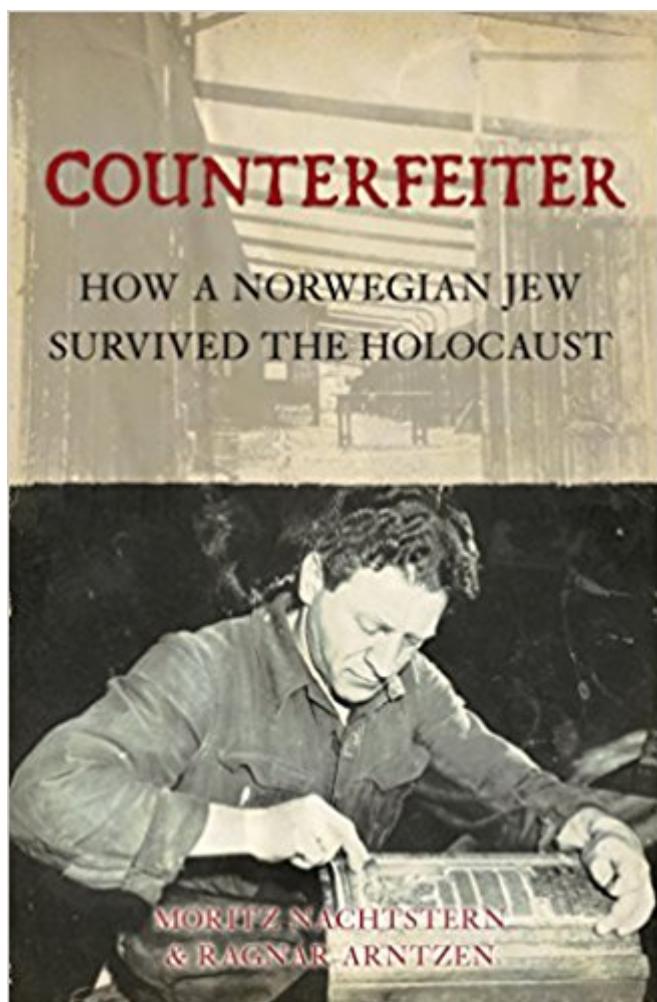


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# Counterfeiter: How A Norwegian Jew Survived The Holocaust (General Military)



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. One of just a few accounts from prisoners who worked for the Nazi's Operation Bernhard, this grim account of imprisonment and survival by the late Nachstern (1902-1969), in English for the first time, takes readers inside Hitler's plan to bring down the British and American economies. In 1942, Nachtstern was arrested by the Nazis and, along with more than 500 others, deported to Germany and imprisoned at Auschwitz. A stroke of luck rescues him from the gas chambers, sending him to work as a typographer at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, producing fake British money that the Nazis hoped to use to destroy the UK economy. Nachstern's prose is measured but vivid, his loneliness a steady beat against which his struggle unfolds. Two essays put the man and his memoir in perspective, and an emotional foreword by Nachstern's daughter recalls a man so haunted, he would wake sobbing and screaming. Arresting from start to finish, this harrowing memoir is full of compassion, pain and strength that illuminates from the inside a little-known episode in the Nazi effort. B&w photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"...History is not just world changing events. History is not just stories of valor or sadness. History is what makes up a person ... To Moritz Nachtstern, the reluctant counterfeiter, WW2 was his fight for survival, and Counterfeiter told his story in a simple manner that nevertheless triggered deepest emotions." -C. Peter Chen, [www.ww2db.com](http://www.ww2db.com) (November 2008)"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 survival and the project offers unusual gripping insights." -The Bookwatch (October 2008)"As far as Malkin is concerned, it's the 'most reliable and psychologically acute' of

