

Dr. Haakon Sæthre: A Norwegian Neuroscientist and his Resistance against Nazi Germany

Lawrence A. Zeidman, MD

Department of Neurology and Rehabilitation, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL USA

Lawrence A. Zeidman, MD
University of Illinois at Chicago Medical Center
Department of Neurology and Rehabilitation (M/C 796)
Neuropsychiatric Institute
912 S. Wood Street, Room 855N
Chicago, IL USA 60612-7330
Phone: 312-996-6496
Fax: 312-996-4169
Email: lzeidm1@uic.edu

Short Running Head: Haakon Sæthre, Norwegian Neurology Resistance

Conflicts of Interest and Sources of Funding: The author reports no conflicts of interest. Funding support for the article was supplied partly by the author's department.

This article has not been published elsewhere and is not being submitted simultaneously for publication elsewhere.

Abstract

Dr. Haakon Sæthre was a leader of Norwegian neurology and psychiatry. He was resourceful, compassionate, and had immense pride in his independent homeland. He described Sæthre-Chotzen syndrome (acrocephalosyndactyly type III). When Nazi Germany occupied Norway during World War II, Sæthre fearlessly and actively resisted, from revoking his medical association membership, to hiding persecuted Jews as patients in his psychiatric ward and aiding in their escape to Sweden, to managing the largest “illegal” food warehouse in Oslo with Danish humanitarian aid. As a prominent and noticeable citizen, he was arrested and executed by the Nazis in reprisal for the resistance’s assassination of a hated Norwegian Nazi. His legacy lives on in Norway, where he was honored by a scholarship fund, a portrait and multiple plaques at Ullevål Hospital, and a street and memorial statue in his hometown. He was a hero, and should be remembered by all who practice neurology.

Key Words: Haakon Sæthre, Holocaust, Norwegian Resistance, Sæthre-Chotzen Syndrome, World War II

Introduction

Resistance by various European neuroscientists toward the Nazi (short for *Nationalsozialismus*, or National Socialist) regime before and during World War II has been discussed previously to some extent. A strong sense of patriotism was exemplified among neuroscience resisters in Norway as well as France and Holland (Zeidman, 2011; Zeidman, accepted 2012). Norway was a victim to Nazi aggression between April 9, 1940, when the Germans invaded, and May 8, 1945, when Germany surrendered. Physicians were among the first and foremost groups in Norway to resist the Nazi occupiers (Cohen, 1997, p. 115-120). The passive resistance by two famous Norwegian neurologists, Georg Monrad-Krohn and Sigvald Refsum, during World War II has been previously described (Cohen & Vidaver, 1998; Cohen & Vidaver, 1992). Only briefly mentioned previously in the neurology literature is the more active resistance of Norwegian neurologist and psychiatrist Dr. Haakon Sæthre (Zeidman, 2011). Sæthre was one of the first Norwegian neurologists, training with Monrad-Krohn, among other European pioneers in the specialty. He also practiced psychiatry, and helped shape neurology and psychiatry as specialties in Norway. Sæthre co-described the genetic Sæthre-Chotzen syndrome and published on a variety of neurological topics. He was vehemently against the Nazi regime in Norway, resisting their puppet medical association, preventing a Nazi ward nurse from maintaining his position, saving up to a dozen Jews by concealing them as patients on his hospital ward, and acting as a liaison with the Danish humanitarian aid and storing their donations in the psychiatric ward basement. He was murdered by the Nazis in a reprisal shortly before the end of the war. The goal of this article is to give a description of Dr. Sæthre's career and resistance against the Nazis, and an attempt to explain the rationale behind his actions, as well as his legacy.

Sæthre and his Contributions to Neurology

In 1931, Haakon Sæthre (Fig. 1) became eponymous when he described in two separate articles a 32-year-old mother and her two daughters, what is now known as acrocephalosyndactyly type III, (Sæthre, 1931, “Ein Beitrag”; Sæthre, 1931, “Über den”) followed in 1932 by the similar description of a father and two sons by German psychiatrist Fritz Chotzen (Chotzen, 1932). The eponym “Sæthre -Chotzen Syndrome” is still used to describe this autosomal dominant disorder characterized by craniosynostosis, low frontal hairline, facial asymmetry, deviated nasal septum, vertebral column defects, brachydactyly, clinodactyly of the fifth digit, partial soft-tissue syndactyly of the second and third digits, and second, third, and fourth toes, and a large pigmented nevus on the back. Sæthre also described a sporadic case with craniosynostosis, low frontal hairline, bilateral ptosis, bilateral hallux valgus, brachydactyly, and soft-tissue syndactyly involving the second and third toes. In the 1990s, Sæthre -Chotzen Syndrome was found to be caused by a defect in the TWIST gene on chromosome 7p21 (Zackai & Stolle, 1998).

Sæthre managed to publish roughly 50 additional works, reflecting his diverse neurologic and psychiatric interests from neuropathology to psychoanalysis, from microscopically-detailed studies to societal studies in medicine and public hygiene (Anchersen, 1966). In 1919 he published about encephalitis lethargica, in 1921 about poliomyelitis treatments, in 1924 about abdominal reflexes (with Monrad-Krohn), in 1926 about myelitis from polyarteritis and subsequent spontaneous pain episodes, and about radiation treatment for brain tumors and on lumbar punctures, and in 1925-26 he published two articles about Bismuth treatment for neurosyphilis (1927, Sæthre, Haakon. In: Norges Læger). Additionally, from 1935-45 Sæthre conducted extensive studies on chronic alcoholism, and on the neurologic and psychiatric sequelae of traumatic brain injury, as well as studies on multiple sclerosis and on sex hormones (1941, 50th Anniversary, Overlæge Haakon Sæthre; 1938, Sæthre Haakon; 1945, Obituary: Haakon Saethre, M.D.).

