



**David Lampe, *Hitler's Savage Canary: A History of the Danish Resistance in World War II*, Frontline Books, Barnsley, 2010. 236pp, £19.99**

This is a fascinating account based on the actions of courageous individuals and groups within the broad church of the Danish resistance movement 1940-45. But it is not a history of that movement – contrary to the cover title. The author even states in his introduction, “It does not pretend to be either a formal history of that occupation or a complete catalogue of Resistance activity...” So what is it and is it worth reading?

American writer, David Lampe interviewed more than thirty personalities in the Resistance only ten years after the war and shaped a book around their recollections. Published originally in 1957 as *The Savage Canary: The Story of Resistance in Denmark*, this book has been reprinted and repackaged hence its confusing description and the addition of the sales magnet of Hitler's name.

The stories recounted here are narrated in a lively and urgent style with occasional flashes of contextual background that may confuse readers unfamiliar with the multiplicity of organisations involved. The overall theme aims at recounting tales of Danish pluck, at times laced with humour, outwitting doltish and brutal Germans. The book fits into the heroic post-war style, prevalent in 1957, constructed around the exploits of outstanding individuals.

Danish resistance drew its members from all levels of Danish society. The Fiil family of Hvidsten bravely organised a group to receive agents and distribute parachuted weapons. Lampe treats them as an example of Danes who took chances to further resistance and, quite correctly, they have been described elsewhere as being , “...a small, simple and clear representation ... of the resistance struggle as a national Danish movement in cooperation with the Allies.” Three of the Fiils were executed along with five of the group. Lampe however notes nine victims. A small error perhaps, but one which brings into focus the remarkably detailed dialogues that he narrates. For example on page 75, ‘ “But sir, I think they're Jews! Escaping - . ” “Can't you see I'm having a drink?” the senior officer snapped.’ These exchanges animate the stories but are of questionable reliability.

What can be relied upon is Lampe's skill in conjuring up the exploits and tensions of the people who took enormous personal risks. For this aspect alone, the book is worth reading. Where the book disappoints is in not setting the complex context within which these people operated. The BOPA group of communists was distrusted by many of the other resistance groups but it initially led the way and remained the most effective of all. Lampe notes on page xii that the victims were the Germans. In fact, BOPA and others initially opposed the Danish authorities (kept in place by the Germans until 1943) for their political collaboration with the occupiers – but of course only after the invasion of the Soviet Union. Sabotage, on a limited scale, grew and about 350 Danes were executed by the Resistance for active collaboration. By 1945, from a small beginning, 45,750 Danes had become involved, mostly passively, in resistance groups. Activity was coordinated in Stockholm by exile Ebbe Munck in close cooperation with SOE and from September 1943, the Danish Freedom Council.

There is a scarcity of English-language books on Denmark during the Second World War but until the authoritative 2006 “*Danmark Besat*” is translated, I would recommend the first 77



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Page 2 / 2

pages of Robin Reilly's "*The Sixth Floor*" to provide the background that is so openly absent in this book. Nevertheless, it provides an evocative account to honour the 2,685 Danes who died in Denmark, the 500 who died in concentration camps and the 400 under forced labour in Germany.

**John Gilmour**