in Denmark and told him that Hitler had sided with General von Hanneken. Best was denied the opportunity to speak personally with Hitler on the matter, as Ribbentrop would

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<sup>65</sup> "GRAVE UNREST IN DENMARK: Martial Law May Be Imposed," *The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW: 1842-1954)*, Aug. 26, 1943.

<sup>66</sup> Paulsson, 446.

<sup>67</sup> Goebbels, 426.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

“in no way oppose Hitler, if he was excited about something.”<sup>69</sup> Although he protested, Best was sent back to Copenhagen with an ultimatum, which was presented to the Danish government on August 28.

Germany’s ultimatum for Denmark consisted of several things. The first was the implementation of a state of emergency. In the state of emergency, public meetings of more than five people were to be prohibited, as well as any form of strike or support for strikers. The press would be censored under German control and all weapons had to be surrendered. A curfew between the hours of 8:30 pm and 5:30 am would be established and enforced. Most distressing were the demands for the implementation of the death penalty and for saboteurs and Danes accused of other violations to be tried by German courts.<sup>70</sup> The Danish government unanimously rejected the proposal and stepped down. On August 29, German authorities declared martial law and a state of emergency was imposed. Telephone lines were cut, prominent Danish figures – including professors, businessmen, writers, members of parliament, and leaders of the Jewish community – were taken as hostages, and the Danish military was disarmed. The previous policies of collaboration and negotiation were over.

In September, German plans for a mass deportation of Danish Jews were made. Reports and theories of who actually initiated the action vary but on September 8, Best sent Telegram 1032 to Ribbentrop’s Foreign Ministry in Berlin, which stated:

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

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<sup>69</sup> “Interrogation of the Former Commissioner of the German Reich in Denmark, Dr. Werner Best, in the Castel Copenhagen, 3 August 1945,” 1.

<sup>70</sup> Werner, 24.

they will be liable to cause reaction in the country, which in turn may lead to a reimposition [sic] of a general state of emergency under conditions which will presumably be less convenient than those of today.<sup>71</sup>

For the Freemasons, Best only suggested closing their lodges, arresting prominent leaders, and confiscating property but for the Jews, he asked for additional ships and police forces to help arrest and deport them.<sup>72</sup> According to Richard Petrow, “The telegram was a masterpiece of bureaucratic infighting.”<sup>73</sup> In sending this report, Best helped repair his ideological standing with Hitler and Himmler as he now was finally willing to address the Danish Jewish question to their liking. In addition, the new police forces requested, as well as some of General von Hanneken’s military forces, would be placed under his control: the move was a small victory in the competition between the two men. Hitler gave his approval nine days later on September 17.

Plans and preparations for the mass deportation quickly came together throughout the month. The police forces Best requested started arriving, even before Hitler’s official approval came through. SS-*Sturmbannführer* Karl Heinz Hoffman, who was assigned as head of the Gestapo in Denmark, was the first to arrive on September 14. Hoffman, with Best’s approval, immediately went to work and conducted a raid on Copenhagen’s Jewish community offices and confiscated their membership lists. The first contingents of the Orpo (*Ordnungspolizei* or Regular Order Police) and SiPo (*Sicherheitspolizei* or Security Police) arrived on September 15 and their commander, SS-*Standartenführer* Rudolf Mildner, on the 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Yahil, 138.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 138-139.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Petrow, *The Bitter Years: The Invasion and Occupation of Denmark and Norway, April 1940-May 1945* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1974), 201.

<sup>74</sup> Paulsson, 447.

After Hitler's approval was received, the arrests and deportations were scheduled for the night of October 1, the first night of the Jewish New Year and when most of the Danish Jews were expected to be at home. In a telegram sent to Ribbentrop on the morning of the arrests, Best explained his plan for that evening: the Jews would be arrested during the night of October 1-2 and transported by ship from Sjælland (the Danish island on which Copenhagen is located) and by "special trains" from the Danish peninsula, Jutland; no mention of the actions would be made in the press or over the radio; Jewish property would not be confiscated "so that the taking away of these assets cannot be described as the primary or subsidiary object of the action"; and an announcement would be made a few days after about releasing interned Danish soldiers to "show that the Germans do not intend, as has already been contended here, to put the Danish peasant boys on the same footing as the Jews."<sup>75</sup> The Danish Jews would then be transported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in Czechoslovakia.

Despite having sent Telegram 1032, Best was apprehensive about the deportations. In a later interview, Best said he protested the actions because it would cause trouble for Germany in Denmark and their relations to Sweden but was told to go forward with the actions as planned. Instead, "The subject [Best] took a decision to enter into the matter in such a way that the persecution could be undertaken in the minimum proportions."<sup>76</sup> He knew that the roundups would cause outrage among the Danish people. To try to minimize Danish reprisals, the arrests were deliberately planned to take

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<sup>75</sup> "Deportation of the Danish Jews in October 1943," Werner Best to the Reich's Foreign Ministry in Berlin, Oct. 1, 1943.

