

#231: WWII AND NORWAY'S RESISTANCE

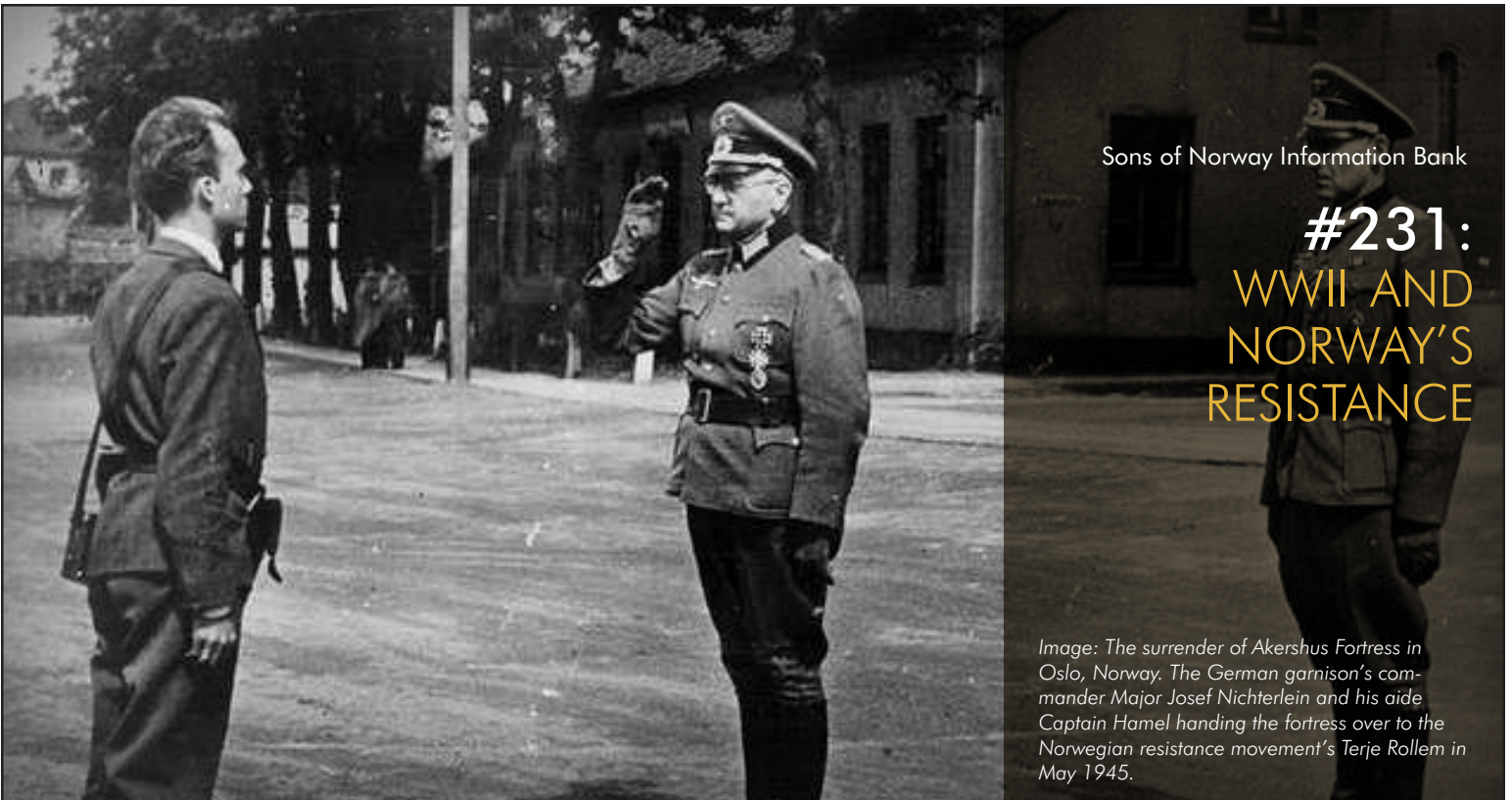


Image: The surrender of Akershus Fortress in Oslo, Norway. The German garnison's commander Major Josef Nichterlein and his aide Captain Hamel handing the fortress over to the Norwegian resistance movement's Terje Rollem in May 1945.

