The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 404
"The Other Resistance"
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

When we think of the resistance during the Second World War, we usually think of furtive resistance fighters hiding in the shadows, blowing up railroad tracks or sending clandestine reports to London via a portable radio.

But there were other kinds of resistance.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 404. The Other Resistance.

From September 1, 1939 till where we are right now in the podcast chronology, roughly August 1943, Germany invaded a total of ten European nations—eleven, if you count the occupation of the Channel Islands as an invasion of the United Kingdom, and hey, why not?

Every one of these eleven nations resisted the German invaders, with one exception. Every one of the governments of the eight nations that were defeated and occupied by the Germans fled their homelands and became governments in exile, with two exceptions. One of these two exceptions is France; the French government continued to rule unoccupied France from Vichy, though there was Charles de Gaulle and his Free French movement which was something like a competing government in exile.

The other nation, the one that neither resisted the Germans nor sent its government out of the country was Denmark. I told you about Operation Weserübung in episode 320, which included the occupation of Denmark. The tiny Danish military resisted for a few hours, until King Christian X accepted a German proposal under which Denmark would not resist a German occupation, while Germany in return would respect Danish sovereignty over its domestic affairs. Thus, the Danish King remained in Copenhagen, as did the Danish Parliament and government.

Even tiny Luxembourg's government and its Sovereign, Grand Duchess Charlotte, had fled the country and set up a government in exile. In the last war, Luxembourg agreed to a German proposal similar to the one Denmark agreed to in this war—you allow our military access to your country and we won't interfere in your domestic affairs.

But this time, Luxembourg did not submit and resisted Nazi rule. When the Germans outlawed the speaking of French in Luxembourg in favor of German, Luxembourgers began speaking their own native Luxembourgish language as an act of defiance. After Operation Barbarossa failed, and the German Army was in need of soldiers, Germany formally annexed Luxembourg. This was very bad news for the roughly 12,000 Luxembourger men of military age, who instantly became eligible for conscription into the German military. About 3,000 of them died in the war.

There was a Luxembourgish resistance, but they were short on arms. They did provide intelligence to the Allies and they operated safe houses where they hid Luxembourgers resisting German conscription and in some cases smuggled them out of the country. Shortly after the annexation, Luxembourgers held a general strike in protest; the Germans arrested 20 of its leaders and executed them.

But I digress. That was Luxembourg; today we're talking about Denmark. The Danish government reluctantly accepted German occupation, as did the Danish people. Germany, in return for permission to station military units in Denmark, agreed to accept Danish sovereignty and neutrality. Officially, the Germans were only there to defend Denmark against the British.

Political parties in the Danish Parliament agreed to a government of national unity, including all the democratic parties, but not including Denmark's Communist Party or its National Socialist Party, each of which held three seats in the Parliament. The Social Democratic Party held the largest number of seats in Parliament, so it led the coalition.

The German occupation of Denmark was gentle, at first. The Germans had no particular reason to crack down on the Danes and they had every reason to keep their promises as a demonstration to the world of German good faith. From an ideological standpoint, the Nazis regarded Danes and other Scandinavians as Aryans, therefore peers of Germans, therefore deserving of the right to run their own affairs.

The Nazis had some vague plans for incorporating the Aryan Scandinavians into the German Reich eventually, but that could wait until after the war. In the meantime, the most valuable contribution Denmark could make to the German war effort would be to sell its agricultural products to Germany. That was just fine with the Danes, whose economy depended heavily on agricultural exports; unfortunately for them, before the war, their top trading partner was the UK, which was now blockading Denmark, so trade overland with Germany was the best way for Denmark to avoid economic collapse.

The Germans took advantage of their economic leverage to force an unfavorable exchange rate on Denmark, which allowed Germany to purchase Danish exports at bargain prices while inflation in Denmark soared. Still, it was better than an occupation, right?

