

# Ragnhild Vogt Hauge – psychiatrist, pioneer and member of the Norwegian Nazi party

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## MEDICAL HISTORY

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## BACKGROUND

Ragnhild Vogt Hauge (1890–1987) was Norway's first woman psychiatrist, but has today been almost forgotten. In this article we present her biography, medical background and work as a doctor.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

We have searched through the Retriever media archive, the digital archives of the National Library and the Aftenposten daily, as well as in the following files in the National Archives of Norway: the legal purge of World War II

collaborators and the files of the State Police, the Norwegian Medical Association and the Directorate of Health.

## RESULTS

After her mother's early death in 1908, Ragnhild Vogt cared for her younger siblings and took her mother's place. These family responsibilities caused her education to be delayed, and she did not graduate from her medical studies in Oslo until the age of 35, in 1925. In 1931, she became the first woman in Norway to be authorised as a psychiatrist. She later worked also as a forensic psychiatrist. In 1934 she married and settled in Arendal, where she continued practising until the end of her career. In the years 1941–45 she was a member of Nasjonal Samling, the Norwegian Nazi party, and was convicted of treason after the war.

## INTERPRETATION

There can be many reasons why the name of Ragnhild Vogt Hauge has been almost forgotten. She worked on the periphery and combined her practice as a psychiatrist with that of a GP. Most likely, her membership in Nasjonal Samling during the war has also played a role. The sources testify to a kind-hearted Christian doctor.

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Our interest in this story arose in relation to the article on the psychiatrist Augusta Rasmussen (1895–1979) [\(1\)](#). While working on that article, we constantly came across the name of Ragnhild Vogt Hauge, a person unknown to us. We became curious about who she was. Her story helps elucidate questions related to World War II and the legal purge of doctors in its aftermath.

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## Material and method

We have used the Retriever media archive, the National Library's digital archive bokhylla.no, the digital archives of the Aftenposten daily, and the following files in the National Archives of Norway: the legal purge of World War II collaborators and the files of the State Police, the Norwegian Medical Association and the Directorate of Health.



**Figure 1** Ragnild Vogt (1890–1987) photographed in 1918. That autumn she embarked on her medical studies at the age of 28. Photo: Peder O. Aune / NTNU UB

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## The family

Ragnild Vogt was the second eldest of six siblings. She came from a family of numerous academics, senior civil servants and politicians. Three of her four brothers became professors, like their father, Johan Vogt (1858–1932) [\(2\)](#). He was a professor of metallurgy in Kristiania for more than 25 years before being appointed the first professor of geology in Trondheim in 1912 [\(3\)](#).

When Ragnhild Vogt was 18 years old, her mother died. The youngest siblings, the twins Johan and Jørgen, were eight years old at the time. In the same year she completed secondary school, but did not enrol at university until ten years later (Figure 1). It 'became my lot to assume her [the mother's] role in the home', she later wrote. When 'my youngest brothers received their student caps, I started my medical studies' (4).

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## Career

Ragnhild Vogt began her medical studies in 1918 and graduated with a medical degree in 1925, at the age of 35 (Figure 2) (5). She was not the first doctor in the family – her grandfather Fredrik Vogt (1829–93) and her uncle Ragnar Vogt (1870–1943) were both doctors; the latter was Norway's first professor of psychiatry. Another uncle was Michael Holmboe (1852–1918), who served as Director General of the Directorate of Health (2).



**Figure 2** Among the 43 students who graduated with a medical degree in spring of 1925 there were four women (5). Ragnhild Vogt is on the far right. In the middle is the director of the maternity ward, professor Kristian Brandt (1859–1932). Excerpt from a student cohort photo taken outside the maternity ward of the National Hospital in the autumn of 1924. Photo: The Department of Gynaecology's photographic collection / National Medical Museum / Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology

Apparently she had set her sights on a career in psychiatry. After graduation she started as a junior registrar at Dr. Dedichen's Private Asylum, followed by periods of employment at Ullevål Hospital, Oppland county mental asylum and Møre county mental asylum. She had a private practice in Trøndelag before settling in Arendal in 1934. Here, she would continue her private practice for the rest of her career. In the same year, at the age of 44, she married the dentist Tom Selmer Hauge (1888–1972). He was divorced and had four children from his first marriage (6). The couple remained childless.

Ragnhild Vogt was authorised as a specialist in mental disorders and nervous mental conditions on 9 December 1931 [\(7\)](#), and thus became Norway's first woman psychiatrist [\(8\)](#). Regulations on medical specialisation had been introduced in 1918, and by 1932 altogether 13 specialists in this discipline had been authorised, of whom she was the first woman [\(8\)](#).

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## Medical activity

Three years after her authorisation as a specialist she was appointed permanent expert in forensic psychiatry by the Ministry of Justice [\(7\)](#), and according to newspaper reports she served for many years as an expert witness in court proceedings on the south coast. She also wrote a number of popular-science articles in the women's magazine *Urd* and other publications.