Early years, Sæthre the man and his interest in medicine and then neurology and psychiatry

Sæthre was born on October 20th, 1891, in Fana, near Bergen (Monrad-Krohn, 1945). His father was one of the pioneers in care of the mentally handicapped in Norway, and was known for his compassionate leadership of a school for the mentally handicapped. Sæthre was undoubtedly heavily influenced by a home in which humanitarianism and strong social values, as well as patriotism, were paramount (Anchersen, 1966). He attended Bergen Cathedral School, graduating in 1910, and was molded by its environment, despite receiving the second lowest grade possible (Monrad-Krohn, 1945; Anchersen, 1966). The low grade served as an incentive to compensate in his later school years. He received a “Laud” (very good) grade on his medical candidate exam in 1918. He also had an interest in student leadership activities, and became chairman of the student medical association in 1915 (Anchersen, 1966).

Sæthre was also a true “Renaissance man,” not just reflected by his vast and varied book collection that contained works of fiction, literature, art and cultural history, but by who his closest friends were. Indeed, Sæthre was a member of a doctors’ club and spent hours reading the medical literature, but some of his closest friends were university figures in linguistics, literary history, philosophy, psychology, theology, well-known names in the media, and attorneys. He could recite all the verses of traditional Norwegian patriotic songs when others stopped singing after only one or two verses, and he enjoyed debating about current events and controversies (Braatøy, 1945).

After his final medical candidate exam, Sæthre desired more training in neurology, a specialty that appealed largely to his fondness for diagnostic accuracy, and a focused approach to the overall complex medical picture of each patient (Anchersen, 1966). He was initially candidate (1918-19), then assistant doctor (1920-21), and then attending physician (1922 –24) at the University of Oslo Rikshospital under neurology head Monrad-Krohn (Monrad-Krohn, 1945). Separately, Sæthre also maintained a very large private practice with both neurologic and psychiatric patients (Anchersen, 1966). In 1920-21, he studied vestibular pathophysiology abroad with Robert Bárány in Sweden, then later studied in Copenhagen and Paris in 1921 (1927, Sæthre,

Haakon. In: Norges Læger). He completed his neurological education during a half-year stay at La Salpêtrière in Paris in 1921, where he worked under Pierre Marie, and later at the Neurological Clinic in Hamburg in 1927-28, under Max Nonne (Monrad-Krohn, 1945; Sæthre, 1935). Sæthre joined the Rikshospital Psychiatric Clinic from 1926-30, having been heavily recruited because of his eminent qualifications (Ancheren, 1966). He introduced a neurological viewpoint that was highly appreciated, (Monrad-Krohn, 1945), and his sense of the psychiatric dimension to neurologic illnesses was further developed. He acted as head of the polyclinic until 1933 (Ancheren, 1966).

When Sæthre's predecessor at Ullevål (Oslo City) Hospital died suddenly in 1933, Sæthre took over as head of Norway's first large open psychiatric department. Under his administration, the division not only sustained high standards, but also continued its rapid development (Monrad-Krohn, 1945). As an extension of the department's laboratory service, he introduced organized follow-up for patients with neurosyphilis. He used his administrative capabilities to assist the whole of Ullevål Hospital. With a quick eye for upcoming medical developments, he took the initiative and was the driving force in developing the hospital's central laboratory. By actively working on the establishment of new specialist positions, which later led to new specialist departments, he was a leading contributor to the development of Ullevål Hospital (Ancheren, 1966). Sæthre's neurological interests resulted in the formation of a neurology consultation service for the other departments – the basis for the later neurology department (Thomstad, 1987).

Sæthre was involved in a number of medical and non-medical associations (Ancheren, 1966). He was one of the founders of the Norwegian Neurological Association in 1920, (Monrad-Krohn, 1945; Ancheren, 1966) and its chairman from 1932-34. He was a member of the administrative board of the Public Health Association from 1923-24 (Ancheren, 1966; 1927, Sæthre, Haakon. In: Norges Læger; Sæthre, 1935). In 1936, he became chairman of the Mental Hygiene Association. In 1937, he was chairman of the Norwegian Psychiatric Association and, in 1938, president of the Nordic Psychiatric Conference in Oslo, as well as official delegate for

Norway at the Second International Congress for Mental Hygiene in Paris (Anchersen, 1966). He enjoyed speaking, lecturing, and debating, and had a strong journalistic instinct. He wrote a number of articles in newspapers and magazines, typically under his own name (Anchersen, 1966; Sæthre, 1935). Also, as psychiatric consultant for Oslo's Child Welfare Committee beginning in 1933, he soon realized the need for specially equipped child psychiatric departments, and the war only postponed the realization of his plans (1945, Obituary: Haakon Saethre, M.D.).

