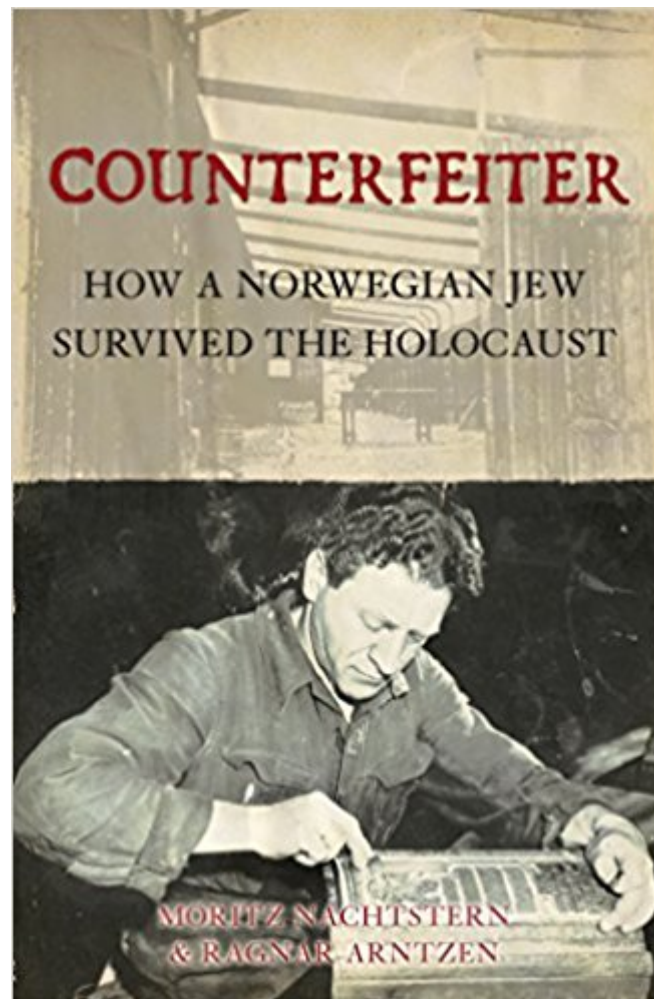


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Counterfeiter: How A Norwegian Jew Survived The Holocaust (General Military)



Synopsis

Published for the first time in English, this is an enthralling personal account of the secret Nazi project, Operation Bernhard, devised to destabilize the British and, later, American economies by creating and putting into circulation millions of counterfeit banknotes. A team of typographers and printers was pulled out of the rows of prisoners on their way to the gas chambers and transferred to the strictly isolated Block 19 in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. There they were presented with the enormous task of producing almost perfect counterfeits to the value of hundreds of millions of pounds sterling. These notes were to be dropped from bombers over London, with the aim of causing financial chaos. When the time came the Luftwaffe's resources were fully committed in other campaigns and theaters but some of the currency was successfully used to fund operations in Germany's secret war. Moritz Nachtstern (1902-1969), was a Norwegian-Jewish typographer deported from Oslo in 1942. This is his story, as told to his wife and written down by her, then edited by journalist Ragnar Arntzen. It was originally published in Norwegian in 1949. It covers the three terrible years from his arrest and transportation to Germany, through the horrors of life in Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen to his escape in the last chaotic and terrifying days as the liberating American forces approached. At the center of this personal tale of courage and endurance is Nachtstern's absorbing description of how, in order to survive, he participated in the creation of exquisite forgeries, while working as slowly as possible, both to frustrate the Nazi plan and to ensure that he and his fellow forgers never became expendable. Nachtstern's daughter Sidsel contributes a moving foreword, "It cannot be erased", and essays by Lawrence Malkin and Bjarte Bruland place this sixty-year old document in its historical context. The translator, Margrit Rosenberg Stenge, was born in Germany but spent five years of her childhood in hiding with her parents in Norway and Sweden during World War II. She has lived in Montreal since 1951 and has translated and published a number of Holocaust memoirs.

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Customer Reviews

Moritz Nachstern was the only member of his family left in Norway when he was arrested and held in prison camps first in Norway (Berg) and then deported on the D/S Donau to Stettin and then to Auschwitz. One of only a few to survive initial selection, his background in typography gave him an opportunity to live by contributing to the Third Reich's ambitious currency counterfeiting scheme, housed in a separate area of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. His account, among the first ever told by Norwegian survivors, is a candid exposition of both the counterfeiting operation and the conditions within the block. Driven both by the threat of immediate death and professional pride, a mixed assembly of prisoners labored to create a money printing press, all the while keeping their work secret within the concentration camp. Nachstern tells of episodes that would be comical if they didn't so often result in murder and provides a view into a world of madness within utter barbarism and lawlessness. Nachstern was one of only 28 of the 770 or so Jews shipped from Norway who survived the camps. He returned to Norway, married, and started a family, but he struggled for the rest of his life to adjust to the memories. This is an unusual story, not just for the events it portrays, but also because Nachstern somehow succeeds in portraying all those involved as humans, though often deeply flawed.

COUNTERFEITER: HOW A NORWEGIAN JEW SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST is an addition for both general-interest lending libraries strong in Holocaust studies and for World War II or Judaic history holdings. It tells of the Nazi secret project, Operation Bernhard, which used prisoners to produce counterfeit British bank notes - considered some of the most perfect counterfeits ever produced - which were to be dropped over London to destabilize the British economy. Author Moritz Nachstern was one of those picked for the program: his story of survival and the project offers unusual, gripping insights.

Reading this book you sometimes feel as if you are not reading a book about the Holocaust but

rather about a "business" that is being run in wartime. That is in fact the unfortunate part of the story because the individuals who are portrayed in this book were in fact inmates in one of the worst concentration camps in the Holocaust--Sachsenhausen (close to modern-day Berlin). They were forced to work on behalf of the German war effort printing counterfeit money of all kinds. As you read the book you find yourself saying "wow these individuals who were chosen were "lucky" because they had a job that pretty well sheltered them from the rest of the inmates and undoubtedly keep them alive longer than many of their peers. It is a similar argument or discussion that one may have around the issue of the Lodz Ghetto vs. the Warsaw Ghetto. In the Lodz Ghetto, the citizens worked on behalf of the war effort and many of them stayed alive longer than their peers in the Warsaw Ghetto who revolted and primarily died. Not a perfect comparison but a similar idea. This was a good book well worth reading as it provides a look into an aspect of the Holocaust that has not been widely reported on.

This was a difficult book for someone living a sheltered life in the United States to read. It is impossible to understand the cruelty of those in charge of the prisoners. The book is a well-written narrative and it is a fast read. The content is difficult to absorb. The story of the counterfeiting of British money by the prisoners is fascinating. Many, many of my relatives were killed in the concentration camps. I avoid reading about the Holocaust, but, although I was often upset by what I was reading, I was able to get through it because it was so well written.

I selected this book because it was in English; the original story was published in Norwegian in 1949. I needed Nachtstern's written experience to complement my presentations on the history of Norwegian Jews. This book was also the basis for the movie "The Counterfeiter".

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