



Helge Hansen

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* May 29, 1922 (Tingsted/Denmark),

† February 1, 2016 (Denmark)

Technician and businessman; arrested in Copenhagen in September 1944 for being active in the resistance; held in Vestre Fængsel prison in Copenhagen; transferred to Neuengamme concentration camp in January 1945; evacuated from Neuengamme on April 20, 1945 by one of the Swedish Red Cross's White Bus convoys and taken to Sweden via Denmark; returned home in May 1945; joined the Danish concentration camp survivors' association, the "Landsforeningen af KZ-fanger fra Neuengamme", later becoming its chairman.

Helge Hansen

Helge Hansen was born on May 29, 1922 in Tingsted, Denmark. In November 1942, at age 20, he joined the Danish Army. After his time as a recruit, he trained as an ordnance handler.

In late August 1943, German troops disarmed the Danish Army. This resulted in minor skirmishes, which Hansen experienced at the armoury training college in Copenhagen. The Germans drove a tank up to the barracks where Hansen was billeted to enforce their demands. However, one of the Danish gunners managed to explode the tank's 20-millimetre grenade.

Hansen's unit was initially taken to an internment camp, but on October 10, 1943, all Danish soldiers were released.

"One of my best friends was killed in the fighting with the Germans, and that was why I joined the resistance [while still in the internment camp]."

(Interview with Helge Hansen on November 11, 1999, ANg. All following quotes are from this interview.)

Hansen was used as a firearms and explosives instructor.

"There were several forms of resistance activities I was involved in, but there is one thing I don't like to talk about, necessary though it was: the liquidations of Danish traitors, whom we used to call 'stikkere' (grasses or snitches). They would usually get a warning, and then they were liquidated. Like I said, I don't like to talk about these operations."

On June 22, 1944, Helge Hansen was involved in one of the largest sabotage operations in Denmark against the Riffel-syndikatet firearms factory in Copenhagen. The operation was planned by the BOPA organisation (short for "Borgerlige Partisaner", bourgeois partisans), and its aim was to take away as many firearms and spare parts as possible before the plant was blown up. For a long time, operations such as this one were comparatively successful, but in the early hours of September 26, 1944, Hansen was arrested by the Gestapo, accompanied by two Danish Nazis. Along with

several of his comrades, Hansen was taken to the Gestapo headquarters in Copenhagen, the Shellhuset, and was then imprisoned in the Vestre Fængsel prison.

"The interrogations and torture continued, they went on for ten to twelve hours a day. I was put in a chair with my hands tied behind my back [...], and every time I didn't give them the correct answer, I was punched by two men who stood behind me [...]. I shared a cell with a musician from Helsingør, and when I came back, he didn't recognise me with my swollen eye. I was black and blue all over."

Hansen managed to smuggle a secret message out of his cell and warn his comrades, thereby ensuring that the information he divulged would not harm anybody. Shortly before Christmas, he was charged with the following "offences":

1. Leading a sabotage group
2. Extensive sabotage activity
3. Producing and repairing firearms
4. Printing and distributing illegal newspapers
5. Involvement in liquidations

"I was prepared for this, but it was still bad news to get right before Christmas, and I didn't know how to tell my parents."

Helge Hansen was sentenced to death and taken to death row.

"On January 14, 1945, I was woken at midnight and expected to spend my last hour. But instead, myself and 145 other prisoners were put on trucks and taken to Gedser, from where we boarded a ferry to Warnemünde. From there, we were transported to the Neuengamme concentration camp in goods wagons."

After the usual procedure of having his hair shaved off and being given a prisoner uniform, Hansen was housed in block 25. Many of the Danish prisoners had to work digging anti-tank trenches or clearing rubble after Allied bombing raids. Thanks to his training, however, Hansen was assigned to carry out dimensional checks on parts in the Walther factory, an armaments plant at the Neuengamme camp producing pistols and rifles.

In the production department at Walther, where Hansen also had to work, SS men would regularly beat prisoners who they said did not work fast enough. Hansen sustained injuries to his back that have caused him serious problems all his life.