Initial resistance against the Nazis by physicians

During the war, Sæthre inspired some of his fellow doctors in resisting the Nazis. When the Nazis tried to control the Norwegian Medical Association in November, 1940, stating that the Association should become part of the Nazi-controlled Guild for Health and Hygiene and that all physicians must swear loyalty to the new government (Cohen, 1997, p. 115-120), Sæthre was the one of the first to resign from it at the morning meeting the following day, and other doctors rapidly followed suit (Thomstad, 1987). In fact only two doctors of prominence had joined the Norwegian Nazi party (*Nasjonal Samling*), and fewer than 100 joined eventually. When members stopped paying dues and boycotted the meetings, the Association was virtually functionless throughout the rest of the war (Cohen, 1997, p. 115-120). Sæthre had a fearless nature, and once when he was called to be an expert witness for a trial, where one of the lawyers was a Nazi, he refused to eat in the same room as the man, choosing instead to sit remonstratively outside and eat his food (Johnsen, 1947, p.13-15).

Sæthre was absolutely convinced that resistance against the Nazis would ultimately lead to victory. In his opposition from the beginning, he attracted the Nazis' enmity early on. In April 1941, he was firm and resolute as he, together with head nurse Agnes Rimestad, sent an energetic protest to the interior departments for "meddling" with departmental administration by hiring a Nazi ward nurse (Anchersen, 1966). Indeed, Nazi authorities initially appointed *Samling* (short for *Nasjonal Samling*) nurse Camillus Wassdahl to take over as chief male nurse at the psychiatric branch

(Dikemark Hospital) of Oslo Community Hospital. Wassdahl boasted, “there will be more” from the hospital to join the Nazi party. The director of the hospital resisted, and was joined by other department heads at the Oslo Community Hospitals in protesting that such an important vacancy should only be filled through open competition, not Nazi nepotism. Also, there was an order to replace the Assistant Chief Male nurse with another *Samling*, Ingvald Fedje (Cohen, 1997, p. 115-120). Sæthre was Fedje’s superior at Ullevål’s psychiatric department, and was asked about his qualifications. Sæthre stated that Fedje’s erratic behavior had generated many complaints over the years. Fedje was usually composed and sociable toward patients, but quickly lost his control when there was a problem, and thus was unsuited to lead or instruct others, especially in critical moments (Klaveness, 1947, p. 42-51).

On May 30, 1941, Sæthre was one of the 17 signers of the follow-up letter to the Nazis' initial letter that requested Wassdahl’s and Fedje’s removal (Klaveness, 1947, p. 63-68). This protest demonstrated that all Norwegian physicians were in solidarity, and was a threat that all physicians at Oslo’s Community Hospitals would strike. After these protests, and ones from the Norwegian Medical Association and the Psychiatric Society, the Nazis relented, and Wassdahl and Fedje were removed from their new positions (Cohen, 1997, p. 115-120).

Helping Jews: Robert Levin and the 12 Jews on the Psychiatry ward at Ullevål

The Nazis terrorized Norway’s tiny Jewish community from the outset of the occupation. In May 1940, Jews were forced to turn in their radios to the Nazi authorities. Beginning September 25, 1940, Jews were forbidden the practice of any profession in Norway. On January 10, 1942, Jews were ordered to be registered and a red “J” was stamped on their identification papers. On March 7, 1942, four Jews falsely accused of spreading foreign propaganda were summarily executed in Trondheim. On March 12, 1942, Quisling re-invoked the Anti-Semitic Article 2 of the Norwegian Constitution, which forbade Jews entrance to the country (and was previously revoked in the mid-1800s). On October 7, 1942, Jews in the Trondheim region and the north of Norway were arrested

and imprisoned, where they were brutally treated. If they became ill from this “normal treatment” by the Nazis, they were executed (Cohen, 1997, p. 130-145).

On October 12, 1942, any Norwegian sheltering Jews or helping them escape was decreed punishable by death. Nevertheless, by year’s end 1942, half of Norway’s 1,500 Jews were transported safely to Sweden by Norwegian “border pilots” across rugged frontier terrain that made detection difficult. On October 24, 1942, Karl A. Marthinsen, “Quisling” (the name derisively given to all Norwegian Nazis) Chief of State Police ordered that all male Jews between ages 15 and 65 should be arrested. This was one week after Quisling decreed all Jewish property should be confiscated. The State Police ruthlessly arrested all male Jews at mental asylums and geriatric facilities, though at Lovisenberg Hospital and others, some Jews were safely hidden. On November 25, 1942, the Nazis also rounded up all Jewish women and children. Some Norwegian physicians played important roles in the resistance, acting as couriers, and in saving Jews, especially because they were still allowed to have a car and bypass curfews. Following the November raid, 530 Jews were transported by boat to Poland, then to the Auschwitz death camp. The last of Norway’s Jews in captivity were transported similarly on February 24, 1943 (Cohen, 1997, p. 130-145).

In October, 1942, a few days prior to the large round-up of adult male Jews, famous Norwegian Jewish concert pianist Robert Levin called state health commissioner Dr. Andreas Diesen, to ask him to visit his home (they lived one block apart) “because he had gone mad” (Levin, 2011). According to Levin’s daughter Mona, Diesen came to the Levin household, looked at Robert and said he didn’t appear to require admission to a closed psychiatry ward. Levin said, “Can’t you see that I am stark raving mad?” Diesen suddenly realized that Levin was faking a nervous breakdown to be hospitalized and avoid arrest, and admitted him into Ullevål Ward 6, under Dr. Sæthre. He spent some days in the closed ward, then more days in an open ward (Levin, 2011; Ulstein, 1971). In a 1971 interview with Ragnar Ulstein, Levin recounted the story. Levin did not want to leave his wife and go into hiding, and stated, “We were all terribly stupid of course. My

good God, it was beyond human imagination to believe that it really would happen what did happen” (Ulstein, 1971).