In an op-ed in the *Aftenposten* daily in 1936, she warned against the misplaced humanity that expressed itself in a growing degree of leniency towards criminals, and that increasing efforts and money were devoted to preserving 'defective people'. She claimed that preventive efforts were called for, to identify and treat all children with poor dispositions at an early age, and – in line with certain currents in contemporary ideology – sterilise all those who were bearers of 'hazardous genetic factors' [\(9\)](#).

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## Christianity

Over the years she published numerous articles about Christianity. In 1940, she had joined *Christian Aid in Sexual Matters*, an association of doctors and clergy who wished to provide guidance and help from a medical and Christian perspective. This group issued a number of leaflets, and her leaflet bore the title *For young girls*. She started with anatomy, which in her words became something of a song of praise: 'A study of the human body, the life of cells, the structure and function of the organs instils a holy reverence for the Creator, so marvellous is this, his ultimate work of creation. -- It lends us a sense of being on hallowed ground, in all its unimaginable perfection' [\(10\)](#).

Even though she had benefited from the opening of universities to women, she believed that being at home with a husband and children was the greatest yearning and ultimate task for women [\(11\)](#): 'I consider the home, school and nursing to be natural areas for a woman's abilities', she wrote [\(12\)](#).

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## Nazism

In September 1941, Ragnhild Vogt Hauge joined Nasjonal Samling (NS), the Norwegian Nazi party. She described her reasons in a newspaper article in December 1943 [\(13\)](#). She wrote that she had always remained a convinced socialist, but could not join any of the socialist parties, since they were anti-

Christian. She underscored that she was opposed to politics because of the corrupted party system, and that she had become aware of NS only on 9 April 1940, when her political awareness was stirred. She portrayed Quisling as a virtual saviour: 'When the fatherland was in the gravest peril and a man came forward who claimed to be able to save the country, the least I could do was to find out who he was and what he had to offer. Then I learned that in spite of all defamation of his character, this man is an idealist and a genius, that his programme concurred with the ideas that I have held since entering adulthood, and that through NS our fatherland could be free and independent again.'

The article was part of a series that was printed in a number of newspapers in the years 1943–44. Here, party members described their path into NS. We have reviewed the first 35 contributions in *Aftenposten* from November 1943 to January 1944. Vogt Hauge's contribution was number 18 in a series that started with Marie Hamsun. Their length and written style varied considerably. Most likely, the articles were penned by the contributors themselves. Their reasons for joining NS varied, most authors citing multiple reasons; the inability of capitalism to solve the problems of the day or an intense anti-bolshevist attitude were the most common, along with a deep distrust of the established parties and great admiration for Quisling. Some stated anti-Semitic views, and about as many voiced their Christian faith.

The decision to join NS had not been easy for her. The first time she heard an NS presentation in the autumn of 1940 she had gone to the lecturer accusing him of all the evil things NS was doing. The answer was: 'When the programme is good and the will is there, you should help us implement it in the right manner.' Another year went by before she joined. The decisive factor was that her husband joined the party: 'So when my husband left with the first Norwegian legion to fight against bolshevism, I was exposed to such an abominable pressure from Christian quarters and such a coldness from my friends and relatives, that it was impossible for me to belong to that section of the Norwegian people who engage in pressure, coldness and hatred.'

Most likely, her account of the experience of coldness on the part of relatives and friends is true. Her brother Fredrik (1892–1970) was rector at the Norwegian College of Technology, but had resigned in 1941 in protest against the occupation. Johan (1900–91) was arrested the same year and imprisoned at Grini, and Jørgen (1900–72), who was a communist, was also arrested and spent the remaining war years in prisons and prison camps. Her sister Margit (1897–1975) had been married to the resistance fighter Martin Linge (1894–1941) (2), who was killed in a battle against German forces in 1941, the same year Ragnhild joined NS.

During the legal purge after the war, questions were raised as to whether it had been her husband who had brought her into the NS movement. This was not so, she maintained. He had been a member from October 1940 until November 1943, and advised her against joining to be spared the unpleasantness associated with it. On numerous occasions, he had suggested that she withdraw, but she was convinced that she would be in a better position to help

others by remaining a member. For example, she made an effort to help her brother Jørgen, who was at risk of deportation to Germany in September 1944. And she remained a member until her withdrawal in April 1945 [\(14\)](#).

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## The legal purge

When the Norwegian Medical Association held its first post-war national convention in September 1945, it was noted that the doctors had passed the test of the wartime years with flying colours [\(15\)](#). To be sure, not everybody had been able 'to show the moral courage that we had expected' [\(15\)](#), but in return, all NS doctors had been immediately excluded from the association [\(16\)](#). Among them was Ragnhild Vogt Hauge [\(17\)](#).

In his opening address, the president ascertained that 'inferior persons' now had been 'weeded out', and that 'in this moment we can consider ourselves to be in untainted good company' [\(15\)](#). Karl Evang (1902–81), Director of Health, said that the traitors and the morally frail among the doctors, whom he referred to as harmful foreign bodies [\(18\)](#), had now been isolated and excluded: 'They are largely inferior elements that there is every reason to purge from the ranks of our medical cadres,' he said [\(\(19\)](#), p. 267).