<sup>76</sup> "Interrogation of the former Plenipotentiary of the German Reich in Denmark, Dr. Werner Best, in Kastell: Kopenhagen, 4th August 1945" in *Nuremberg, Germany: International Military Tribunal, 1945-08-04* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Law Library's Donovan Nuremberg Trial Collection), 1.

place during the night, as most would learn about the night's events the following morning when the operation would be over.<sup>77</sup> He mentioned in his telegram on October 1 that Jewish property would not be confiscated and Danish soldiers would be released: all measures to placate the Danish people after the arrests. Most telling were the orders given to the police, which said that they were not allowed to break down the doors of Jewish citizens; the police needed to knock and if no one answered, they had to leave peacefully. One Jewish family was spared because they were asleep and did not hear the knocking on the door; they only found out about the arrests the following morning.<sup>78</sup>

Most likely his biggest concern was the effect the operation would have on his career. In his ambition to regain favor with the Nazi elite, he made a risky move. By offering to implement a plan for a "Final Solution" in Denmark, he had started to earn back trust with Hitler and Himmler, his former mentor, and temporarily had the upper hand over General von Hanneken. However, he knew that if the operation were to fail, it would mean forfeiting his power, almost certainly to his rival, and losing any chance to advance his career. For Best, it might be better if the deportations did not happen at all.

Other German officials had their doubts as well. When Best's rival, General von Hanneken, was told about the deportations on September 20, he quickly sent a telegram to General Staff headquarters about his concerns. He worried about how the operation would affect the military, calling it "a heavy burden" as he believed the police force could not handle the job alone and the army's strength would be divided between the action in Copenhagen and training new recruits elsewhere.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, he said:

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<sup>77</sup> Buckser, "Group Identities and the Construction of the 1943 Rescue of the Danish Jews," 212.

<sup>78</sup> Yahil, 172-173.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Yahil, 153.



The benefits of the deportation strike me as doubtful. No cooperation can be expected afterward from the civil administration or from the Danish police. The supply of food will be adversely affected. The “willingness to supply” of the armaments industry will be undermined. Disturbances requiring use of military force must be expected.<sup>80</sup>

He saw clear and serious ramifications that would result from the deportations and none of them were positive for the German military or Foreign Ministry.

Even one of the new arrivals in Copenhagen saw the harm that would come from such action. Mildner had come to Denmark from Katowice, Poland where he was known as the tough Gestapo chief who sent many to Auschwitz. According to historian Timothy Snyder, “In other words, he was hardly a man without experience in the mass murder of Jews.”<sup>81</sup> However, what he found in Copenhagen was much different than what he saw in his past experiences in East Europe. The Danes still maintained many institutions that had been eliminated further east including active political parties, a sovereign state, and a native police force that would not cooperate with the occupier’s plans. The effectiveness of a “Final Solution” that had been achieved in the east would not be easy to come by in Denmark, if at all.<sup>82</sup> When he received the order for the deportations, Mildner was “very distressed” and made his concerns known to Best and his superiors in Berlin.<sup>83</sup> With Best’s permission, he sent a telegram to Gestapo Chief Heinrich Mueller requesting for the operations to be cancelled, his reasons being that the Jews were causing no problems, there would be serious consequences for the German-Danish relationship, and it would lead to more riots and sabotage.<sup>84</sup> His telegram was answered by a message from

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 153-154.

<sup>81</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Crown/Archetype, 2015), 216.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 216-217.

<sup>83</sup> Mildner, interview by Leon Goldensohn, 375.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

Himmler through the Chief of the Security Police and SD, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, which said the actions were to be carried out. He even flew to Berlin to meet with Kaltenbrunner with the sole purpose of changing his mind but had no success; as Kaltenbrunner was unavailable, he met with Mueller who wrote a telegram to Himmler at Mildner's request. When he returned to Copenhagen, Mildner received a direct order from Himmler, again through Kaltenbrunner, which said, "The anti-Jewish actions are to be started immediately."<sup>85</sup>

On September 23, Ribbentrop sent a memorandum to Hitler reiterating Best's apprehensions for the action. He brought up the concerns about the Danish political situation, the likely possibility that a new government could be formed, the assumed riots and strikes that would follow, and that the King and Danish parliament would cease to cooperate. Ribbentrop asked, "Having taken into account the considerations of the Reich Minister in Denmark, I hereby request an instruction. Does the Fuehrer want the action against the Jews to be carried out now?"<sup>86</sup> Hitler could not be swayed. In the margins of the received message was the note, "The Fuehrer doubts that the action will lead to these conclusions" initialed by Walter Hewel, the Representative of the Foreign Ministry at Hitler's headquarters.<sup>87</sup> The arrests and deportations would continue as planned.

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<sup>85</sup> Rudolf Mildner, "Translation of Document 2375-PS," trans. Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality. In *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol. V (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1946).