Levin recalled speaking to Sæthre on a daily basis, and only later realized that he was one of the most significant figures in the resistance movement. Apparently, though, Sæthre had no idea what would happen to the Jews and stated to Levin, “Well, the worst that can happen to you is that you will be interned until the war is over.” Levin stated:

An ordinary human mind of course could not imagine such cruelties. But then he [Sæthre] really confused me, because one day he came in to me and asked me, ‘So, have you made up your mind, do you want to stay or leave?’ And I answered, ‘No, I stay.’ And then he said, ‘A terribly silly attitude ... I have 60 beds, and I have 12 Jews. Even a German idiot will understand that something is amiss when a fifth of the patient census are Jews!’ ... I could hardly think clearly at this time. When I was removed from the hospital by [the resistance], it was really urgent because I think the next day the Germans came up to the hospital and many were arrested... . One night a nurse came in and said, ‘Either tonight or it will be too late.’ So one of my elder friends and I went out together. It was us they came for. I did not even get the chance to say goodbye to my wife... . Apart from my uncle Elias and one other, all were arrested (Ulstein, 1971).

Between the head nurse and Sæthre, they discovered what the Nazis were up to and moved most of the Jews in the nick of time. Robert Levin always remembered looking in on his uncle Elias and waving to him (he was not allowed to say he was leaving), wondering if he would ever see him again. It was a horrible moment, but he did see him later (Levin, 2011). Levin was hidden in the Ullevål for 10-12 days, and then in Oslo up to 12 days. He did not want to flee to Sweden because his wife did not want to, but he and his family were convinced and eventually smuggled there with the help of the resistance. Levin recalled how there was quite an open hostility in parts of the Swedish population and in the media towards the Norwegian refugees despite all the Swedish help

(Ulstein, 1971).

Apparently a resistance member “Valderhaug” may have been an active member of the Norwegian resistance and helped Jews to escape. Ulstein wrote of him:

Did Valderhaug have the courage to take the risk and wait a few more days [to remove the Jews from Ullevål]? There was no [other mission] [awaiting] at the moment. Usually one would collect refugees in convenient groups. But in the case of imminent danger a refugee would be sent immediately even ... alone. At the moment it looked as if it would be acceptable to wait a bit. In the meantime he could meet [Sæthre] at Ullevål in order to strengthen his alibi. The next day Valderhaug went to consultant Sæthre...and presented the papers he had received...Sæthre understood right away. ‘Well, well, he said. There is only one thing I need you to do and that is not to smoke so much [... .] You have to understand that you really have had brain damage and that is no lie!’ And then he [Sæthre] would make a note in the charts that he [Valderhaug] had come...and that there had been an arrangement ... for follow-up visits. ‘That you don't come to follow-up hasn't anything to do with that matter. I don't know anything about it. But here it is written black and white that you have to come and as long as you are in town you should do so! When you have left [town] the follow-up ends.’ That was a nice arrangement. If Sæthre would be asked whether [Valderhaug] had been here, [Sæthre] could see in the charts and answer, ‘Yes indeed, he [was] here an hour ago!’ (Ulstein, 1974, p. 116).

Turning the Psychiatry Dept into a Food Warehouse!

Another important part of Sæthre's resistance was the organization of the Danish humanitarian help that provided food and other provisions for political prisoners at prisons and concentration camps, partisans who lived undercover, and to homes that had lost their bread-winners (Haugen, 1946; Gogstad, 1995). He helped better organize the somewhat random and

disorganized distribution of food from Denmark starting in 1942, becoming “shop steward.” A number of assistants, most importantly Sæthre’s head nurse Gunda Jahr, helped to organize this Danish help (Gogstad, 1995). Jahr later wrote about the great work Sæthre did as head of the largest illicit food warehouse in Oslo, the cellar of the psychiatric department at Ullevål hospital, otherwise known as “the shop” at Ullevål:

Sometimes I've asked myself, ‘How is it we were the ones that were allowed to be Denmark's helpers? Ullevål is so big, why exactly was this department chosen?’ One of the answers is the following: Denmark couldn't find a more radiant reception, and such a warm-hearted, eager and joyful worker and giver as...Haakon Sæthre. What affection and enthusiasm he was filled with for Denmark and for the Danish gifts to our distressed country ... his enthusiasm grew with every generous gift shipment, and with every new letter he received from our Danish benefactors. Little did we know, as the first two large packages...were sent ... in July 1942, that it was the beginning of such a thrilling adventure amidst the horrible, trying times we then lived in... I see before me the head physician on the day he received the first letter telling him of a very large gift shipment, which, among other things, included '1000 kg of oatmeal, [and] 1000 kg of barley.' After throwing a glance over this thrilling message, he had a smile...as he rubbed his hands together – ‘I'm becoming a wholesale merchant!’ (Jahr, 1947, p. 89-96).

