

Reading 12D

RESCUE IN DENMARK

Denmark was invaded and occupied by the German Army (*Wehrmacht*) {ver-macht} in the spring of 1940. Since there was little resistance by the Danish people, the Danish government was allowed to continue to function. This government refused to carry out German and anti-Jewish laws.

In the fall of 1943, an extraordinary event occurred. The German destruction machinery was halted in Denmark. The Danish civil service and a whole population determined to rescue the Jews refused to cooperate with the Germans. On September 18, 1943, Hitler decided that the Danish Jews would be deported to Auschwitz. No Danish police or armed forces would cooperate. They refused to round up the approximately 6,500 Danish Jews. SS troops had to be sent from Germany to Denmark because even the *Wehrmacht* commander, General Von Hanneken, refused to obey. He argued that the task of rounding up Jews was not a military one.

On the occasion of the Jewish New Year, September 28, 1943, news of an SS deportation round-up was announced to Jewish congregations in the synagogues. Two nights later, the *Gestapo*, the SS police, went door to door to round up Jews. Breaking into homes was, of course, against Danish law. The Danish police had threatened armed resistance if the SS broke the law. Thus, if Jews did not answer their doors, the SS moved on! Only 477 Jews were caught and sent to Theresienstadt {Ter-e-zen-shet} (a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia) from which they were sent to Auschwitz.

On October 4, 1943, the Swedish government promised to grant sanctuary, a safe place, to Danish Jews. It led to one of the most remarkable rescues in history. First, doctors, teachers, businessmen, students, housewives, farmers, taxi drivers, etc., mobilized the Danish fishing fleet to take Jews across the Sund, the body of water separating Sweden from Denmark. Next, they moved Jews secretly to beaches and ports of departure. They raised money to pay for the crossing (about \$100 per person); Danish police stood guard to ward off danger; taxi drivers drove Jews to the ports so as not to arouse suspicion; druggists supplied free stimulants to keep people awake all night. By the end of October, Denmark had rescued 7,220 Jews (including over 800 German Jewish refugees who had come to Denmark before 1940) and 686 non-Jewish spouses of Jews.