<sup>86</sup> "Ribbentrop to Hitler Concerning Deportation of Danish Jews (September 23, 1943)," Joachim Von Ribbentrop to Adolf Hitler, Sept. 23, 1943.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter IV

**“So, for God’s sake, don’t stay at home.”<sup>88</sup>**

Although Berlin commanded that the operation be continued as planned, Best had one more card to play. In a meeting between Best, Mildner, and the plenipotentiary’s deputy and old friend, *SS-Brigadeführer* Paul Kanstein, who would later be involved in the July 20, 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler as the would-be new head of the German security police, it was decided that a warning should be issued to the Jewish community.<sup>89</sup> This warning would be “leaked” by Best’s confidant, Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz.

Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz is a celebrated figure in Holocaust resistance and has been recognized as one of the “Righteous Among the Nations” by Yad Vashem since 1971.<sup>90</sup> He was born in Bremen, Germany in 1904 and became involved in the international coffee trade after college, spending much time in Scandinavia. He joined the Nazi Party in 1932 but later drifted away from the movement. However, in 1939 the Foreign Ministry appointed him the German maritime attaché stationed in Copenhagen, responsible for coordinating commercial shipping between the two countries.<sup>91</sup> As he had previously worked in Denmark before the war, his knowledge of Danish affairs and their language made him a valuable asset. When Best arrived in Denmark in late 1942, he and Duckwitz soon became good friends. Their families were known to socialize privately and Best trusted Duckwitz’s counsel on Danish affairs. Duckwitz served as a

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<sup>88</sup> Rabbi Bent Melchior, interview by Judith Goldstein, “Oral history interview with Bent Melchior” in United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Oral History Branch, part 1, June 24, 1996.

<sup>89</sup> Lidegaard, 45; Mildner, interview by Leon Goldensohn, 376.

<sup>90</sup> “Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz,” *Yad Vashem*, last modified 2016, <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/stories/duckwitz.asp>.

<sup>91</sup> Paldiel, 94.

confidant to Best, who clearly valued his friend's judgment, which is why he chose to confide in him about the deportations.

The details of exactly *when* Duckwitz first heard of the operation and *what* he did afterwards are unclear. Most historians believe Duckwitz's account that he learned about Telegram 1032 three days after it was sent (September 11) and flew to Berlin to try to intercept it but when he arrived on the 13<sup>th</sup>, it was too late. It is also widely accepted that in order to negotiate for foreign aid from Sweden, Duckwitz travelled to Stockholm on September 22 and met with a friend, Nils Ekblad, an official of the Swedish Embassy in Copenhagen who was in Stockholm at the time, and was introduced to the Swedish Prime Minister. However, historian Gunnar Paulsson claims that both accounts are untrue, as they do not correspond to other factual timelines and accounts. According to Paulsson, Telegram 1032 only arrived at its intended recipient – Ribbentrop – on September 13 and was not forwarded to Hitler until the 16<sup>th</sup>, which he claims was also the first day recorded in Best's diary that mentioned meeting with Duckwitz during this time period.<sup>92</sup> Paulsson argues that either the flight did not happen, that it took place later than claimed, or that the visit pertained to an entirely different matter.<sup>93</sup> In regards to whether Duckwitz ever contacted the Swedes, Paulsson puts more faith in Ekblad's version of the events, in which he claimed Duckwitz met him in Copenhagen on September 28 and that Ekblad put him in contact not with the Swedish Prime Minister but the Danish Prime Minister. Duckwitz's visa records at the Swedish Foreign Ministry also indicate that he was not in

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<sup>92</sup> *Dänemark in Hitlers Hand: der Bericht des Reichsbevollmächtigten Werner Best über seine Besatzungspolitik in Danemark mit Studien über Hitler, Goring, Himmler, Heydrich, Ribbentrop, Canaris u.a.*, ed. Siegfried Matlok (Husum, 1988), 117, quoted in Paulsson, 448.

<sup>93</sup> Paulsson, 448.

Sweden at any point during this time period.<sup>94</sup> Paulsson believes that Ekblad's story, although not entirely credible – for example, Duckwitz had his own contacts in the Danish government and did not need Ekblad's introduction – is more plausible. It would explain why it took so long for the Swedish government to take action on information that it supposedly received on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and refutes the implication that the Swedish Prime Minister would accept the word of “a junior official of a German embassy in a foreign country who had no standing in Sweden.”<sup>95</sup> However, Sweden did announce in early October that it would take in all Danish Jewish refugees.