INTRODUCTION

Following the unstable culmination of World War I (1914-1918) and the Versailles Treaty, Germany's economy and postwar climate was bleak. Two decades later it seemed as though another war was imminent and Germany was out for vengeance. Struggling to rebuild, Germany appointed Adolf Hitler as Reich Chancellor in 1933. With Hitler as the country's leader, Germany writhed to harness world domination. Hitler and the National Socialist Party (Nazi Party) convinced the German people that the country needed him in order to secure a superior future. However, greed and power led the war down a devastating path of destruction. Well over 10 million innocent lives were killed in slave work and concentration camps. Over 100 million military personnel fought in a state of "total war" from countries around the world. And in the end Germany found itself again in economic poverty. World War II would last from 1939 to 1945.

The 1930's was a time of great economic and military revival in Germany. Hitler's goal was to create a dominant Aryan race. In September of 1939 Germany invaded Poland's west border. Just two days later France and Britain declared war on Germany and World War II had begun. Soon enough Norway would be forced to get involved.

GERMAN INVASION OF NORWAY

Germany's invasion of Poland meant the start of World War II. The Norwegian Labor Party at the time was very much a supporter of equality and pacifism so their decision to remain neutral during WWI into WWII was no surprise. The doctrine of neutrality was to protect that right. However, Hitler's demand for power overrode any attempt at neutrality. He knew that by taking control of Norway the Nazi's were in control of the North Atlantic and most importantly access to Sweden's iron ore supplier through Norway's port of Narvik. Hitler's plan was to take control of Norway but remain friendly in order to align the two Aryan countries. The Norwegian people were Hitler's ideal depiction of an Aryan race, blonde hair and blue eyed Christians.

Germany invaded neutral Norway on April 9, 1940. This shocked the Norwegian people. With the help of Vidkun Quisling, German military forces maneuvered their ships past British ocean defenses with intentions to surprise attack Norway's port cities of Kristiansand, Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim, Narvik and Oslo. In Oslo, Germans were ordered to seize government buildings and leaders, including Prime Minister Johan Nygaardsvold and most importantly King Haakon VII. The king was vital for Hitler's propaganda purposes. Thankfully though, Norwegian military personnel stationed at Oscarborg Fortress near Oslo fjord completed the first brave act of Norwegian resistance. Colonel Eriksen, Station Commander of the Oscarborg Fortress fired the first shot at the Blucher, the German cruise vessel headed for Oslo's shore and said, "Either I will be decorated, or I will be court-martialed. Fire!" This heroic act of war sank the Blucher allowing just enough time for Norway's Royal Family to escape Oslo and avoid capture by the Nazis. Norway was now a player in the war.



THE ROYAL FAMILY'S ESCAPE

Before German troops were able to occupy Oslo, King Haakon VII and his family fled to safety. He would not surrender easily. King Haakon and Crown Prince Olaf escaped to safety in England while Crown Princess Märtha, Princess Ragnhild, Princess Astrid and, Crown Prince Harald escaped to safety in Sweden. During the Crown Prince and Princess' visit to the US in 1939 they befriended an influential American, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Following the escape from Norway, President Roosevelt invited the Crown Princess and her children to come stay with him in Washington DC. The family traveled in secret to America where they stayed for the remainder of the war. Harald, Norway's present King was just three years old when they arrived in America. The bonds that the royal family made with the US during the war made a lasting impression on the future of the two countries.



King Haakon VII and Crown Prince Olav looking for shelter in the area of Molde during a German bombing in town in April 1940.

TRAITOR QUILSLING

As Germany continued to pour more troops into Norway, the Norwegian people were still coping with the shock of the surprise attack. Rumors spread that there must have been a traitor conspiracy in order for the Germans to invade and occupy so quickly and easily. Nazi propaganda spread as Norwegians were being told to believe that the Germans had come to protect Norway against the British and French. However, it was the complete opposite.

