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## Book Reviews

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## Book Reviews

Torben Tvorup Christensen and Lucy Wilder. *War Games – Denmark on the Eve of the Nazi Invasion, April 1940*  
DK 1040-1945 Historical Trust Publishing, Madison, WI, 2009

The book *War Games* focuses on the events of the week prior to the Nazi occupation of Denmark. The book details the political, military and diplomatic moves in Northern Europe day by day, starting on April 1<sup>st</sup> and ending with the invasion on April 9, 1940. For each day we are given an account of what was happening in Copenhagen, Berlin and London, as well as in other locations – on land and sea.

*War Games* is an excellent book for anyone who wants to know in detail what happened just prior to the occupation; why the occupation took place; and the Danish reaction to it. The book gives a brief introduction to relations between Denmark and Germany as well as background information on the international situation. At the end, the book gives an evaluation of Denmark's policies and reaction to the invasion.

The amount of research involved in writing *War Games* is impressive. The sources for each chapter are all listed at the back of the book.

*War Games* gives a fair account of how the Danish government reacted to the invasion. The authors competently explain the foreign and defence policies of Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning and Foreign Minister Peter Munch. These policies of disarmament, neutrality, non-violence, negotiation, compromise and diplomacy are likely to be little understood or appreciated in the United States of today. And therefore a good reason for writing the book!

According to Peter Munch, a strong Danish army and navy would never be able to match Germany's armed forces. Putting up a fight was useless. A slogan of Munch's Radical Party was "Hvad kan det nytte?" – What's the use? Therefore Denmark might as well disarm. By disarming Denmark was also telling Germany that Denmark would never be a military threat.

From the German point of view, Munch had created a weak northern flank by disarming Denmark. Germany therefore had to

step in to secure its northern defences – or the weak northern flank would be an invitation to Britain to attack Germany through Denmark. The emasculated Danish forces wouldn't even be able to keep the British at bay for a day, until the Germans arrived.

Due to Foreign Minister Peter Munch's policies the German invasion was not a military attack, but practically a peaceful crossing of the border by German troops and the unhindered landing of German naval vessels at various Danish ports.

The German invasion caused resentment and bitterness against Germany and the German people, and many Danes were in a state of sorrow over the state which had befallen their country. They more or less accepted the government's decision to meet the German demands, and there were no strikes or street demonstrations against the Danish government.

The adoption of Munch's approach did not clarify the relationship between Denmark and Germany. The Germans had promised to respect Denmark's integrity and sovereignty, and yet the country was occupied. Furthermore, the government was to continue its policy of neutrality, and yet its territory was occupied by a warring power. Perhaps this could be called a 'peace occupation', which however, was a concept which lacked a clear-cut definition, even in international law, because of the nearly total lack of a precedent. There was therefore no case in international law which completely covered Denmark's case.

The Nazi occupation of Denmark stands in stark contrast to the occupation of all other countries occupied by Germany. The Danish case is unique, which makes it extremely interesting. The case is worth studying, and the book *War Games* is therefore an excellent contribution.

Thanks to Peter Munch's policies and approach Denmark was spared a military attack, the destruction of property and the loss of lives. Most Danes could carry on life more or less as before. Denmark was not officially at war and the government could deal with the Germans – government to government - in a relatively civilized manner for the next three years.

The authors of *War Games* refer to Foreign Minister Peter Munch in glowing terms, calling him 'the great Dr. Munch' and recalling how

‘he had served with great distinction as defence minister’ during the First World War. The book is very much a defence of Peter Munch. And yet, the book ends with two following paragraphs:

Rumors circulated after the war that Munch had been involved in a secret meeting with the Germans on March 17, 1940, in Rostock. Supposedly the Germans informed Munch of their plans to invade Denmark and he then made a deal that Denmark would abstain from resistance.

In spite of official denials issued through the press, the rumors stayed alive for a great many years, even following the death of P. Munch on January 12, 1948.

It is indeed puzzling why the book ends on this note, as *War Games* is otherwise a tribute to Peter Munch and his policies. Moreover, did the authors not note in Viggo Sjøquist’s ‘official’ biography *Peter Munch*, that Sjøquist emphatically rejects this rumor? Dr. Sjøquist was a historian and the Chief Archivist of the Foreign Ministry’s Archives from 1961 to 1974.

Peter Munch truly thought he was doing the right thing for his country. Even if one vehemently disagrees with his policies, Munch was not a traitor. He did save Denmark from destruction and the loss of life. He acted well-knowing that there were Danes who would not appreciate his stance.