Sæthre was not foolhardy, but wisely assessed the dangers and still dared to participate. On one occasion, the whole venture was in a precarious situation. The Germans had transferred prisoners to Victoria Terrasse (Gestapo, German secret police, headquarters in Oslo) from Grini (another prison in Oslo), but the prisoners’ food was to come from the city jail at Møllergata 19. Sæthre and his compatriots wondered whether to deliver these provisions, containing Danish bedspreads and food, to Gestapo headquarters and to guards who would likely be more suspicious than the guards at Møllergata. They realized the risk, but also realized it would be risky to stop

sending provisions there, because that would also raise suspicions. Sæthre considered carefully what to do. He said, “Bring the food in, but realize ... one day we'll be shot” (Johnsen, 1947, p.13-15).

Tragedy strikes

On Thursday, February 8, 1945, Sæthre sat at his desk working on a lecture, when suddenly five men from the Gestapo entered his home, apprehended him and took him away, along with three others to Akershus Fortress (Monrad-Krohn, 1945; Anchersen, 1966; Johnsen, 1947, p.13-15; Braatøy, 1945; Larsen, 2010). Sæthre went calmly with them and told his wife as he walked down the stairs, “Take it easy, I shall return soon” (Monrad-Krohn, 1945; Anchersen, 1966). These ended up being his last words to her, as twelve hours later the morning newspapers reported his execution by firing squad (Johnsen, 1947, p.13-15). One headline read, “SENIOR PHYSICIAN HÅKON SÆTHRE SENTENCED TO DEATH BY A SO-CALLED COURT. APPEAL DENIED. THE SENTENCE CARRIED OUT BY FIRING SQUAD ALL IN ONE NIGHT” (Monrad-Krohn, 1945). After the resistance had assassinated Karl Marthinsen on February 8, the Nazis decided that among the well-known names of Oslo, ten would be shot in reprisal (Anchersen, 1966; Johnsen, 1947, p.13-15). They went through a farce of a trial, accused of having “taken a leading part in disloyal organizations which carried out murders and sabotage actions.” He and the others received a “Just Verdict” (“*Standretedom*,” a quick and now illegal method by a military court in which the accused can only be found not guilty and freed, or found guilty and then executed). A request for a pardon was not granted by Nazi Reichskommissar Joseph Terboven, and they were then murdered, cremated, and their ashes sunk in the Oslo Fjord (Anchersen, 1966; Johnsen, 1947, p.13-15; 1945, “Sammanlagt 19”; 1995, “Dødsdømt og henrettet”; Sæthre, 1951).

Many speculated as to why Sæthre was included, and wondered if it was due to statements from a criminal with a grudge, because the Germans had learned to fear his firm, fearless attitude, or because they suspected his organization and leadership of the Danish humanitarian aid (Johnsen,

1947). It was known that neither Sæthre nor any of the others had anything at all to do with the killing of Marthinsen (Anchersen, 1966). Sæthre's obituary in Britain stated, "His death reflects dismally the terrorism practiced by the Germans in occupied Norway" (1945, Obituary: Haakon Saethre, M.D.). Apparently, up to 34 Norwegian patriots were killed on February 9-10 by Germans and Quislings in reprisal for Marthinsen's assassination (1945, "*Femton nya offer*"), though only 28 are listed on a memorial plaque at the execution site inside Akershus Fortress (Figs. 2,3). A

Swedish newspaper column stated:

The events of the last days have of course left their mark on Oslo and it's not saying too much that people are shocked. The frequent happy smiles that you, in spite of all difficulties, are used to seeing have now frozen away. The atmosphere is indescribable and everyone wonders how the death sentences will affect those who are actively attempting sabotage (1945, "*Häftiga utfall*").

On February 17, a memorial service was held in secret at the hospital department. Sæthre's death represented a significant loss to the hospital and to his patients. Jahr wrote to Chief Executive Klaveness shortly after the execution:

We share the grief and feel united and I believe this gives us new strength. This was all like a bolt of lightening from the blue, we knew nothing. Our dear head physician was literally torn away from it all. He was working here during the day and always as active as he could be. At seven in the evening, he was detained and nobody knew anything until they read the newspapers, and it is so hard, so hard. I, and everyone who worked with him, feel so unbelievably bereft and robbed, and it is hard to believe that we will never see his dear face again. It has been an exceptional pleasure to work with him all of these years, and especially to stand together at this demanding and difficult time. This all makes no sense, but we will have to try to be strong and continue, those of us who are left here in the department, and all the poor patients (Klaveness, 1947, pp. 7-8).

Jahr continued as Danish help liaison and manager even after Sæthre was killed (Gogstad, 1995).

The last letter Sæthre received in the department was from the Danes, announcing large new donations. He called in Jahr, who stated:

[He was] waving one of those lovely letters ... while crying, with laughter and joy, 'Look what we are getting now again! No, Denmark, Denmark, how touching they are!' He gave me these letters to take care of until the goods had arrived. Then ... letters of gratitude were sent to our beloved sister nation, thank-you letters so warm and so true, so heartfelt. When he died, Denmark surely lost one of its best, wisest, warmest and most enthusiastic workers in Norway. The evening he had been taken from his home by the Germans, I found it likely that we would receive a 'visit' to the department during the night and the giving of Danish help packages would probably be stopped, and our storage rooms sealed. But the night went without us hearing anything more... . Nobody touched the Danish help gifts (Jahr, 1947, p. 89-96).