This was not the only concession Germany demanded of Denmark. The Germans limited the size of the Danish military and insisted on a censorship regime in Denmark that would outlaw any criticism of Germany or the Nazi Party. After Germany began its invasion of the Soviet Union, it insisted that Denmark outlaw the Communist Party. About half of Party members were interned in a concentration camp in Denmark, the other half in Germany. Thus in Denmark, as in many countries in Europe, the first and most committed resisters of German occupation were the Communists.

Germany also successfully pressured Denmark into signing the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1941, along with Finland. Denmark successfully persuaded the Germans to accept a secret protocol to that signing which reaffirmed Danish neutrality, but the secret protocol was secret, so when the agreement was announced, the reaction of the Danish public was sharply negative.

You might be wondering by this time whether this agreement was worth the sacrifices the Danes had to make. Well, the Danish government successfully resisted German efforts to put the Danish military under German command. The Danish police and legal system operated without German interference, and the Danes refused to allow German military tribunals to be held in Denmark. The Danes brushed off German requests for a Danish customs union with Germany or for the adoption of the Reichsmark as Danish currency, and the Germans were content to drop those proposals, for the sake of maintaining good relations.

And if you think back to our episodes on the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, you'll recall that although Denmark remained neutral in the last war, the Allies imposed a referendum on Northern Schleswig in Germany, where the inhabitants voted for Danish rule. Since coming to power in 1933, Adolf Hitler had worked assiduously to undo every other territorial concession the Treaty of Versailles forced on Germany, and by 1940 he had undone them all, with the sole exception of Northern Schleswig. While it is likely he would have eventually gotten around to reclaiming this territory, making nice with the Danes was more important, for now.

Keeping Northern Schleswig as part of Denmark was not so great a disadvantage. Many among the German minority living there supported National Socialism and volunteered to serve in the SS, which was open to recruits from any country so long as the Nazis deemed the recruit sufficiently Aryan.

The tensions with Germany over the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1941 compelled the Danish Cabinet to consider the question of how far Denmark was willing to go to satisfy Berlin, and what German demands would be impossible to yield to, even at the risk of a German military takeover.

The Cabinet decided there were three demands they would find unacceptable. First, the Danish military would not under any circumstances involve itself in the war. Second, while Denmark had given in on the Anti-Comintern Pact, it would never sign on to the Axis Pact and become a full-fledged ally of Germany, Italy, and Japan. And third, Denmark would not enact legislation limiting the civil rights of its small Jewish population.

Yes, over the entire stretch of the European continent ruled by Germany or its Axis partners, from the Pyrenees to the Eastern Front, from Sicily to the North Cape, there were only two countries were Jewish citizens held the same legal rights as anyone else. Even the French government in Vichy had enacted discriminatory laws. Even Germany's Axis partners, such as Italy and Hungary, after a little prodding from Berlin, agreed to enact laws similar to the ones in force in Germany. As an aside, I'll note that even by 1942, with the murder camps operating at capacity and people being slaughtered by the millions, the German government was still adding new laws limiting the rights of Jews in petty ways: a law prohibiting Jewish people from owning pets, for example.

There were only two exceptions to this continent-wide persecution. One was Finland. Finland was independent of Germany and useful to Germany as an ally in the war against the Soviet Union. When Berlin broached the topic of legal restrictions on its Jewish community, Helsinki wouldn't budge, so the Germans dropped the idea.

The other exception was Denmark. Denmark was at this time home to about 7,500 Jews. Six thousand of them were Danes, the other 1,500 refugees from German persecution. Berlin pushed for anti-Semitic legislation in Denmark, but the Danish government refused to consider any such thing, so the German Foreign Office dropped the subject. Even at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, as German government officials drew up their plans for deporting Jewish people from across Europe to be murdered in the East, the Foreign Office representative, Martin Luther, objected to deportations of Jews from Denmark, on the grounds that it would adversely affect Germany's delicate relationship with the government in Copenhagen.

