

Synopsis

Armed with jokes, puns, and cartoons, Norwegians tried to keep their spirits high and foster the Resistance by poking fun at the occupying Germans during World War II. Despite a 1942 ordinance mandating death for the ridicule of Nazi soldiers, Norwegians attacked the occupying Nazis and their Norwegian collaborators by means of anecdotes, quips, insinuating personal ads, children's stories, Christmas cards, mock postage stamps, and symbolic clothing. In relating this dramatic story, Kathleen Stokker draws upon her many interviews with survivors of the Occupation and upon the archives of the Norwegian Resistance Museum and the University of Oslo. Central to the book are four "joke notebooks" kept by women ranging in age from eleven to thirty, who found sufficient meaning in this humor to risk recording and preserving it. Stokker also cites details from wartime diaries of three other women from East, West, and North Norway. Placing the joking in historical, cultural, and psychological context, Stokker demonstrates how this seemingly frivolous humor in fact contributed to the development of a resistance mentality among an initially confused, paralyzed, and dispirited population, stunned by the German invasion of their neutral country. For this paperback edition, Stokker has added a new preface offering a comparative view of resistance through humor in neighboring Denmark.

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Customer Reviews

"Hitler and Goering were once out driving. Passing through a village, they ran over a pig. Goering thought he should find the farmer and apologize for what had happened. He was gone a very long time and received very fine hospitality. When he returned, Hitler asked why he had stayed so long.

'Well, there was so much celebration in the house over what I told them,' Goering replied, 'and finally I had to join in.' 'What did you tell them?' 'That the pig was dead.' This was one of hundreds of jokes told by the Norwegians from 1940 until 1945. While the phenomenon of occupation humor has certainly not been ignored, the role it played in developing a resistance mentality among the Norwegian people has until now been largely unexamined. This humor was expressed in overtly anti-Hitler and anti-Nazi jokes, but it was also found in snide replies, double-entendres, insinuating newspaper advertisements that were not understood by the occupying forces, children's stories, and even Christmas cards. Kathleen Stokker, extending an earlier study by Magne Skodvin, observes that "wartime humor granted a voice to those deprived of free speech, discouraged the undecided from hasty attachment to Nazism, and helped the initially amorphous group of individuals opposed to Nazism to develop a sense of solidarity." Norway was a neutral country in 1940, and just as it had done during World War One, it hoped to remain neutral. Geopolitical realities, however, including the German desire to control access to Swedish iron mines, made Norway and Denmark Hitler's first victims following the end of the Phony War in April of 1940. The Norwegians did not surrender.

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