Regardless of exact dates, Duckwitz *was* told of the upcoming deportations and met with Swedish officials at some point to arrange a place of refuge for Danish Jews. On Tuesday, September 28, Best told him that the mass deportations had a confirmed date for the night of October 1-2. He quickly disclosed this to Danish Social Democratic leaders, Hans Hedtoft and H.C. Hansen, who immediately shared the information with leaders of the Jewish community.<sup>96</sup> One such leader was the acting chief rabbi of Denmark, Rabbi Marcus Melchior, who received a visitor that night with a message. According to his son, Rabbi Bent Melchior:

The message was, “The Jews should not stay home on Friday night. Whether it would possible... later to return, we don't know. The Germans here in Denmark are in fact against this decision but it is an order from Berlin and we can't do nothing about it and it has to be done and the Gestapo will be here to arrest the Jews. So, for God's sake, don't stay at home.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> UMA, Viseringar, Duckwitz, Georg Ferdinand and Annemarie, quoted in Paulsson, 451-452.

<sup>95</sup> Paulsson, 452.

<sup>96</sup> Barford, 13.

<sup>97</sup> Rabbi Bent Melchior, interview by Judith Goldstein.

Although the action was to take place three days later, Rabbi Melchior had to make the best decision about when to share the news. He received the information just minutes before curfew began and therefore could not go out or use the telephone:

So the first chance to spread the news was on the Wednesday morning. Now that Wednesday was the eve of Rosh Hashanah of the Jewish New Year. And there is a very early service in synagogues – in orthodox synagogues – where you say special prayers and where there are to be more people than on usual, on normal weekdays. So my father stopped those services in the synagogue of Copenhagen... in the middle of the services... and told the people what he had been told the night before.<sup>98</sup>

He told his congregation about the planned roundup, asked them to spread the news to everyone, and urged them to go into hiding.

Rescue efforts had little organization at first and relied on the spontaneous and generous action of non-Jewish Danes.<sup>99</sup> Contacting Jews in the Danish community proved to be a problem at times because, as Pundik recalled, “There was no general awareness in Denmark of who was or was not Jewish. Many were surprised to discover that the people next door were Jews, for some Jews had tried so hard to forget their origin that they had nearly succeeded.”<sup>100</sup> Although delivering warnings was not always easy, most Jews were able to leave their homes quickly and continued to pass on the warning as they left. During the next several weeks, friends, colleagues, and even strangers assisted the majority of the Danish Jews. Rabbi Marcus Melchior’s family spread the news that they were going into the country for a vacation; according to his son, Rabbi Bent Melchior, “And people knew that if the rabbi goes into the country on Rosh Hashanah, it is like Father Christmas leaving before December. And that was some of

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Buckser, “Group Identities and the Construction of the 1943 Rescue of the Danish Jews,” 213.

<sup>100</sup> Pundik, “Personal Narrative: Herbert Pundik,” 83.

the ways we used to get the message around.”<sup>101</sup> Many found hiding spaces within hours and “All found a place to sleep and were given food; offers of payment were usually refused”.<sup>102</sup> The home of Dr. Jørgen Gersfelt became one of the main channels in this operation and his services extended past being just a safe-home. As a doctor, Gersfelt was allowed to drive at night during curfew and would use this privilege to take Jewish citizens that had been hidden in his home to their departure points on the coast. He would also make sure that the transportations could be paid for and that all passengers on board would remain quiet. Pundik explained:

The fishermen would tell him how many people they could take each night and how much it would cost. Gersfelt manipulated the passenger lists so that affluent refugees would pay for the indigent. He made young children drink an anesthetic so they would not cry and wake up the Germans, and he injected adults with a tranquilizer. In most cases, Gersfelt relates, it was the adults, of all people, who displayed the most fear.<sup>103</sup>

Local institutions also offered shelter. Schools welcomed refugees but could not remain open for a long period of time or they would draw attention. Hospitals, especially the Copenhagen hospital, Bispebjerg, became a center for a great number of refugees, many of whom were hidden under Christian names.<sup>104</sup> Several priests from a church near the Copenhagen synagogue, concerned that Nazis might try to destroy its sacred scrolls, broke into the synagogue, took the scrolls, and hid them in the basement of their church for the remainder of the war.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Rabbi Bent Melchior, interview by Judith Goldstein.

<sup>102</sup> Yahil, 240.

<sup>103</sup> Herbert Pundik, *Det kan ikke ske i Danmark: Jødernes flugt til Sverige i 1943*, trans. Yad Vashem The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority (Zmora-Bitan, 1996), 20.

<sup>104</sup> Yahil, 241.

<sup>105</sup> Buckser, “Group Identities and the Construction of the 1943 Rescue of the Danish Jews,” 213.

An additional factor in acting out this grand rescue was acquiring the needed finances. Jews hiding in the city were being quickly and quietly moved to hiding places along the northern coast where they would wait for fishermen to take them over to Sweden. Fishing boats filled with refugees left fishing ports constantly, some fishermen making the trip several times a day. Fishermen often took advantage of the desperate need for transportation and perceived dangers to charge fees that “rose and fell with the pressure of refugees and that the price per transport greatly surpassed the value of a fishing boat”.<sup>106</sup> Transportation at first was carried out on a private basis, making this option of escape available to the few that had the necessary means of payment. The majority of Jewish citizens had to sell possessions in order to obtain the money needed. Some fishermen made the trips free of cost or refused extra payment in addition to their original fees. The Jewish Community’s Board of Trustees, which was already in Sweden, allowed the assets of the community to be used as collateral and a loan of 750,000 kroner was given and paid back by the community after the war.<sup>107</sup> Some Danish organizations and wealthier private citizens covered most other expenses.

