

Countrymen: The Untold Story of How Denmark's Jews Escaped the Nazis
by Bo Lidegaard.
Atlantic Books 2014.

There are many myths and legends associated with the Shoah, the Nazi genocide of the Jews of Europe and Russia during the Second World War, but one of the most deeply rooted is that, once Danish Jews were told by the Nazis that they had to wear a yellow star on their coats, the King of Denmark, Christian X, took to wearing a yellow star on his uniform while taking his daily ride through Copenhagen.

In Countrymen, Bo Lidegaard, editor in chief of Politiken, seeks to tell the true story of the experience of Danish Jews while their country was under Nazi occupation. In case anyone expects other myths to be shattered leaving a void in their wake they can rest easy.

Over ten chapters, sandwiched by a Prologue and Epilogue, and each covering a day between September 26th and October 9th 1943, Lidegaard uses both witness statements and historical reportage to tell the story of the escape of almost the entire Danish Jewish community to neutral Sweden, where they were beyond the reach of Nazi hands.

It is an uplifting story that never flags, and as is always the case truth is stronger than myth.

And the king's yellow star? The real story is even more special, though less public. When the king and his acting prime minister, Vilhelm Buhl, discussed the Nazi demand about the yellow star the king remarked, and the two agreed, that they should reject the demand from the Nazis, and if it was enforced then all Danish citizens, including the king, would wear the star.

Bo Lidegaard's Countrymen is likely to stand as the definitive account of just one episode, albeit of a deeply significant kind, in the Shoah, and as a testimony to the decency and honour of the Danish people with regard to their fellow citizens who happened to be Jews.

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