After two months of bitter fighting Norway was forced to surrender to the German forces. Hitler appointed Josef Terboven as *Reichskommissar* of Norway above Vidkun Quisling. The leadership in Norway was now under the control of the Nazi party. Political parties were

banned, the press was censored, radios eventually became contraband, free speech was forbidden and food rations were put in place. Bread, flour, butter and fats were under strict rations by the Germans. This fear of scarcity later instilled a frugality in the Norwegian people. Norwegians were to go on with their life as normal, with the unwelcomed company of the Nazi's around every corner. Compared to other occupied countries, the Nazis maintained a relatively light reign of power in Norway. However, strict penalties were forced on all those who resisted. All Norwegians aged 14 to 80 were to get identity cards with their photograph and a signature from a local official. Quisling approved of everything and was convinced that Norway would eventually accept the Nazi party. But Quisling's power was quickly fading.

Upon Germany's invasion of Norway, Curt Bräer, German Minister to Norway urged King Haakon to accept Hitler's demands by ending their resistance and appointing Vidkun Quisling as Prime Minister of Norway. This would insure a smooth transition. Communicating from England, Norway's King responded by refusing to surrender complete power to Hitler, stating:

"I am deeply affected by the responsibility laid on me if the German demand is rejected. The responsibility for the calamities that will befall people and country is indeed so grave that I dread to take it. It rests with the government to decide, but my position is clear. For my part I cannot accept the German demands. It would conflict with all that I have considered to be my duty as King of Norway since I came to this country nearly thirty-five years ago." –King Haakon VII, 1940, England

That night NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting Company) broadcasted the news that King Haakon and his government had refused German demands calling Quisling's control of the Norwegian government illegitimate. The King's decision made him a hero from afar. This turning point drove the Norwegian resistance effort. In the meantime, life as a Norwegian had changed significantly. The Norwegians were immediately forced to adhere to strict blackout restrictions by the Germans in order to avoid British nighttime bombing attempts. The Gestapo's cruel secret police began tak-

ing over big hotels and local establishments. Norwegians had to be careful so as not to speak publicly of their opposition to the Nazis. Quisling's name instantly became synonymous with the word traitor. He betrayed his country and paved the way for Nazi invasion and occupation on behalf of his *Nasjonal Samling* (National Union). Quisling was certain that his loyalty to Hitler would result in him being named Fuhrer of Norway and the country would accept him. His obsession with Hitler and his incompetence and inability to gain popular support in Norway meant that he was no longer of use to Hitler. Quisling became nothing but a Nazi puppet on Norway's stage.

Buildings and street signs were soon covered with posters and graffiti showing resistance and support for king and country. These small acts inspired many to continue their fight against the Germans. Signs most commonly read: **"Leve Kongen"** ("Long Live the King") and **"Ned med Quisling"** ("Down with Quisling, the Traitor"). The symbol of an H superimposed with the number 7 was the monogram for King Haakon VI. The spread of this symbol on buildings was a sign of Norwegian solidarity and loyalty to the King and resistance to the Nazis. Paper clips were also worn on shirts and jacket lapels to express opposition.

CAPITULATION

Following Norway's capitulation to the Germans, many Norwegians were divided. They were embarrassed and upset that Norway's defenses could collapse so quickly. Some pledged their allegiances to Quisling and the Nazis while many held their loyalty to the King. Quisling was convinced he could recruit tens of thousands of young Norwegian men willing to fight for Norway alongside the Germans. He committed Norway wholeheartedly to the German effort of a 'total war'. Terboven had a different plan. He began recruiting Norwegians to join the German defenses. A recruiting effort was made in Oslo and Den Norske Legion (DNL) was formed.

NORWEGIAN RESISTANCE

In occupied Norway the civilian resistance campaigns grew and secret military powers were formed. The Germans viewed this as a threat. Norwegians on the ground and abroad risked their lives to protect their country from the Nazis in armed resistance, civil disobedience and passive resistance efforts. Many secretly wrote and distributed newspapers in order to modify Nazi propaganda. On the other side of the pond, Winston Churchill had formed the Special Operation Executives (SOE) in July 1940. In order to undermine the Germans, British Special Forces partnered with resistance movements in Nazi occupied countries. In Churchill's words, they were to "Set Europe ablaze!" They were compared to secret agents and they trained for war. Leaders in London planned and executed sabotages against the Germans all across Europe and the Norwegians soon joined the ranks. The Norwegian Royal Navy was also greatly influenced and aided by the British and exiled Norwegian leaders. Following Germany's invasion, Norwegian ships followed the King to England disobeying German order to return to Norway. Nortraship (Norwegian Shipping and Trading Mission) was soon established in London in April 1940. The ranks grew steadily during the war, eventually operating nearly 1,000 vessels. Nortraship and the Norwegian Royal Navy were credited with major contributions to the Allied war effort.