During this time, discovery was always a possible threat in the forefront of the minds of all involved. However, the majority of evidence indicates that the Germans did not put up much of a fight. Yahil claims, "The general opinion is that the Danish Nazis - few though they were - were more dangerous than the Germans themselves."<sup>108</sup> The majority of the police that were carrying out the operation were not Gestapo but the

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<sup>106</sup> Hans Kirchhoff, “Denmark: A Light in the Darkness of the Holocaust? A Reply to Gunnar S. Paulsson,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995): 474.

<sup>107</sup> Yahil, 263.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 266-267.



Orpo's "over-age reservists" aided by some Danish officers.<sup>109</sup> As previously mentioned, these men were under orders to leave peacefully if no one answered the knocks on their door and although there were a few who disregarded the instructions, the majority complied. While the German army was called in to help carry out the deportations, the soldiers were not enthusiastic. Dr. Gersfelt recalled an instance when a garbage truck hiding several Jews was stopped by an army patrol. When they lifted the lid of the truck and saw the hidden people, one of them exclaimed, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," dropped the lid, and motioned for the truck driver to continue.<sup>110</sup> According to many Danish survivors, most German soldiers were willing to accept bribes or turn a blind eye. Countless stories of Jewish families travelling to the coast by train corroborate that the train-cars were full of German soldiers who pretended not to see their fellow passengers. Some of these soldiers even took advantage of the rescues as a way to desert to Sweden: one story claims that on October 12, the German consul stationed in the German port of Malmö reported that six German soldiers had disguised themselves as fishermen, participated in transporting Danish Jews to Sweden, and then stayed there.<sup>111</sup>

The Germans were also not very present in the water, although they knew there was a "very lively traffic" of fishing boats going back and forth between Denmark and Sweden.<sup>112</sup> In such a dramatic and tense situation as the rescues, it would be easy to imagine the Øresund, the strait between Denmark and Sweden, to be filled with German ships waiting to catch the Jews and those who helped them. However, this was not the case. Only one ship, the *Wartheland*, was sent for the deportations and remained

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<sup>109</sup> Paulsson, 435.

<sup>110</sup> Pundik, "Personal Narrative: Herbert Pundik," 88.

<sup>111</sup> "Juden in Dänemark 1942-1943," Yad Vashem JM/2216, quoted in Yahil, 112-113.

<sup>112</sup> Mildner, interview by Leon Goldensohn, 376.

anchored in the Copenhagen harbor at the time.<sup>113</sup> The German naval commander for the port in Copenhagen had decided that this would be a good time to send his entire fleet of patrol boats in for repairs.<sup>114</sup> The inactivity of the Germans – on land and at sea – made it much easier for the rescue attempts to succeed. The numbers vary slightly, but most agree that within a few weeks about 7,000 Jews were transported to Sweden and kept out of danger.

The success of the Danish rescue most often overshadows the losses experienced at the time. One of the few failed rescues was a transport from Gilleleje, a small fishing port in North Zealand. In the first stages of the rescue, the trips to Sweden could be easily kept secret. However, as more people came and waited to be transported, the growing interest in the small harbor caught the attention of the Gestapo. On October 5, the Gestapo chief and a few subordinates arrived and stopped a group of about twenty Jews from leaving by shooting the ship's skipper and easily taking the passengers. The next day, even more arrests were made. Around five hundred Jews were hiding in Gilleleje, some hiding in the lofts of the town's church and others in the Mission hall. That night, the Gestapo Chief and his men raided the town, capturing the eighty people in the church lofts and the twenty hiding in the Mission hall. All of the refugees and the Danes that helped them were caught, taken to the Horserød prison camp in North Zealand, and later to Germany.<sup>115</sup>

Out of the estimated 7,500 Jews in Denmark, the number of Jews arrested was under five hundred. Those who were arrested were taken to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. The Danish Red Cross worked on their behalf to

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<sup>113</sup> Paulsson, 434.

<sup>114</sup> Hollander, 55.

