

GRAND LODGE DANIA of CALIFORNIA-NEVADA

Report of the History Committee:

The History Committee of the Society had a very interesting year. Soon after the Convention in Reno, Danneskjold #10 of San Jose sponsored a well-attended get-together featuring Knud Dyby, who had been very active with the Resistance in Denmark. He was a Copenhagen police officer and he succeeded in helping perhaps 1000 Jews reach neutral Sweden from Denmark. "Boats in the Night", a book of his exploits, is displayed on the table at the rear of the room, together with some letters of note.

This gathering was particularly auspicious inasmuch as the History Committee had requested personal histories of World War 2 at the 2002 Dania Convention.

Ellen Jensen, a member of Laura #8 introduced me to the book, "5 Years: The Occupation of Denmark in Pictures". She loaned me her copy until I could find one to purchase. During the occupation photography was forbidden in Denmark and many of the pictures were taken surreptitiously and often with the threat of great harm by the Germans. It is truly a remarkable book. My copy is also on display. Ellen also contributed copies of many interesting photographs. Her mother was awarded the "King Christian X Medal of Liberation" for her outstanding work with the Danish War Relief while a member of Laura #8 in San Jose. The original citation and medal have been generously donated to the Danish Museum in Fresno.

Interestingly, I met Hugo Rasmussen's cousin, Jørgen Pedersen, who was deeply involved in the resistance. He was arrested and imprisoned by the Germans first in Vestre Fængsel, then in Frølslev Prison. His picture is in the book "5 Years". He is seen among a number of prisoners as they are being released from Frølslev (Photo #261 Jørgen is on the right with his right arm waving). He kept a daily diary while in prison, commenting on ordinary events and especially on the food. Later, it was published as "An Illegal Diary". Had he ever been discovered with his diary, he would have been summarily sent to a concentration camp in Germany. A copy of his story and an edited version are on display.

Palle Thomsen was just starting his professional career in the hotel business when the Occupation occurred. His story is also on display as "A Few Episodes During the Occupation". Palle is a long-time member of Danmark #2.

Niels Jessen was a young farm lad near Kolding, Denmark in 1940, and he has written of his experiences. He points out that living on a farm during the Occupation meant that, at least, the farmers had plenty to eat. Niels is a long-time member of Freya #6.

Charles Allman, a member of Danneskjold #10, writes of his experiences as a young US Marine. Chuck joined the Marines shortly after Pearl Harbor and he was trained as a papatrooper and as 50-cal machine gunner. He served as an infantry non-com on Iwo Jima in February and March of 1945. He was wounded in action and evacuated, ultimately to Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland. His remarkable story is on display. Interestingly, there is another former Marine and Dania member who also served on Iwo Jima, Alvin Olsen of Bornholm #14.

Marvin Jensen, a former member of Danmark #2, has written a book, "Strike Swiftly", the definitive history of the US 70th Armored Division. Marvin served in that unit for much of WW2. His book is on display. He has kindly written a dedication on the front flyleaf.

I talked to a number of Dania members who were in Denmark during the war and experienced the Occupation first hand. Jørgen Sørensen, a former member of Bornholm #14, told me the story of his uncle, who was in the resistance near Slagelse. On one occasion, his uncle was threatened by a German officer who held a Lugger to his head, threatening to shoot unless he "talked". Fortunately, he survived although he did not talk. Jørgen has contributed the Jørgen Røjel books and "The Resistance Group Hvidsten" story about the Riis family, many who were executed for resistance activities. I know that Henning Jensen and many others were deeply involved in the resistance.

I have spoken to many members who are modest about writing of their first-hand experiences but have promised to write something in the future. The History Committee will be pleased to continue to gather further histories. John Johansen is considering ways that these reports may be made available on the web together with a reading list. Hopefully, the History Committee can return next year with additional histories. It is hoped that the Society considers these reports to be worthwhile and that they should remain as a permanent record of the outstanding contributions made by many of our friends and members. Some Danes with whom I have spoken are understandably bitter about the Occupation experience and would rather not hearken back to painful memories. Others are anxious to tell of their experiences. We will respect both views. Unfortunately, there are probably many interesting stories that will never be recorded.

Respectfully submitted this 19th of April 2002.

Roger Gearhart
Chairman, Dania History Committee