In the days before he died, he seemed to colleagues retrospectively to be "curiously ready and self-aware." He seemed more sincere and expressed his appreciation toward the Danish for their humanitarian aid (Johnsen, 1947, p.13-15).

Possibly as a premonition of his death, the evening before Sæthre was arrested, his conversation with wife turned to his book collection. Because the university library collection was denuded to a large degree, such that scientific activity in Oslo was "practically impossible," Sæthre clearly intimated that the psychiatric-neurologic portion of his book collection should be given to the psychiatric department. This was a very valuable gift because there were periodicals that were not available in any other public or private library in Norway, and because it wouldn't be possible to purchase many of these works after the war, as they probably would not be reprinted (Braatøy, 1945).

Aftermath

Sæthre's murder triggered an outpouring of grief among his friends and colleagues. His neurology mentor Monrad-Krohn wrote of how he was violently prevented from continuing his rich life, and continuing his unfinished work on neurosyphilis, hypophysis secretion, and several aspects of the pathology of alcoholism. Despite his risky efforts to resist the Nazis, "this work was not of such a kind that deserves the death penalty in any decent justice system" (Monrad-Krohn, 1945). Indeed, he was only in the middle of his career as head physician and was far away from retirement (Thomstad, 1987). In the journal of the Norwegian Medical Association, Braatøy wrote of him that the Nazi firing squad bullets struck down a man who was highly qualified and ambitious, diligent, and who held one of the most significant positions in the country. "[He was] Norway's only neuro-psychiatrist. He is irreplaceable" (1960, Sæthre, Haakon). Furthermore, Braatøy wrote of Sæthre's intolerance of "second-rate work" and how those who knew him would always hear him stomping on the ground when guilty of any lapse in behavior. Those who knew him would always remember his "sharp voice" at gatherings as well, like "trumpet fanfare" (Braatøy, 1945). Braatøy believed:

Haakon Sæthre was killed ... [because he] was visible in the landscape, without requiring [the Nazis to perform] searches... . As he fell, it was taken note of by everyone ... and no one will [think us incorrect] that we ... are of the view that he was killed because he was the most representative head physician at Ullevål. But the tree's roots go deeper Haakon Sæthre was born [in] ... 1891. He belongs to the generation who were of that most eager boy-scout age in the years [around] 1905. Those of this generation, who grew up in culturally-awakened homes, were in their most intense boyhood years marked by thoughts of a free and independent Norway under its own flag. They have experienced the tragic return of those boyhood thoughts in these times, and they have had no choice in the matter (Braatøy, 1945).

It was thought at the time that his publications on neurosyphilis, on post-traumatic neuroses, and on experiences from the psychiatric hospital during the war would probably be considered his

greatest contributions. Braatøy, as Sæthre's successor, brought with him the "Sæthre-ian point of view," especially in the exacting physical examination of patients. Because of Sæthre's popularity, when Henrik Sørensen's posthumous portrait of him was unveiled in 1947 (Fig. 1), King Haakon (the Norwegian monarch in exile during the War) was in the front row with his family and representatives from the city council and Norwegian psychiatry (Thomstad, 1987). Also in 1947, Sæthre's friends established "Head Physician Haakon Sæthre's Memorial Fund," and the interest from this is given as travel grants to young neurologists and psychiatrists, and to nurses and other staff (Anchersen, 1966). Regarding the fund it was said, "It will be active through the ages as a living memorial, the right way to honor him, he whose long working days bore hundreds of unhappy and spiritually broken people" (Nissen, 1945). A memorial plaque to Sæthre and another killed resistance member who worked at Ullevål was placed near the hospital entrance. (Fig. 4) In 1967, Sæthre was honored near his hometown in Bergen, when a street was named after him, "Haakon Sæthre Way" (Larsen, 2010). There is a monument of him on that street, designed in 1971 by Hans Jacob Meyer (Skarstein, 2012).

Conclusions

Haakon Sæthre was well-educated and well-traveled, came from a cathedral school background, had an exacting perfectionist personality, and had a wide range of cultural and social interests, with friends in many professional and cultural circles in Norway. His impact on neurology and psychiatry both in Norway and internationally was acknowledged by many of his colleagues and contemporaries after his death. He helped to modernize his hospital and made positive changes on the treatment of psychiatric patients in Oslo. His contributions to neurosyphilis treatment, pituitary secretions, neuroses, and his description of Sæthre-Chotzen syndrome had some lasting impact on neurology and genetic medicine. He was struck down in the middle of his career by the Nazi terror that gripped Norway for five long years. Ironically, his murder took place only three short months before the war ended, and he almost survived the war despite his acknowledged risky actions to help Jews and his creation of "the largest illicit food warehouse" in Oslo with the Danish

humanitarian gifts. Lesser but still significant resistance involved protesting the appointment of Nazi nurses in psychiatric hospitals, and being among the first to revoke his medical association membership when an attempt was made to Nazify that organization. Indeed, Sæthre's most significant achievements likely are related to his strong opposition toward the National Socialist occupiers of Norway.

