

Redningsmænd

by Bo Lidegaard



SPECIFICATIONS

Pages: 464

Publication Date: 29. April 2015

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NORWAY/Cappelen Damm

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In 1944, activists in occupied Norway and Denmark realized that their compatriots held in Nazi concentration camps were facing extermination as the Allies closed in on Germany. Information was leaked that Hitler had issued orders for all prisoners to be executed and the concentration camps destroyed before Allied troops could seize them. Appalled by this prospect, activists sought ways to identify and eventually evacuate Scandinavian prisoners from the camps.

Despite orders from the Allied Supreme Command in September 1944 that no civilian prisoners held in Germany were to be released before Allied forces had secured the entire country and established firm control, groups of civilian activists from Norway and Denmark continued their push to reach some kind of understanding with the Nazi leadership over a gradual release of prisoners. Eventually, through a concerted effort, a major rescue operation building on these initiatives was planned and launched in February and March of 1945 by the Swedish Red Cross, under the leadership of Count Folke Bernadotte. It was a unique humanitarian operation. Over the course of a few weeks, volunteers driving hundreds of white buses through the scattered roads of the collapsing Third Reich managed to rescue more than 10,000 prisoners.

The White Buses traces the origins of this fascinating operation and reveals the details of the diplomacy that made it possible. Based almost exclusively on contemporary accounts, the book offers a revealing insight into the SS's leadership during the final months, weeks and days of Nazi Germany.

Richly documented and featuring firsthand accounts from the activists who negotiated with leading Nazis and visited the concentration camps to secure the release of prisoners, the story is both compelling and moving.

The White Buses is fully illustrated with contemporary photographs documenting the operation and its main participants.

Bo Lidegaard, MD is the editor in chief of Politiken, the leading Danish daily newspaper. He has published several bestselling titles on contemporary history, most recently *Countrymen* (*Landsmænd*) (2013), about the escape of the Danish Jews in October 1943, which was published in twelve countries.