Despite his courage and sacrifice Peter Munch is not remembered as a hero. In Denmark he remains an important yet controversial politician. This is readily evident in the many books about the German invasion of Denmark. Even in major encyclopedias, which try to be balanced and unbiased, Munch is remembered as a controversial figure.

To the freedom fighters in the Resistance Movement, which gradually grew, Munch was the symbol of collaboration with the enemy. Their slogan became *Never Again an April 9<sup>th</sup>!* In short Peter Munch was made a public scapegoat along with the other collaborators.

*War Games* was written by Lucille Wilder and was later edited by Torben Tvorup Christensen. Ms. Wilder, who did an enormous amount of research, did not completely finish *War Games* before she

passed away. After her death Torben Tvorup Christensen carefully proofread and edited the book so it could be published.

Many books on the invasion deal with the topic from one side only – in Danish books from the Danish side. *War Games*, however, shows what was happening each day in each country. *War Games* is an easy and fast read, which quickly sets the scene for the dramatic events of April 1940. Most important, *War Games* tells the story of what really happened back in April 1940, and not only how the events have been interpreted.

Rolf Buschardt Christensen

Kristian Hvidt. *Sylvia Pio. En adelig socialist*. Gyldendal, Copenhagen, Denmark. 2009. ISBN 9788702082166. DKK 299.

“A queen-like beauty, a tall blond Danish type of perfect harmony, a charming creature; she literally came stalking forward in a nimbus of sunshine, the most beautiful and loveable lady in Denmark”

Who was this woman described in such a way by journalist Anker Kirkeby? Sylvia Pio, born in Denmark in 1876 as the daughter of the legendary socialist leader Louis (Albert Francois) Pio (1841-1894) and Augusta Jørgensen (1853- ) and very active within the socialist women’s movement.

Louis Pio was a pioneer of Danish socialism and later the founder of the Danish social democratic party. He had organized a section of Internationale in Copenhagen. The authorities feared that the dawning socialism would change the society to the worse. The rising of workers in Paris in 1871 had spread a fear among citizens all over Europe. At a large meeting for the working class in Copenhagen in May 1872 Louis Pio and his friend and colleague Poul Geleff were arrested. On the Danish King’s birthday in 1875 the two of them were released, and Pio took up again his socialistic activities. He was elected head of the Danish labour movement. Pio started a newspaper “Socialdemokraten” which indebted him completely.

The Copenhagen police director raised a sum of DKK 10.000 among leading Danish capitalists. The money was offered to Louis

Pio provided that he promised to go to America. Pio accepted and brought Augusta Jørgensen and their little daughter to Chicago. At that time Chicago was a metropolis of 300.000 inhabitants and an important centre of traffic for the many millions of immigrants on their way to the prairie to have their share of the generous offer of the Homestead law – 160 acres of free land.

Pio married Augusta, and their little baby was baptized and got the name Sylvia Mizpah Pio. The family found a small flat in the western part of Chicago and began a new life based on the income of Augusta's piano – and song- lessons. Loius Pio's health was not very good, and he was not able to manage a permanent job. During her childhood in Chicago Sylvia moved 13 times<sup>1</sup>, and she remembered the years as marked by poverty. Two more children were born, two sons who stayed in the US. Louis Pio died in 1894.

Sylvia was now 18 years old and had started a study at the Chicago Musical Institute. Later she worked as a shop assistant and a typist. She had become an intelligent pretty young lady. In 1902 she became ill and to recover she was sent to Florida. She stayed at the most fashionable hotel in Miami, and here she met a young Dane who owned a farm on the island of Lolland. The young man was Eggert Christopher Knuth. He proposed successfully to Sylvia, and the couple went to Chicago to ask permission to be married. Augusta Pio was against the liaison, as she found the 21-year-old Eggert Knuth too young for her Sylvia who at that time was 27 years old. Finally she gave in, and Eggert went back to Denmark to tell his family of nobility about his choice of a coming spouse. The farm was the huge Danish estate Knuthenborg, and Eggert was the heir and a count. The wedding took place in London in 1903, and a completely different life started for the Danish-American woman, the daughter of a socialist.

Her straightforward American manners gave offence in the rural surroundings on Lolland. On Knuthenborg they addressed her as "Your Grace", and her husband was not of any help. He was more interested in his hunting parties than in helping his wife to adapt to the – for her – different life as a countess. However she fulfilled her most important duties, the continuing of the family Knuth. One year after the wedding she gave birth to the son, Frederik Marcus Knuth,

and seven years after to the daughter, Eva Knuth. In 1912 the count and countess were divorced. During her years as countess Sylvia spent a great deal of her time in Copenhagen where the couple had a large well-equipped apartment at their disposal, and she keenly participated in society. Her beauty, her tactfulness and her intelligence charmed the bigwigs of the intellectual life of Copenhagen. The brothers Georg and Edvard Brandes were both her great admirers and so was editor of "*Politiken*", Henrik Cavling. Johannes Poulsen, a much-admired actor, could not resist her charm either, and after the divorce from Eggert Knuth Sylvia married Johannes Poulsen. The marriage lasted only five years.