Why did Sæthre resist? Because of his personality, interests, and background, it was impossible for him to blindly follow and tolerate the obscenity and injustice with which the Nazis assaulted the Norwegian people. He believed in justice, and his "patriotic boy scout attitude" from his youth led him to tolerate nothing less than a fully independent Norway. Because of his intellectuality, sophistication, and innovativeness, he could not tolerate the barbaric Nazis ruling his country and terrorizing its people with their backward racist ideology. Similar to neuroscientists Johannes Pompe in Holland and Jules Tinel in France (Zeidman, 2011), Sæthre couldn't sit idly while his country suffered, and unlike Refsum and Monrad-Krohn, he felt a more active stance against the Nazis was warranted. Sæthre's religious background likely instilled in him a belief that even the weakest and most outcast elements of society deserved to be treated with respect and dignity – this likely influenced his reforming attitude toward orphans in Oslo and toward rights for the mentally ill. That trait also likely led him to help hide the twelve Jews in his hospital ward, and assist in transporting them to Sweden. Many generations of Jewish families have Sæthre to thank for his compassion and benevolence despite the risk. He is not currently on Yad Vashem's Righteous Among the Nations list in Jerusalem, but others involved in saving the Levin family have been named (Levin, 2011).

Sæthre was clearly not killed because of his administration of the Danish aid, as the Nazis did not curtail that operation after his arrest. But because Sæthre had such a strong, vivacious personality, he was very visible, and was an easy target for the Nazis to pick out as a significant loss for the Norwegians amongst all of the heads of his hospital. He had no part in the assassination of

the Nazi police official that led to his death as part of a reprisal, which makes his unjust murder more poignant. It was that very injustice that he was fighting against, and he strongly believed resistance would lead to the Nazis' defeat. Sadly, he did not live to see the day three months later when his and many others' efforts did pay off. His legacy lived on in Norway through the memorial fund set up in his name, and in the memories of those whose lives he touched, from patients, to nurses, to medical staff and students he worked with and trained. In particular, neurologists need to remember the heroic and dignified actions of a member of their specialty. The world needs to always remember individuals like Sæthre, who took the higher road and did the just and right thing despite the risks.

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to acknowledge the help of Olav Bogen at the Norges Hjemmefrontmuseum (Norwegian Resistance Museum) in Oslo for access to Robert Levin's interview with Ragnar Ulstein and various book recommendations, Mette Krog at the University of Oslo Library for assistance with documents, Anders Kvernberg at the National Library of Norway in Oslo for access to documents and newspaper clippings, John Barstad at the National Archives of Norway in Oslo for copies of the Våre Falne portion on Sæthre, Cecelia Ericson at the National Library of Sweden in Stockholm for assistance with newspaper clippings, Mona Levin for information and assistance with Sæthre's aid to her family and other Jews, Mimi Overlie at the Ullevål Hospital Library in Oslo for her assistance with memorials and access to books about the hospital during the war, Dr. Stein Ilner in the psychiatry department at Ullevål Hospital for discussing Sæthre and allowing me access to his portrait in the department, David Heywood-Jones with Gofetch translations in Berlin and Grigorios Petsos with Kontextor Teoranta in Berlin for their help with translations from Norwegian to English, and Dr. Daniel Kondziella of Copenhagen for his assistance with translations from Norwegian to English.

References

- Anchersen P (1966): Sæthre, Haakon, 1891-1945. In: *Norsk Biografisk Leksikon*, Vol. 15. Oslo, Aschehoug, pp. 515-519.
- Braatøy T (1945): *Overlæge Haakon Sæthre*. 9 Februar 1945. (eulogy from Sæthre's memorial service)
- Chotzen F (1932): Eine eigenartige familiäre Entwicklungsstörung. (Akrocephalosyndaktylie, Dysostosis craniofacialis and Hypertelorismus). *Monatsschrift Kinderheilkunde* 55:97–102.
- Cohen MM (1997): Nazi Pressures Mount. In: *A Stand Against Tyranny: Norway's Physicians and the Nazis*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press, pp. 115-120.
- Cohen MM (1997): The Campaign Against the Jews. In: *A Stand Against Tyranny: Norway's Physicians and the Nazis*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press, pp. 130-145.
- Cohen MM, Vidaver D (1998): Two Norwegian neurological giants: Georg H Monrad-Krohn and Sigvald Refsum. *Journal of Medical Biography* 6(4):194-199.
- Cohen MM, Vidaver D (1992): The man behind the syndrome: Sigvald Refsum. *Journal of the History of Neuroscience* 1:277-284.
- Gogstad AC (1995): Sykepleiere i hjemme- og utefronten. In: *Slange og Sverd, Hjemmefront og Utefront Leger og Helsetjenester 1940-1945*. Bergen, Alma Mater Forlag, pp. 173-174.

Haugen A. Letter to Våre Falne Publisher. August 7, 1946. (Letter by Psychiatrist Arne Haugen at Oslo Community Hospital recommending the inclusion of Sæthre in the Norwegian memorial book “Våre Falne.”)

Jahr G (1947): “‘Butikken’ på Ullevål.” In: Mürer NJ, ed. *Boken Om Danskehjelpen*. Oslo, Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, pp. 89-96.

Johnsen G (1947): “Overlæge dr. med. Haakon Sæthre.” In: Mürer NJ, ed. *Boken Om Danskehjelpen*. Oslo, Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, pp. 13-15.

Klaveness T (1947): “Haakon Sæthre.” In: *Oslo Kommunale Sykehus i Krigens Tegn*. Oslo, Cammermeyers Boghandel, pp. 7-8.