After a few weeks, he was put on another unpleasant work detail:

"One day, 100 prisoners were taken on trucks to a warehouse in Hamburg's port. There, we had to recover

bodies after air raids and other such tasks. Having to touch the decomposing bodies led to an abscess on my arm, which the Danish doctor and fellow prisoner Paul Thygesen cut out with a knife that he had sterilised over a candle."

Back at the Neuengamme main camp, Hansen continued to work at the Walther factory, where he was friends with a French prisoner, Mario Tramonti, who was an engraver. Hansen shared his rations from the Red Cross food parcels with Tramonti, who made two cigarette holders for Hansen to thank him. One holder was made from a piece of human thigh bone Tramonti had found in the ashes at the crematorium. The cigarette case was carved from a rifle butt. The other cigarette holder was made from aluminium and was engraved with Hansen's name and prisoner number.

On April 20, 1945, Hansen and around 4,000 other Danish and Norwegian prisoners were taken to freedom in Sweden via Denmark on the Swedish Red Cross's White Buses.

"On the same day that 20 Jewish children were taken to the school on Bullenhusser Damm, we left the camp for Denmark aboard the White Buses."

On May 6, 1945, Helge Hansen returned home. He initially continued to serve in the military and later worked for various companies. However, because of the back injuries he had sustained as a concentration camp prisoner, he was unable to work continuously. Hansen therefore founded his own business, which allowed him to work according to his own rhythm. He produced semi-finished goods for the electrical industry for 38 years before retiring.

Helge Hansen was active in the Danish association of former Neuengamme prisoners, the "Landsforeningen af kz-fanger fra Neuengamme", until his death. In 2005, this association passed under the aegis of the new "Vennekredsen i Danmark for KZ Neuengamme" foundation.

He died on February 1, 2016.

**Helge Hansen and Inge Olsen's wedding
photograph, September 15, 1947.**

(Courtesy of Helge Hansen)



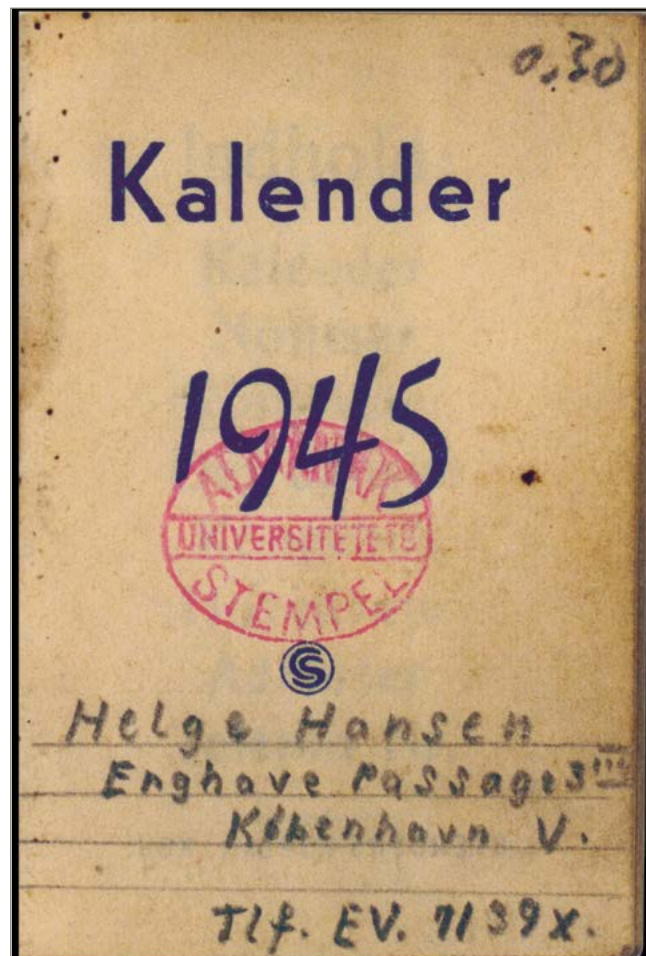
"We stopped our truck from the Fyns canned food factory a little way away from the Riffelsyndikatet factory and waited for the signal to attack. After the German guards had gone, we disarmed the remaining Danish guards and drove in. We had a drawing that told us where to find guns and parts. We loaded as much onto our truck as we could. We had to hurry because the time for the detonation had been fixed. For me as a craftsman, it was sad to see that we couldn't take the good machine tools with us. Of course, they had to be blown up, too."