Even so, relations between Copenhagen and Berlin deteriorated over the course of 1942. The Danish resistance coordinated acts of sabotage against German interests, and after the German defeats at El Alamein and then Stalingrad, the Danish resistance became bolder, as did resistance movements across Nazi-occupied Europe. Before Stalingrad, German occupation seemed likely to continue indefinitely; most people tried to live with it. After Stalingrad, it seemed the days of German occupation were numbered.

Then there was the Telegram Crisis. September 26, 1942 marked King Christian's 72nd birthday. Per diplomatic protocol, Adolf Hitler sent the King a lengthy telegram of congratulations. The King responded with a thank-you telegram just seven words long. Hitler was already in a bad mood, after the disappointing results of the offensive in the Caucasus and the stubborn resistance in the city of Stalingrad, and he wasn't going to overlook a slap in the face from the king of a

country under German occupation. Hitler expelled the Danish ambassador in Berlin and assigned a new German representative in Copenhagen: Werner Best, an SS officer and Gestapo leader. The Danes were pressed to dissolve the government and replace it with a new Cabinet with members more to Germany's liking.

But even Werner Best recommended against any German effort to deport Denmark's Jews.

In March 1943, Denmark held a general election, the first and the last free election held under German occupation. The Germans allowed the election to proceed without interference, if you don't count German Nazi financial backing of the Danish National Socialists.

The election results were dramatic. Turnout was just under 90%, a record for Denmark. Despite getting boosted by the Germans, the National Socialists won only about 2% of the votes and three seats in the Parliament, the same as what they'd gotten in the 1939 election. The new Danish Unity Party, a nationalist party opposed to cooperating with the Germans, also got 2% of the vote and three seats. The four parties in the coalition government won 94% of the vote, which has to be seen as an endorsement not only of the government's policy of cooperation with Germany, but only up to a point, but of electoral democracy generally and a repudiation of Nazism. The Nazis certainly saw it that way and Nazi Party publications in Germany lamented the Danish electorate's refusal to reconcile itself to the new order in Europe.

The election result, coupled with German setbacks in Russia and North Africa, stiffened the resolve of the Danish resistance. The months that followed saw anti-German strikes and protests, until finally the Germans had had enough. In late August, the German government demanded harsh countermeasures: a ban on strikes and public protests, tighter censorship over the Danish press, and the introduction of German military courts with the power to try Danish saboteurs and impose the death penalty.

When the Danish government rejected these German demands, the Germans ordered the Danish government dissolved and imposed martial law in Denmark. The Danish resistance went underground. On September 8, Werner Best sent a message to Adolf Hitler pointing out that now that Denmark was under German martial law, there was no longer any obstacle to deporting Jews in Denmark to the murder camps. Hitler approved the idea, and the German occupation forces laid plans to round up the Jewish population of Denmark on the evening of Friday, October 1. Friday evening marks the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, and the choice of date was meant to facilitate the operation by executing it at a time when most Jewish people would be at home with their families, just settling down for the Sabbath dinner, or else at synagogue.

October 1 was also just a couple days after Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

It seems that in the final days of September, the leadership of the German occupation in Denmark began to have second thoughts about this plan. Unlike most places where the Germans seized and deported Jews, Denmark never kept lists of its Jewish population, or forced them to

register, or wear yellow stars in public, as were the norms in other places under German occupation. Finding and rounding up all these people would not be easy. If the Danish authorities were to assist, that would help the operation go more smoothly, but that was unlikely. Far more likely, the roundup and deportation would alienate the Danes and motivate the Danish resistance.

Even Werner Best, the SS officer, was having second thoughts. On September 28, three days before the roundup was to begin, the German naval attaché in Copenhagen, a man named Georg Duckwitz, contacted Danish politician Hans Hedtoft, a leader in the Danish Social Democratic Party, a future prime minister of Denmark, and a man known to be hostile to the German occupation, and tipped him off. Hedtoft passed the warning along to prominent Jews, including Marcus Melchior, rabbi of Copenhagen's leading synagogue.