<sup>115</sup> Barford, 20-21.

ensure their welfare. They were persistent in knowing their location and living conditions and therefore secured better treatment for their imprisoned countrymen. The Danish Red Cross also pressured the Germans to allow the International Red Cross to inspect Theresenstadt. A visit was eventually granted for June 23, 1944 and was conducted by a Berlin delegate from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Dr. Maurice Rossel, and two representatives of the Danish government and Danish Red Cross.<sup>116</sup> However, the conditions of the camp are known now to have been a great hoax; in preparation for this visit, the Nazis orchestrated a beautification project for the camp, which included painting buildings, constructing fake stores, planting gardens, and adding better furnishings to the shower area. The prisoners were also threatened that they and their families would be killed if they in any way exposed the deception.<sup>117</sup> Despite the deceptive tricks, the persistence and amount of Danish protests likely kept the imprisoned Danes from being transported to other camps. According to a later interview, Best:

...heard the complaints in the country that the danish [sic] people were not properly treated in concentration camps, - he laid down a complaint to the foreign ministry proposing and requiring that the Germans would be transferred to a special camp in order that they could [be] properly treated. As far as the danes [sic] were concerned he requested repeatedly that they be transported back to Denmark.<sup>118</sup>

In April 1945, German authorities handed over the Danish prisoners to the Swedish Red Cross and virtually all refugees returned to Denmark that year. Most found their homes unoccupied and taken care of by their neighbors.

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<sup>116</sup> Lidegaard, 73-74.

<sup>117</sup> Naomi Baumslag, *Murderous Medicine: Nazi Doctors, Human Experimentation, and Typhus* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 188-189.

<sup>118</sup> "Interrogation of the former Plenipotentiary of the German Reich in Denmark, Dr. Werner Best, in Kastell: Kopenhagen, 4th August 1945," 3.

The failed action in Denmark inspired much bitterness directed at both Best and Mildner from several high-ranking Nazi officials. Best, eager to put a positive spin on the situation, claimed that the goal of the operation was to get rid of the Jews in Denmark and so their plan to make Denmark *Judenrein* was actually successful.<sup>119</sup> But the powers in Berlin were not so easily fooled. According to Mildner, “There was big excitement in the Führer’s headquarters. Hitler and Himmler were furious... They assumed correctly that the Jews had been warned.”<sup>120</sup>

Despite the reactions from Berlin, there is no evidence that indicates that either man was harshly penalized for this outcome. Both men had worked to put an end to the plans being made throughout September and the night of the deportations showed obvious signs of their interference. Best especially had actively participated in sabotaging German efforts by leaking information and ordering a more passive approach to searching for and arresting the Danish Jews. His actions anywhere else would have resulted in death. The lack of response from Berlin regarding the failed deportations suggests that Nazi leadership was perhaps happy to settle for a *Judenrein* Denmark, regardless of how it was achieved. However, although he was not reprimanded for the outcome of the events in October, Mildner would be transferred to Kassel, Germany a few months later in January 1944 for not agreeing to German retaliation plans in response to subsequent acts of sabotage in Denmark.

In Denmark, the Danes did not experience much backlash from the occupying Germans regarding the failed deportations. Paulsson claims, “Whatever fears the Danes may have entertained, in reality no Dane was executed, sent to a concentration camp, or

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<sup>119</sup> Hollander, 54.

<sup>120</sup> Mildner, interview by Leon Goldensohm, 376.

long imprisoned for helping Jews.”<sup>121</sup> The few that the German police had arrested were turned over to the Danish authorities. Their fellow Danes would then let them go after paying a small fine or by letting them escape. In addition, those who publicly protested the deportations were not punished, even though they did so in violation of the rules of the state of emergency. For example, the German authorities in Denmark ignored a group of Danish students and professors who protested the anti-Jewish action during the week of October 3-10, 1943.<sup>122</sup> In comparison, resistance efforts in the Netherlands were met with dramatically different results: when Dutch students protested the dismissal of Jewish professors in November 1940, two universities were closed and one professor was arrested.<sup>123</sup> It was only after an increased amount of sabotage perpetrated by the Danes after the failed deportations that the occupying Germans considered reprisals. Even after their now-famous act of defiance, Denmark still received preferential treatment.

The outcome of Germany’s plan for the deportation of the Danish Jews was, by all means, a disaster. With only three days notice, the Danish citizens of Copenhagen managed to save about 7,000 of Denmark’s estimated Jewish population of 7,500 from a plan that took a month to coordinate. This failed mission and the rescue efforts behind it made the country of Denmark a rarity in Nazi-occupied Europe.

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<sup>121</sup> Paulsson, 434.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter V

**“Some devious political purpose... [that was] never seriously meant to succeed.”<sup>124</sup>**

The Danish rescue efforts helped to elevate the perception of Denmark in the global Jewish community. At the end of the war, less than 200 of the estimated 7,000 Danish Jews were killed in the Holocaust. This total represents one of the highest survival rates for a German-occupied country.<sup>125</sup> The rescue marked one of the greatest victories against the goal of the Final Solution and caused serious frustration for a number of authorities in Berlin. It also served as a model for Danish human rights and international policies in the post-war era.<sup>126</sup> The numerous and varied stories of the rescue hold images of good and evil in the larger community of a nation. Though a small and defenseless nation, Denmark proved to be a symbol of hope and community in the Jewish history of the Holocaust.