Klaveness T (1947): “Pleier Wassdahl. Pleier Fedje.” In: *Oslo Kommunale Sykehus i Krigens Tegn*. Oslo, Cammermeyers Boghandel, pp. 42-51.

Klaveness T (1947): “Overlægenes protestkrivelse av 30. Mai 1941.” In: *Oslo Kommunale Sykehus i Krigens Tegn*. Oslo, Cammermeyers Boghandel, pp. 63-68.

Larsen SB (2010): En likvidasjon med bivirkninger. *Bergens Tidende* 24 September: 29.

Levin M: Personal communication. October 10, 2011.

Monrad-Krohn GH (1945): Overlæge Haakon Sæthre. *Norsk Magasin for Lægevidenskapen* (Norwegian Journal for Medical Science) 106:2671-2.

Nissen BA (1945): Haakon Sæthre. In Memoriam. *Verdens Gang*, Friday 14 September.

Sæthre F. Letter to Våre Falne Publisher. October 8, 1951. (Letter by Sæthre’s wife to the

editors of *Våre Falne* requesting a correction of the date he was arrested and shot, which was erroneously published as April 8, 1945)

Sæthre H (1931): Ein Beitrag zum Turmschädelproblem (Pathogenese, Erbllichkeit und Symptomatologie) *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Nervenheilkunde* 117:533–555.

Sæthre H (1931): Über den Turmschädel, seine Erbllichkeit, Pathogenes und neuropsychiatrischen Symptome. *Acta Psychiatrica Neurologica Scandinavica* 6:405–427.

Sæthre, Haakon (1935): In: *Studentene fra 1910: 25-års Studentene 1910-1935*. Oslo, Gundersen, pp. 327.

Skarstein J. Haakon Sæthre – utdypning (NBL-artikkel). Store Norske Leksikon website: http://snl.no/.nbl_biografi/Haakon_S%C3%A6thre/utdypning. Last accessed 1/4/2012

Thomstad H (1987): Den psykiatriske tradisjon: Tre portretter. *Tidsskrift for Den Norske Lægeforening* 107(24):2014–2016.

Ulstein R. Interview with Robert Levin. 20 April 1971. NHM 16 Ragnar Ulstein.

Ulstein R (1974): In: *Svensketrafikken*. Oslo, Det Norske Samlaget, pp. 116.

Zackai EH, Stolle CA (1998): A New Twist: Some Patients with Saethre-Chotzen Syndrome Have a Microdeletion Syndrome. *American Journal of Human Genetics* 63:1277–1281.

Zeidman LA: Johannes C. Pompe, MD, Hero of Neuroscience: The Man Behind the Syndrome. Accepted for publication by *Muscle and Nerve* on 2/9/12.

Zeidman LA (2011): Neuroscience in Nazi Europe Part II: Resistance against the Third Reich.

Canadian Journal of Neurological Sciences 38(6):826-838.

(1927): Sæthre, Haakon. In: *Norges Læger*. Oslo, Aschehoug, pp. 348.

(1938) Sæthre Haakon. Hvem er hvem (HEH, the Norwegian "Who's who"): 508.

(1941) 50th Anniversary, Overlæge Haakon Sæthre. Unknown newspaper (probably Aftenposten, per the Norwegian National Library, Oslo).

(1945) Femton nya offer för terror i Norge: Våldsamma hotelser av tyskar och quislingar på konferens. *Svenska Dagbladet*, 10 February:30.

(1945): Sammanlagt 19 avrättade. *Svenska Dagbladet*, 10 February:31.

(1945) Häftiga utfall mot patrioterna. *Svenska Dagbladet*, 10 February:31.

(1945) Obituary: Haakon Saethre, M.D. *British Medical Journal* April 14, 1945:536-537.

(1960): Sæthre, Haakon. In: *Studentene fra 1910: Biografiske opplysninger samlet til 50-års jubileet 1960*. Oslo, Bye & Co, pp. 212-213.

(1995) Dødsdømt og henrettet: De to sykehusansatte som ble dødsdømt og henrettet under okkupasjonen. *Ullevål Nytt: Internavis for Ullevål Sykehus*

(Ullevål News: International Newspaper for Ullevål Hospital) 4:9.

Figure Legend:

Fig. 1. Portrait, Dr. Haakon Sæthre, by Henrik Sørensen, 1947. Ullevål Hospital Psychiatry Department. Taken with permission of Dr. Stein Ilner. Photo by the author.

Figs. 2 and 3. Memorial Plaque, Akershus Fortress, Oslo, Norway. The plaque reads “At this place were 42 Norwegians executed by the German occupying forces.” Sæthre’s name is listed third from the bottom in the left column, along with 19 others murdered by the Nazis on February 9, 1945. Photo by the author.

Fig. 4. Memorial Plaque for Eugen Grønholdt and Haakon Sæthre near exit, Ullevål Hospital, Oslo, Norway. It states, “Eugen Grønholdt - Haakon Sæthre. They gave their lives for the fatherland 1940-1945.” Grønholdt was member of the resistance movement and a temporary worker at Ullevål. He was arrested by the Gestapo and executed in 1943 after some acts of sabotage on ships in Oslo harbor (1995, “Dødsdømt og henrettet”). Photo by the author.