The evening of September 29 was the beginning of Rosh Hashanah. At that evening's service, Rabbi Melchior informed the congregation of the Nazi plan and urged everyone to spread the word and go into hiding. Thousands of non-Jewish Danes helped out by hiding Jewish people on farms and in churches or hospitals. Some Jewish people hid in vacation cabins or camped out in the woods.

When the SS began the roundup on October 1, Danish authorities refused to cooperate. Danish civil servants, who were still working their government jobs under German rule, used their offices to spread the warning that the Germans were coming. In some cases, they simply went through phone books and rang up anyone they thought had a Jewish-sounding name and urged them to hide. Danish police barred Germans from searching Danish homes. In some instances, they pretended to cooperate in the searches, but claimed to have found no one.

Not all Danes helped. In one instance, a young Danish woman who was engaged to a German soldier told him about 80 Jewish people hiding in a church. Her fiancé passed the information on to the Gestapo, who captured them.

Danish political figures publicly denounced the action. The bishops of the Church of Denmark issued a pastoral letter, read in pulpits around the country that Sunday, October 3, denouncing the Germans and calling on Danes to protect Jews. The King himself endorsed the rescue operation.

As a result of Danish resistance, the Germans were only able to capture a few hundred of the 7,500 people they were after, but keeping that many people in hiding was not a practical long-term strategy.

What was needed was an escape plan. Fortunately, Danish geography offered an easy and obvious one: escape by boat across the strait to neutral Sweden. One of the first Danes to make this crossing is the most famous among them: the physicist Niels Bohr, whom we've met before on this podcast, the man who famously told Albert Einstein to stop telling God what to do. Theologically, Bohr was an atheist, and culturally, he considered himself a Dane, but his mother

was Jewish, which made him Jewish as far as the Germans were concerned. Bohr's brother Harald contacted him on the 29th to point this out to him and warn him of the impending Gestapo action. Niels Bohr and his wife were able to escape to Sweden that same day.

Bohr had friends in high places, including the most famous Swede in the world, Hollywood film star Greta Garbo. By 1943, Garbo had retired from movie-making, but she was still a famous name, and she persuaded the King of Sweden to grant Bohr an audience. Now, as soon as word got out that Bohr was in Sweden and now beyond the reach of the Gestapo, Lord Cherwell immediately invited him to come to Britain and work on the British atom bomb project, codenamed Tube Alloys.

When Bohr met with the King, he requested that Sweden publicly announce its willingness to accept Jewish refugees from Denmark and told the Swedish government he had no intention of leaving Sweden until he had assurance that Sweden would accept the remaining Jews in hiding in Denmark.

The Swedish government made the public announcement Bohr wanted two days later, on Saturday, October 2. Some historians credit Bohr with a major role in opening Sweden to the refugees, though others argue that the Swedish foreign ministry was already preparing plans to admit the refugees.

A few days after the public announcement was made, Bohr was flown from Sweden to England aboard a de Havilland Mosquito fighter-bomber, specially adapted to fly high enough and fast enough that it could cross back and forth through Norwegian airspace faster than the Luftwaffe could react to it.

Over the course of the following month, virtually the entire Jewish population of Denmark was transported to Sweden, some in craft as small as rowboats braving the swells, others hiding in railway boxcars carrying exports across the rail ferry into Sweden, but most of them traveled on fishing boats. The fisherman who transported them demanded good money in exchange for the passage, equivalent to something like US$10,000 per person in today's currency.

In fairness, this was a dangerous undertaking and no one could be sure how the Germans would respond, but it was a lot of money, more than most of the refugees could afford to pay. Wealthier Jews paid the way for some refugees, while non-Jewish Danes paid the way for others.