NORWEGIAN INDEPENDENT COMPANY 1 (NOR.I.C.1)

The SOE formed a strong relationship with Norway's exiled king and government in Britain. Young, brave and enthusiastic Norwegian men sailed to England in order to train with the SOE. Sabotages were intricately planned down to the last detail with means of carrying out military operations deep within Nazi occupied Norway. They were to disrupt the Nazi advancement. Troops would get dropped by plane and parachute their way to their landing zone, followed by large bundles of equipment needed to complete their job. Troops were trained to work explosive devices in order to bomb German transports. Equipped with weapons, a detailed plan and a cyanide pill in case of capture, Norway's SOE division was

active. They were known as the Norwegian Independent Company 1 or Linge's Company, named after Captain Martin Linge, their first leader who died in combat in 1941.

MILORG

By early 1941 resistance groups sprung up around Norway. In order to organize the efforts, Norway's secret home front resistance developed a military organization called Milorg (*militær organisasjon*). Men and women joined from regions across Norway and by the end of the war they were 40,000 strong. Milorg was not originally part of the Special Operations Executive out of Britain but they began to work together by the summer of 1941. At the beginning of the war, Milorg focused their efforts on intelligence operations, Nazi reconnaissance, and the transportation of people and goods to and from neutral Sweden. Jens Christian Hauge was an important resistance figure and the secret leader of Milorg. His large network of connections helped with undercover intelligence on the Nazis. Following the war, Hauge went on to become Norway's youngest Minister of Defense. After operating in conjunction with the SOE, Milorg soon learned that their efforts would be more effective if they were to organize sabotage missions, such as the bombing of Nazi buildings, ships, trains and more. These missions would stir up Nazi upheaval and retaliation, sometimes towards innocent lives. However, these risky missions were vital in disrupting the German advancement and bringing an end to the war.

TELEMARK HEROES

The Norwegian Independent Company bombed German ships, destroyed railways transporting German troops and supplies, burned Quisling's Norwegian draft cards and much more. Many of them led dangerously risky lives in order to avoid the Germans. Following dangerous missions, troops would escape to neutral Sweden and check in at Stockholm's British Consulate in order to receive further instructions. The Norwegian Independent Company became most famous for the sabotage that occurred at Vemork Hydroelectric Plant in Telemark, Norway. Hitler

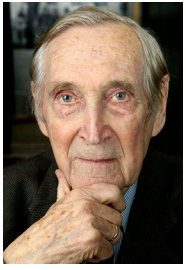
knew that Norway contained significant heavy water operations, a key ingredient in developing an atomic bomb. The original purpose of the heavy water was to produce electricity and fertilizer. Early on in the war, the plant was taken over by the Nazis. On the night of February 16, 1943 Norwegian resistance fighters sabotaged the Nazi's efforts by bombing the plant. The raid was considered successful. In 1965, the film *The Heroes of Telemark* starring Kirk Douglas was released. The film is an elaborated account of the heavy water sabotage but the Hollywood excitement and true events it captures combine to create a thrilling movie.



**Maximo Guillermo
"Max" Manus**

Max Manus (1914-1996) is considered a Norwegian national hero and was one of the most wanted resistance fighters

during the war. He served in Norway's army in Finland, fighting against the Soviet Union in the winter war of 1939-1940. After Norway's surprise invasion by the Germans Manus joined the Norwegian Independent Company in Britain. He was a leader in many sabotage missions in Norway including his most daring and successful mission, blowing up the German transport ship, the *Donau* in Oslo. King Haakon VI decorated Max Manus the War Cross with Sword two different times as well as the British Military Cross and Bar. The famous Norwegian film, *Max Manus* (2008) reveals his valiant work in aiding Norway's war effort.