the half-dozen memoirs written by participants of the counterfeiting operation. 'To me, it's barely a Holocaust story,' said Malkin of the counterfeiting saga. 'It's a story of survival and deception in wartime.' --Jon Kalish, *The Forward* (August 2008)"Arresting from start to finish, this harrowing memoir is full of compassion, pain and strength that illuminates from the inside a little-known episode in the Nazi effort." --Publisher's Weekly, Starred Review From the introductory essay by award-winning journalist Lawrence Malkin, author of *Krueger's Men: the Secret Nazi Counterfeit Plot and the Prisoners of Block 19* (Little, Brown 2006)"Of the half-dozen memoirs written by the prisoners who were conscripted into the greatest counterfeiting operation in history, Moritz Nachtstern's is the most reliable and psychologically acute version of the drama as seen from inside Sachsenhausen's Block 19. Shortly after he returned home in 1945, when his extraordinary experiences were still fresh in his memory, he dictated his reminiscences to his new wife, Rachel. Her typed notes (still in possession of their daughter, Sidsel) were later turned over to a Norwegian journalist, Ragnar Arntzen. He wove them into a story of deceit and survival by the counterfeiting crew of about 145 prisoners and their master, SS Major Bernhard Krueger."

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 found this book a little disappointing because the title would imply that it is going to talk about the German counterfeiting of British pound notes in depth, as other books have done, but it is more of a bibliography of the author's life both as a youth and later in a concentration camp. That will probably be fine for many readers, but since I was interested in the technical aspects of the counterfeiting plot, it did not exactly satisfy my curiosity. There have been about a half-dozen books written about this particular German operation, and at least one movie, and this book is not among the strongest of them. I did find one part interesting. There has always been a great debate about what American greenbacks were counterfeited in Sachsenhausen. In the past it has always been the \$100 bill, with some authors also mentioning a \$20 bill. Author Moritz Nachtstern says that there were \$50 bills produced there. That does make for an interesting argument. The counterfeiters talk about their work at different times: "We will soon begin the manufacture of 50-dollar bills en masse. I swear old

Uncle Sam is going to be so bloated with dollar bills that he will burst...""It won't be long and you'll see a 50-dollar bill that beat everything in the industry. It will be my life's masterpiece...""Are you completely finished with it? Does it look good? You should have seen Kruger. He embraced me and carried on like a maniac. I can tell you this men; if anyone has produced a better 50-dollar bill than mine, he has not been discovered."So, I found little new data in the book that I have not already read elsewhere, but it did help to define what banknotes were forged, an argument that is still going on among some specialists in the field of wartime counterfeiting.

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".

great history

This is perhaps the most detailed autobiographical account of WW2 concentration camp confinement that has appeared in print. But very little of it deals directly with the extermination of Jews. Instead it details the operation of a sequestered group of Jewish prisoners who were individually selected from many concentration camps because of their skill related to engraving and typography. The Nazi objective was to produce counterfeited English pound notes which would be used to sabotage the British financial system. That would occur by injecting millions of fake currency into circulation aiming to bankrupt the Bank of England. To only a minor extent the objective did succeed in doing so. The author, Moritz Nachtstern, was a Norwegian-born Jew who optimistically chose to stay in Norway by keeping a low profile rather than to escape to Sweden, Britain, Canada or the U.S.A. as did the other members of his family and fellow Jews soon after the April, 1940, German occupation. Hitler's Final Solution (the extermination of the Jews) did not have much impact on Norway until mid-1942 when Jews were required to register with the Quisling-controlled police. In October arrests were made and about eight hundred Jews were deported by ship from Oslo destined for Auschwitz. But, by a fortuitous circumstance Nachtstern avoided being gassed. Instead he was selected to become a member of the counterfeiting group that was being established in a unit of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp located in the outskirts of Berlin. There he became an integral and successful part of producing the fake English notes in forced collaboration with an array of Jews from a dozen and more European countries. Almost the entire narrative recounts the conditions and events in

connected with the counterfeiting operation as it affected dozens of individuals. The reader becomes acquainted with these men and their SS officers and subordinates, their meager diets, their slavish working conditions, their injurious tortures, their subjection to cutthroat gamesmanship, their rivalries and camaraderie, their covert conversations and shenanigans. Some readers may find the detailed day-to-day accounts repetitive and boring, however situations are frequently interrupted by the heartless vagaries of their superiors. I thought that what seemed to be insignificant events needed to be included to provide the complete picture. This book recreates the ruthless atmosphere that threatened a tiny specialized segment among the millions of Jews who were subjected to the Nazi objective to decimate their race.

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