Of the approximately 7,500 Jewish people in Denmark, about 7,000 escaped to Sweden. About a hundred remained in hiding in Denmark until the end of the war. Only some 400 were taken prisoner by the SS. These people were taken to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, and even after their deportation, the Danish government successfully pressured the Germans to keep them there and not send them on to an extermination camp. The Danes also persuaded the Germans to permit their Danish prisoners to receive parcels of food and to allow the Danish Red Cross to monitor their condition. A total of 51 Jewish Danes died in German custody, most from disease.

The rescue of Jews from Denmark stands as one of the biggest and most successful resistance actions anywhere in occupied Europe during the war, and one of the few bright spots in the ugly story of the Holocaust.

[music: Krøyer and Oehlenschläger, “Der er et yndigt land” (The national anthem of Denmark.)]

Perhaps the most famous victim of the Holocaust was a teenage girl. Annelies Marie Frank was born on June 12, 1929 to a Jewish family in Frankfurt, Germany. When she was four years old, in 1934, her family moved from Frankfurt to Amsterdam to escape the new Nazi government in Germany. She thus lived most of her life in the Netherlands, though she never held Dutch citizenship.

Her father Otto ran a business in Amsterdam, the Opekta Works, which sold pectin, a fruit extract used in the making of jellies and jams. Life in the Netherlands went well enough for Annelies until May 1940, when the Germans occupied the country and the Franks found themselves under Nazi rule once again.

On her thirteen birthday, June 12, 1942, Anne received an autograph book as a birthday present. She had aspirations of becoming a writer and decided to use the book as a diary. One of her first entries details the restrictions imposed on the lives of Jewish people in the Netherlands.

It was at about this time that the Nazis began rounding up and deporting Jewish people from Western Europe to the murder camps. On July 5, Anne’s 16-year-old sister, Margot, received a notice ordering her to report for relocation to a labor camp. The following day, Otto and his wife Edith and their two daughters went into hiding in a set of concealed rooms in the back of the building where Opekta operated. The Franks deliberately left their home in disarray and left behind evidence suggesting they had fled to Switzerland.

A bookcase was placed over the only entryway into what came to be known as the “Secret Annex,” to disguise its existence. Opekta Works continued operation as usual and under new ownership, with only four of its employees, two men and two women, aware of the presence of the Frank family. One of them would visit the family every day to bring them news of what was going on in the outside world, and supply them with food, a task that became increasingly difficult as the war progressed and food became scarcer. The Franks took in four other people who were friends of the family, increasing the population of the Secret Annex to eight.

Anneleis continued to contribute to her diary throughout the period in which her family was in hiding. It is said that her older sister Margot also kept a diary, but if this is true, that diary has never been found and must be presumed lost.

Anne Frank wrote about herself and the other residents of the Secret Annex, profiling each of them and describing their daily lives. As she grew older, she began to examine subjects such as her belief in God and her ambition to become a writer or journalist. As you can imagine, there

was a lot of tension among these eight people forced to live together in a confined space, and Anne chronicled the ups and downs of their relationships. She had difficulty with the only other teenager in the group, a boy named Peter, though they eventually grew fond of each other and shared at least one kiss before she cut short the budding relationship out of concern that she and Peter really had nothing in common other than their confinement.

On July 15, 1944, after two years of living in hiding, she wrote these words in her diary:

It's difficult in times like these: ideals, dreams, and cherished hopes rise within us, only to be crushed by grim reality. It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart. It's utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more. In the meantime, I must hold on to my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I'll be able to realize them!

About three weeks later, on August 4, 1944, the SS raided the Secret Annex and arrested its eight residents. The two men who helped conceal them were also arrested. One of the women was questioned but not arrested. The other attempted to bribe the SS commander to release the arrestees, but he refused the offer.

The two women later returned to the Secret Annex and collected papers and photo albums left behind, including parts of Anne's diary, and resolved to return them to their owners after the war.