Historians have taken several positions on the case of the Danish rescue during the Second World War. While the actions of many of the Danes were brave, there were special circumstances that made the rescue in Denmark easier than most other occupied countries in Europe. The number of Danish Jews was small and largely located in one city, and there was a safe haven relatively nearby. There were also warning signs seen by Danish citizens before the information ‘leak’ on September 28. When Nazi occupiers declared a state of emergency on August 29, 1943, it signaled a change in the policy of the occupation. The fate of other Jews throughout the rest of Europe was already well

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<sup>124</sup> Paulsson, 435.

<sup>125</sup> “Denmark,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC*, last modified Jan. 29, 2016, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005409>.

<sup>126</sup> Buckser, “Group Identities and the Construction of the 1943 Rescue of the Danish Jews”, 213.

known: for example, Jews from their neighboring country of Norway had been deported to Auschwitz in October 1942, one year before the attempted Danish deportation.<sup>127</sup>

These conditions made the possibility of a successful rescue more likely as opposed to rescue efforts in other countries.

Another condition that proved helpful to the Danish rescue was the actions – or inactions – of the occupying German administration. Some scholars call this the ‘Good Germans’ Theory. This school of thought promotes the idea that the deportation in Denmark was initiated and then deliberately sabotaged by German officials. It asserts that the rescue was “made possible by the fact that accurate advance information about the deportations was made available: not leaks or rumours, which might well have been disbelieved, but information passed by authoritative German sources to authoritative Danish ones, and thence to the Jewish leadership.”<sup>128</sup> Without the advance warning, the rescue would not have been possible and the deportations would have occurred as planned. The Danish Jews might have ignored the warning and not gone into hiding allowing the plans to have them arrested and deported proceed, but by that point there was enough evidence of Jewish deportations from elsewhere in occupied Europe. It was by running, hiding, and travelling to Sweden that they lived.

The theory implies that the plans for the arrests and deportation of Danish Jews were a charade led by SS-*Obergruppenführer* Werner Best. After the war, his contemporaries, such as Duckwitz, Mildner, and Ribbentrop, all claimed that Best greatly contributed to the success of the Danish rescues. Former German Envoy of the Reich-Deputy in Copenhagen, Dr. Paul Barandon, described Best as having the attitude of a

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<sup>127</sup> Jill Stephenson, “October 1943: The Rescue of the Danish Jews from Annihilation,” *German History; The Journal of the German Historical Society* 12 (1994): 401.

<sup>128</sup> Paulsson, 435.

lawyer “but he was [also] a very pleasant and honest man with an absolutely faultless character.”<sup>129</sup> Both he and Best agreed that to keep the steady supply of Danish agricultural and labor resources and its shipbuilding industry, they needed to maintain Denmark’s cooperation. Any strong actions taken against Denmark’s Jews would result in resistance from the Danish people. Barandon insinuated that Best opposed the deportations as he “had done everything in order to facilitate the emigration of as many Jews as possible to Sweden and to mitigate the effect of the action.”<sup>130</sup> Ribbentrop later claimed that it was Best – and, of course, his own actions – that delayed the deportations in Denmark for two years and also credited Best for warning the Danish Jews.<sup>131</sup> Mildner maintained that although he received the direction to start the deportations through Best, the orders originated from Berlin.<sup>132</sup> He also received Best’s approval to send the telegram requesting the end of the anti-Jewish actions and to fly to Berlin to speak with their superiors directly on the subject. Duckwitz also remained loyal to his friend. He believed that Best was opposed to any action against the Danish Jews and therefore found it hard and tragic that he was the one to initiate the deportations.<sup>133</sup>

Modern scholars are more divided on the question of Best’s role in the rescue. Otto F. Kernberg, a psychiatry professor whose work focuses on personality disorders, calls Best “an opportunist who, in order to maintain things smoothly in Denmark, first tried to protect the Jews. However, when he thought the German army was about to

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<sup>129</sup> “Interrogation of Dr. Barandon, Former German Envoy of the Reich-Deputy in Copenhagen, in the Police Headquarters, Regarding Dr. Werner Best, Copenhagen, 1 October 1945” in *Nuremberg, Germany: International Military Tribunal, 1945-10-01* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Law Library’s Donovan Nuremberg Trial Collection), 4.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>131</sup> Joachim von Ribbentrop, interview by Leon Goldensohm, July 15, 1946, in *The Nuremberg Interviews*, ed. Robert Gellately (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 194-195.

<sup>132</sup> Mildner, interview by Leon Goldensohm, 375.