In 1921 Sylvia Pio became acquainted with Thorvald Stauning, the leader of the Danish social democratic party and later the Prime Minister of Denmark. The party could soon celebrate its 50 years anniversary, and Sylvia saw the occasion as a possibility to rehabilitate her father Louis Pio, the founder of the party. She wanted her father's urn, brought back to Denmark from Chicago, to be laid to rest in the homeland on the "*Vestre Kirkegaard*". By her charm and her ability of persuasion she finally succeeded to talk Stauning into the idea. Stauning even gave a speech in honor of Louis Pio, and a monument was raised on the grave. Stauning's first wife had recently died, and should Silvia had had the wish, she definitely now had the opportunity to become Stauning's second wife.

But Sylvia Pio had other interests at that time. She looked eastward – to the new Soviet Republic. In Copenhagen she had met the future Soviet foreign minister Livinov, and she took advantage of the connection to get a visa to travel to the country of the Bolsheviks. In 1922 she spent some time in Moscow and reported back to the newspaper *Politiken*. A later visit to the USSR together with her son Frederik had a bad ending, and Silvia finished her relationship with the Soviet.

Back again in Denmark Sylvia wanted to continue her social democratic career, and her new hobby-horse was to focus on the women of the party. She succeeded in having Stauning's support and a committee for women was founded in 1929 in Copenhagen.

Stauning had then remarried, and the close cooperation between Stauning and Sylvia Pio became a threat to the marriage.

In 1930 Iceland could celebrate its 1000 years anniversary. Thorvald Stauning and his wife were invited to participate in the celebration and went by ship to Iceland. Onboard was a certain lady, Sylvia Poulsen, née Pio. What happened on the ship and during the stay on the Island of the Sagas is unknown, but on his return to Copenhagen Stauning applied for divorce. Two days later the catastrophe happened, Sylvia had a cerebral hemorrhage which caused a paralysation. Her health deteriorated, and on April 24, 1932 Sylvia Mizpah Pio died.

In *The Bridge* 1990, Volume 13, no 1 Kristian Hvidt presented an article "Sylvia Pio. A Danish-American Livewire". Hvidt happened to meet Sylvia Pio in the late 1980s - in a historical respect it was - during his research for his book *Edvard Brandes. Portræt af en radikal blæksprutte*, published in 1987. In the correspondence of Edvard Brandes Hvidt found a couple of letters from Sylvia Pio. These letters were extremely well-written, and from then on Hvidt caught a special interest in this woman and wanted to know more about her life. At the Royal Library and at Arbejderbevægelsens Arkiv in Copenhagen Hvidt had access to many letters written by Silvia Pio to a large number of people, however there were only few letters written to Silvia Pio. A meeting with the Russian historian Boris Weil changed the situation. Weil was able to supply Hvidt with material from Sylvia's Russian adventure in the 1920s. Also Hvidt contacted the grandchild of Sylvia Pio, the present count Adam Knuth at Knuthenborg. It turned out that valuable material, several hundreds of letters, and her personal notes were kept in a green canvas suitcase which was found in one of the stable buildings of the manor.

Now it was possible for Hvidt to get a closer impression of his protagonist, and the new material became an important basis for this book about Sylvia Pio. The book presents a life story of a woman who gets to the top of the social ladder in a class-divided society. It is a very colorful presentation of an exciting period of the history of Denmark. We follow a daughter of a convict who spends her years of adolescence in Chicago and is transplanted to an isolated island in



Denmark. The woman is described by her author as somewhat of a dreamer, but she had a strong power, much energy, and a lot of courage. She was influenced by her father who was a very gifted person. To compensate for the defeat of her father she wanted to continue his socialistic ideas. Hvidt gives this characteristic of his protagonist: "She is sexy and very beautiful with a twinkle in her eye. She sways her hips in a seductive way and understands to say the right thing at the right moment, Her American upbringing has made her straightforward and aggressive in a charming way and she must have been a very exciting acquaintance. ". Maybe the author is a little infatuated himself. Hvidt tells his story about Sylvia in a florid and dramatic language. The reader is well entertained.

Birgit Flemming Larsen