Exactly how the SS discovered the existence of the Secret Annex is unclear and remains a source of debate even today. One possibility is that an informant gave them away; a competing theory is that the discovery was the result of an SS investigation into the black market purchases of food for the residents of the annex by the Opekta employees.

In September 1944, as the Western Allies were liberating France, the eight residents of the Secret Annex were shipped to the Auschwitz concentration camp, where men were separated from women and the SS selected who was to be used for labor and who was to be killed. All children under 15 were killed as a matter of course; Anne Frank had just turned 15 three months ago, so she was spared. All eight of them were chosen for labor, as it turned out, although it is unlikely any of them realized this.

In October, the two sisters, Margot and Annalies, were sent to the labor camp of Bergen-Belsen. A witness reports that Annalies was at this time still expressing hope that she could finish her diary and publish it after the war. But for Annalies there would be no "after the war." She and her sister Margot died one day apart, sometime in February or March of 1945, victims of a

typhus epidemic that was ravaging the camp at the time. The exact dates of their deaths are unknown.

Otto Frank, survived the war and returned to Amsterdam, where he attempted to determine the fates of the other seven people who had shared the Secret Annex with him. He eventually learned he was the only one of them left alive. The documents and keepsakes that had been collected after their arrest were returned to him, including Annelise's diary, which he read for the first time. He found reading the diary painful, but also felt surprised by the depth of his daughter's thoughts and feelings, which she had mostly kept to herself during their confinement.

Frank inquired about the possibility of publishing his daughter's diary in book form, but had no success until the Amsterdam newspaper *Het Parool* published an article about the diary in 1946. This led to the diary getting published in the Netherlands in 1947, under the title *Het Achterhuis*, The Annex.

The book sold well in the Netherlands. French and German editions followed in 1950. In 1952, the book was published in English in the UK and the US under the title, *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*, though the book is often referred to simply as "The Diary of Anne Frank." The first edition in the US included an introduction by Eleanor Roosevelt, who described it as "one of the wisest and most moving commentaries on war and its impact on human beings I have ever read."

In 1955, a play based on the book, written by the wife-and-husband team of Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, opened in New York City. The play won that year's Pulitzer Prize for Drama and was made into a 1959 film, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, directed by George Stevens and released through Twentieth Century-Fox. The film was well received and was nominated for seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture. It won three, including Best Supporting Actress for Shelley Winters. Winters later donated the award statuette she received to the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, a museum that preserves the Secret Annex and is dedicated to Anne's memory.

The movie helped popularize the book, in America and worldwide. The diary has been praised for the quality of its writing, especially given the young age of the author. In the decades that followed, Anne Frank became a potent symbol of the Holocaust and of victims of persecution generally. Otto Frank spent the rest of his life promoting his daughter's work and her legacy, while also remarking on the peculiarity of a parent as custodian of his child's literary estate, rather than the other way around, which is the more common situation.

In 1999, *Time* magazine named Anne Frank one of the 100 most important people of the twentieth century.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening and I'd like to thank Kathleen for her kind donation, and thank you to Aden for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Kathleen and Aden help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the

podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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I'm going to be at Balticon, the Baltimore science fiction convention, over Memorial Day weekend. If anyone listening is planning to be there, look me up and say hi. In July, I plan to be at Readercon in Boston and Confluence in Pittsburgh, so again, if you happen to be attending either of those conventions, come and say hi.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we take a break from the war. I think it's time to talk about another movie studio, don't you? The next one up is Twentieth Century-Fox. On the Good Ship Lollipop, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Members of the Danish resistance who aided the Jews during the escape from Denmark are included among those honored as the "Righteous among the Nations" at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Israel. That title is used to honor non-Jewish people who aided Jews during the Holocaust. The Danish resistance is honored collectively, not by individual names, per their own request. Yad Vashem also has on exhibit a Danish fishing boat that was used during the rescues.

The United States Holocaust Museum also has one of those boats on exhibit.

[music: Closing War Theme]