(Helge Hansen. Interview, November 11, 1999. ANg.)

The Riffelsyndikatet arms factory in Copenhagen's northern port was destroyed in one of the biggest sabotage operations in Denmark. Helge Hansen was involved in this operation. Photograph taken on June 22, 1944.

Photographer unknown. (NMK)





Pages from the diary in which Hansen took notes during his imprisonment in Neuengamme.

(Courtesy of Helge Hansen)

December

S.	16
M.	17
Ti.	18
O.	19
T.	20
F.	21
L.	22

S.	23
M.	24
Ti.	25
O.	26
T.	27
F.	28
L.	29

Dr. Alexandrine
1. Juledag
2. Juledag

Jehnd!

S.	30
M.	31

Nytårsaft.

Notitser

J Dag d. 31./12. - 1944
 sidder jeg bag Fang-
 selts muse og langes.
 Naar Lykken og
 Ugladen man igen
 frem til os herinde
 Helge.

Føds. 2		Januar	rejser	Notitser
M.	1	Nytaarsdag	<u>Far.</u>	D. 1. = Mindes Far (Fødselsdag). — samt Mindes vore dejlige Nytaarsfester med "Kliken".
Ti.	2	Faaet Brev.		
O.	3			
T.	4	F. P. T. J. søgt R. + L.		
F.	5	Helt		
L.	6	Hellig 3 Konger		
S.	7	2 Luftalarm		Alles Nytaarsønske = <u>Fred!</u> 9/1. Holger Frøsløv. mon! 22
M.	8			
Ti.	9	15 Uget.		
O.	10	Holger rejst		
T.	11	my Mand.		
F.	12			
L.	13			
S.	14	SK. B. ?		
M.	15	Tyskland (Neuen gamme)		

Januar		Notitser
Ti.	16	16 Uger. F.B.?
O.	17	
T.	18	F.P.?
F.	19	
L.	20	
S.	21	Onkel Carl.
M.	22	Kathe.
Ti.	23	17 Uger.
O.	24	
T.	25	
F.	26	4 Md.
L.	27	Besøg?
S.	28	
M.	29	Første Mand +
Ti.	30	18 Uger
O.	31	

ca d. 21. rejste
 Munich, Th, Ldaal
 og flere paa Trans=
 nat.

Frits Død + 29/1.

Februar		Notitser
T.	1	
F.	2	
L.	3	
S.	4	
M.	5	
Ti.	6	
O.	7	
T.	8	
F.	9	
L.	10	
S.	11	Fastelavn
M.	12	
Ti.	13	
O.	14	
T.	15	

Februar

Notitser

T. 1
F. 2
L. 3
S. 4
M. 5
Ti. 6
O. 7
T. 8
F. 9
L. 10
S. 11
M. 12
Ti. 13
O. 14
T. 15

(forbier) 7
x 7 nar. (Fred)

Hising + Tid 1/2.
d. 8/2 var en forbier
Jeg vil tjene igen
jeg vil ikke da end
~~med~~
d. 9. flyttet til Blok 25, atskift.



Helge Hansen in the living room of his house in Ugerløse in 1999. The British infantry rifle on the wall held special memories for Hansen:

"I received it from one of Montgomery's soldiers, one of the Desert Rats. He landed in Normandy on D-Day. So it has a story to tell."

The framed embroidery is a gift of honour which all Danish resistance fighters received.

Photo by Michael Grill (private collection)

Commemorative service on the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Denmark in 1995: Helge Hansen and Queen Ingrid leaving Helligångskirke church in Copenhagen.

(Courtesy of Helge Hansen)



Helge Hansen representing the Danish association of former Neuengamme prisoners with US President Bill Clinton in 1999 during a visit to the Mindelunden memorial in Copenhagen.

(Courtesy of Helge Hansen)