<sup>133</sup> “Duckwitz to Yahil, January 1948,” YVA-027/14, quoted in Paldiel, 95.



assume direct control of the government of Denmark, he tried to maintain his own power with the support of Himmler."<sup>134</sup> Under this theory, Best had no objection to whether or not the deportations took place, as long as he was on the winning side. For some, like Danish historian Hans Kirchhoff, Best initiated the plans for deportation because he believed that it would happen regardless after the state of emergency was declared on August 29 and "knowing the SS murder machine intimately, he preferred to act as the initiator."<sup>135</sup> He could better control the outcome of the operation – and its effect on his career – if he placed himself in control from the very beginning. Gunnar Paulsson claims that Best's plan was part of "some devious political purpose but never seriously meant to succeed. And this was perfectly obvious at the time, to those in the know."<sup>136</sup> In this scenario, the plans for the operation were just a power-play meant to help Best regain favor in Berlin. This is most likely the case, as the majority of German administrative figures stationed in Denmark during the occupation knew that many Danish people would meet such actions with greater resistance and the supplies Germany so desperately needed from Denmark would be put at greater risk.

The 'Good Germans' Theory also pertains to how the arrests and deportations were carried out. In a later interview, Best claimed that because he had no choice but to carry out the plans for the operation, he wanted to make sure it was done with the least damage possible and for that reason he decided to share the information about the action

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<sup>134</sup> Otto F. Kernberg, "A Psychological Perspective," in *The Rescue of the Danish Jews: Moral Courage Under Stress*, ed. Leo Goldberger (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 189.

<sup>135</sup> Kirchhoff, 196.

<sup>136</sup> Paulsson, 435.

with “reliable agents.”<sup>137</sup> However, he remembered no other person than Georg Duckwitz who was tasked with spreading the information. Mildner “had no interest that any Jews should fall into our hands” and he – the commander of the Orpo and SiPo – spent the evening of the roundups with Paul Kanstein instead of acting as a leader and supervisor during the arrests.<sup>138</sup> His actions clearly show that he did not support the operation or wish to see it succeed. Without passionate leadership, the German soldiers and police forces tasked with carrying out the arrests were unlikely to fulfill their assignment with much effort. These men were also under instructions to knock on doors and then leave if unanswered; no doors were to be broken down. Although there were a few occasions where the directions were ignored, the fact that such orders were given and for the most part followed indicates a unique deviation from standard Nazi practice.<sup>139</sup> Without the Germans breaking down their doors, some Danes were able to sleep through the arrests or remain quiet in their houses until they could leave to go into hiding outside of the city. The German soldiers’ willingness to turn a blind eye to the Danes they encountered, both the Jews that were hiding and the Danes who helped them, was another rare occurrence. While their motives were probably not aligned to any strong moral rationale – it is more likely that the German soldiers were unhappy and unwilling to do the work – their decision to purposefully neglect orders greatly benefited the Danish Jews. The Germans’ lax approach to the arrests and deportations in Denmark made the rescues much easier for the Danes to accomplish.

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<sup>137</sup> “Interrogation of the former Plenipotentiary of the German Reich in Denmark, Dr. Werner Best, in Kastell: Kopenhagen, 4th August 1945,” 1.

<sup>138</sup> Mildner, interview by Leon Goldensohm, 376.

<sup>139</sup> Paulsson, 435.

The Germans in Denmark were “good” because they let the rescues succeed, but their intentions were not in defense of the Jews. None of the men previously mentioned were opposed to waiting until after the war to deport the Danish Jews. They just did not want to carry out the action at that time. Their opposition was politically motivated. When studying the events of the Danish occupation, much emphasis is placed on the fact that Danes in both government and civilian positions supported their Jewish countrymen, long before the war even started. They did not tolerate prejudice based on religion or race. Members of the German occupation in Denmark knew that any action taken against the Danish Jews would lead to severe complications in the “cordial” relationship between the two countries. The German soldiers in Denmark called it the “Whipped Cream” Front; it was an easy and pleasant assignment for the older and wounded soldiers stationed there. They knew that the riots, strikes, and other acts of sabotage that would likely result from the deportations would make their job of keeping order much harder. The German administration knew the operation would put a strain on political relations between the countries and Denmark’s cooperation would end.

These Germans were “good” to let the deportation fail and the rescues succeed, but there is little evidence that they did this from the goodness of their hearts. In fact Best was previously known as the “Bloodhound of Paris.” He was sent to Copenhagen to be part of a stricter, more severe German occupation administration. There was little in his history to suggest any particular empathy toward the Jews. What did change for him and other Germans assigned to Copenhagen was the relative ease with which they could carry out their assignments there and in turn burnish their careers. What is much more

likely is that these German allowed the deportation to fail in order to preserve the comfortable situation they had in Denmark.

If we acknowledge that the villain of the story was morally ambivalent, does that diminish the suffering of the victim? In the case of Denmark, it does not. This does not lessen the brave actions of the Danish people. They thought they were in danger. They thought that there would be severe punishment for their defiance. They had no way of knowing that the Germans would be so purposefully ineffectual in their tasks. To them, the Germans posed a real threat. It is important that history does not forget the terrible acts committed by the Nazis nor the suffering of their victims in the Holocaust. However, the success stories, and those who helped make them possible, should also be taught, remembered, and celebrated.

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