Gunnar Fridtjof Thurmman Sønsteby

A daring war hero, Gunnar Sønsteby (1919-2012) is the most highly decorated Norwegian war hero, awarded with the Norwegian War

Gunnar Sønsteby © BY-SA 3.0 (license) Photo by: Arnephoto (Wikimedia Commons)

Cross with three swords. As a member of the Norwegian Independent Company, Sønsteby, a master of disguise, never used the same hideout twice. He was a leader of "the Oslo Gang" and fought alongside Max Manus. Sønsteby led his own sabotage missions against the Germans and was code named agent #24 and *kjaken* (the jaw). As Norway suffered from meager rations, nearing the end of the war, Sønsteby organized the destruction of 75,000 ration books prepared by the Germans. His brave war efforts will forever be remembered by the Norwegian people.

THE END IS NEAR

Norwegians were suffering from meager rations and a lack of independence in their own country. The Nazis were taking advantage of the economy as 40% of Norway's GDP was appropriated by the Germans. Norwegians were at a real risk of famine. They began growing their own crops and raising livestock in their yards. Quisling was still under the impression that he could control Norway and lead the country to greatness. His actions became delusional. He offered citizenship to 400,000 German troops in Norway and he even offered up Norway as a fortress for the Nazi's last stand against the allies. But it was all too late. The German offenses were getting taken over by the Russians on the Eastern front and the British and Americans on the Western front. Berlin was crumbling and on April 30, 1945 Adolf Hitler committed suicide knowing the end was near.

VE DAY

Shortly following Hitler's death, German military leaders fought their last fight. But surrender was not going to come without a cost. On May 8, 1945 the Germans yielded and the war was over in Europe. The transition was smooth in Norway as British military leaders landed and took control. Most Norwegians heard the news on BBC radio broadcasted over loudspeakers in towns and cities across the country. People were filled with joy! Finally Norwegians could wave their flag again, sing and dance, smile and laugh, and speak freely in public.

Quisling claimed to be defending Norway and he believed he could create a partnership with the Norwegian resistance army. King Haakon's response to Quisling was, "Hand yourself in, or expect to be taken by force." Quisling surrendered and was put on trial in Norway. He was charged with treason, murder and theft and punished with the death penalty. He died, still convinced he did nothing wrong saying,

"I know that the Norwegian people have sentenced me to death, and that the easiest course for me would be to take my own life. But I want to let history reach its own verdict. Believe me, in ten years' time I will have become another Saint Olav." –Vidkun Quisling, May 8, 1945

Following the end of the war, people were excited and happy that the occupation was over. However, life would not be back to normal immediately. Nazis were rounded up across Europe and convicted of war crimes. Nearly 50,000 Norwegian traitors who pledged allegiance to the Norwegian National Socialist Party were accused of treason. Norway needed to rebuild their economy as did the rest of the world. WWII had been the most expansive battle humankind had ever seen with over 50 countries involved. An estimated 50 million people lost their lives, including military personnel and innocent victims of war. Within Norway there were approximately 10,000 men and women killed during the five year occupation. Around 700 Norwegian Jews were deported and killed in concentration camps. The war had changed people.

SEPTEMBER 2, 1945

Japan formally surrenders to the United States, ending World War II.

POST WAR NORWAY

Developments in building Norway back up progressed efficiently and quicker than expected. The Norwegian people had suffered from an economic and social brutalization. However, Norway was focused on rebuilding. In 1945 Norway's Labour Party elected Einar Gerhardsen as Prime Minister. The country was focused on economic growth through heavy industry with an emphasis on transforming into a welfare state. The people knew what it was like to have nothing and now they wanted a government that would support them in times of need. Aid from America helped significantly during and after the war through the Marshall Aid Plan. By the late 1940's, Norway's GDP had exceeded pre-war heights. The country was persistent in neutrality in order to avoid any potential foreign conflicts. Trygve Lye would assure his people of this by becoming the first Secretary General of the United Nations. Norway joined NATO in 1949.

Norway experienced constant growth and in the 1960's the oil age started. Oil and gas were discovered off Norway's coastal waters and hydroelectricity became more widespread. Today Norway is one of the richest countries in the world. Oil and gas revenues have gone directly into a government pension fund which supports the country's welfare system. Because of this, Norwegian citizens receive "cradle to grave" benefits such as free healthcare and education. Norway has come a long way in rebuilding their country since WWII, and today:

"Norway has been ranked the best country to live in by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) several times during the past decade. In addition, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report has ranked Norway one of the world's leading countries in closing the gender gap between men and women." – Norway.org, the official site in the United States