

Denmark 50 Years Later

Editor's note: This is a follow up to an article in the 1995 Conference Book: "ESCAPE FROM DENMARK". The author, F/O Ross C. Wiens, described how he as an Allied airman during World War II was shot down over Denmark and with help of Danes escaped to Sweden. R.A.F.E.S. means Royal Air Force Escaping Society.

It may surprise you to learn that R.A.F.E.S. has a representative in Copenhagen, Denmark. His name is Svenn Seehusen. Last March after he read our latest newsletter, he wrote to our Editor, Bob Lindsay requesting his help in finding a Canadian airman, who had been shot down over Denmark and had been helped by the Danish resistance movement to get back to England. Bob called me and after checking with some more of the executive told me that I had been selected to be the representative of our Society and that I would be invited to the 50th Anniversary of the Liberation of Denmark celebrations to be held May 3rd to 5th, 1995. Thank you, Bob, and the other members of the executive for selecting me, it was a memorable experience. On March 22nd, Bob sent my name to Svenn Seehusen and on April 13th, I received the official invitation from Søren Haslund, Deputy Director of Protocol, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Copenhagen, stating that His Royal Highness the Crown Prince would act as host for all the foreign guests.

There were 50 in our group, some from Australia, Denmark, France, Norway, Poland, Russia, Israel, Sweden, USA and the UK. Peggy and I were the only ones from Canada and the only representatives of R.A.F.E.S.

In the correspondence it had been indicated that the Danish government would pay my way over and a hotel room for three days in Copenhagen. Consequently, on April 24, I received a cheque for \$3,456.13 to cover one airline ticket, Montreal/Copenhagen return business class. Peggy and I had already planned to go to Denmark this year and had already booked KLM economy to Schiphol with train from there to Copenhagen. The cheque covered all of this quite nicely.

We left Mirabel Airport on April 30th, and stayed one night at Schiphol Airport. While here our good friend Nel Lind picked us up, drove us to a friend's house and we all had dinner with our old friend Jan Oscar, who had driven in from Rotterdam for the occasion. The next day we proceeded to Copenhagen/Helsingør/Hellebæk traveling through the lovely Dutch countryside. It was a thrill to see Canadian flags adorning the houses in Apeldoorn welcoming the Canadian armed forces who had liberated Holland 50 years earlier.

On May 3rd, after visiting and presenting medallions to Mil Andres and her daughter, Marie Louise (two of my helpers) it was time to relocate to the Kong Frederik hotel in Copenhagen and to get ready for the reception by H.R.H. Crown Prince, Frederik by name. This took place in his wing of Amalienborg Palace, followed by dinner at Eigtveds Pakhus, hosted by Ambassador Henrik Wohlk, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On May 4th, we were received at Parliament (Folketing), hosted by the Presidium. In the afternoon we visited the Memorial Park at Ryvangen, where one of my helpers, Knud Petersen, along with 100 other young resistance men were executed on April 11th, 1945. Three wooden

posts, now replaced with metal ones, complete with bullet holes, were a grim reminder of this tragic event. The victims were buried in a shallow grave and after the war they were reburied in appropriate towns. Knud is buried in Helsingør, in a special plot that is looked after by the city.

After “high tea” at a delightful tea room on the coast, where the U.K. types went aboard a destroyer anchored near by, we returned to the hotel in preparation for the theatre performance that night. This performance was a resistance play, with the Queen and the two princes in attendance. During intermission we were served refreshments and had an opportunity to meet the Queen and the princes. The Crown Prince inquired if I was the one who had left a gift for him. When I said I was, he thanked me for this Inuit soapstone carving saying he had just received it that morning. Our executive had authorized this gift earlier and with the help of Monique and Pierre Bauset we picked out a nice flying bird by an Inuit artist. It was appreciated very much both by myself and the Crown Prince.

May 4th is a day of remembrance and May 5th is the day of celebration. This day started off with a church service, attended by the Queen and her consort, Prince Henrik. At the play the night before we were provided with a summary in English. This morning we had an English translation of the sermon. After this we were transported to the City Hall Square where we had two minutes of silence, then a speech by the Queen, followed by a reception in the City Hall by the Lord Mayor.

A reception by the British Ambassador was not on the original program, but we Britishers were invited by fax to his place this same afternoon. He had taxis pick us up and take us back to the hotel. Normally we travelled by bus with a police escort front and back with two charming secretaries checking to see that we were all on board and on time.

Later that night the Crown Prince hosted the farewell dinner at Restaurant Divan 2, Tivoli Gardens. This is reported to be one of the best eating places in the capital. The Prince welcomed us. Later in the evening a Dane thanked him, followed by an American. Since Peggy and I were the only Canadians present and Peggy didn't want to do the honours, I made a short speech of thanks as well. From here we walked back to our hotel and this ended the official program.

The next morning, Saturday May 6th, we had lunch with Helge, Ole and Tom Petersen, some more of my helpers. Their father and mother were our guests in 1967. Helge is Knud's twin brother. After lunch, Ole was kind enough to drive us to Helsingør, where we visited Knud's grave, before proceeding to the Solbakken Inn which is our normal resting place in Hellebæk (actually Aalsgarde). On May 7th we hosted a farewell party of our own. The next morning, we left for Trelleborg, Sweden. This is where I had landed with the Swedish pilot who picked me from the steamer from Copenhagen on my first visit. The Chief of Police welcomed us as his predecessor had welcomed me many years ago. He had even found the young secretary, Elsa, whom I had taken out to dinner on that very first visit. He took us all to lunch. Peggy and I entertained Elsa and her 91-year old husband that night at the Stadshotel which was also where I stayed for three nights back in 1944.

From here we returned to Copenhagen by hydrofoil for some shopping and then on to Odense where we spent five lovely days with Kristian and Meta Andres meeting their three charming daughters once again. Kristian is also a helper.

Now it was time to go back to Holland, stopping off at Amersfoort to see old friends, one of which was unfortunately very ill, and we couldn't see him. Our good friend, Joke Folmer came to visit us there. After lunch Nel Lind and Mia Lelivelt picked us up at the hotel. We went to Nel's for dinner and then they returned us to our hotel. Joke, Nel and Mia have all been our invited guests in years gone by. We look forward to seeing them in Toronto in September, this time as guests of the Americans. We arrived home on May 18 having participated in one of the most enjoyable trips that we have ever made.

Ross C. Wiens

Montreal, June 26, 1995