According to the association's bylaws, the National Board could lift the exclusion after a certain period of time. If the doctor's misdemeanour during the occupation had not been of a grievous nature, he or she could be readmitted to the association. The association's secretariat provided as much material as possible about the doctors in question. Then the case file was sent to the local chapter for a statement, first to the place where the doctor had been resident during the war, and then to the department where the doctor was based at the time of the application. The case was subsequently deliberated by the executive committee, which decided whether the case was suitable for a written vote in the national representative meeting [\(20\)](#). In other words, the process was comprehensive, and an anonymous letter to the editor in 1951 stated that nobody ought to voluntarily enter the private purgatory that the association had established [\(21\)](#).

Vogt Hauge wrote to the Norwegian Medical Association in March 1951, asking how matters stood with regard to membership for former NS members, but we have not been able to find an application [\(22\)](#), and she is not listed in any of the association's yearbooks, which we have examined up to 1960. Most likely, she remained outside the Norwegian Medical Association after the war.

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## Medical licence and specialist approval

Although the Norwegian Medical Association had made short shrift of the NS doctors, it was less clear how the cases should be processed by the courts. Evang wrote that it was generally viewed that all doctors who had been NS members should forever lose their licence to practice medicine [\(\(18\)](#); [\(23\)](#), p. 170). The first step in this process was also taken. Immediately after the

liberation and pursuant to Section 50 of the provisional regulations on treatment of collaborators, the Ministry of Social Affairs decided to strip 109 doctors of their *licentia practicandi*. This also included Ragnhild Vogt Hauge, who lost her licence in July 1945.

Evang considered the ministry's decision to be both natural and correct, and welcomed it for several reasons. According to Evang, the NS doctors were not representative of the average doctor. Although there were numerous exceptions, these were doctors against whom considerable reproach could have been raised even in peacetime. He claimed that every 'profession may be in some need of purging, and the war provided us with the opportunity' (18).

But the ministry's suspension of the medical licences was temporary and was only to remain in force until the criminal proceedings were over. If the verdict or writ did not specify such a loss of rights, the suspension would automatically cease. When Sven Oftedal (1905–48), Minister of Social Affairs, presented the case to the Storting in November 1946, altogether 22 doctors had been convicted of treason. Ragnhild Vogt Hauge was one of them. However, in none of the cases had the courts wanted to pass a verdict of revocation of medical licence, irrespective of the gravity of the treason committed, the cabinet minister said (24).

Another question concerned what should be done about specialist authorisation. When someone was excluded from the Norwegian Medical Association and had his or her medical licence temporarily revoked, perhaps this should also apply to the specialist authorisation? In June 1946, the Directorate of Health wrote that this question 'perhaps should be decided by the Norwegian Medical Association' (25). General Secretary Jørgen Berner (1883–1964) rejected this, however. The Norwegian Medical Association had never considered itself entitled to revoke a 'specialist authorisation once granted, even if the person in question is excluded from the association', he wrote (25).

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## The verdict

Vogt Hauge was kept under house arrest from May to July 1945, and in March 1946 she went on trial for treason in Arendal. The charges brought against her included membership of NS from 1941 to 1945 and of the NS charitable organisation from 1942, to which she had also donated money, in addition to serving as the social chair of the local chapter of the NS women's organisation.

She was sentenced to 120 days of imprisonment and payment of a fine of 5 000 kroner and 15 000 kroner in damages. The public prosecutor for the legal purge found it unnecessary to strip her of her medical licence. As usual, Evang disagreed, but his protest was not upheld by the court. Moreover, three months later, in June 1946, the ministry annulled the suspension (26). She was again free to resume her medical work.

The verdict was a disappointment to her. The prosecutor had not argued for a prison sentence, but the judgment noted as an aggravating circumstance that she was a mature woman with good intellectual abilities and the highest education obtainable in Norway. The court therefore found a prison sentence to be appropriate. In her appeal, she pointed out that serving a prison sentence would be especially difficult for her as a practising woman doctor, but to no avail. She had to serve four months.

The verdict contains an interesting element. She had been a long-standing member of the Norwegian Medical Association, and after the association was nazified in 1941 and its name changed to the Norwegian Doctors' Union, she remained a member. She appealed, because she felt that it was 'incorrect by the city court to consider the Norwegian Doctors' Union to be an organisation linked to NS'. She pointed out that unless one protested, one automatically became a member of the new association (27).

In November 1946 her appeal was brought before the Supreme Court, where it was upheld (28). This verdict defined important principles. She was acquitted of her membership in the Norwegian Doctors' Union, but the sentence by the city court was maintained, and the court assessed her harshly: 'As a good example of her inability to understand the situation, we have exactly in this case the more than usually shallow and naive article by the accused on "why I am a member of NS"'. Her husband had stood before the court some days before her. He was sentenced to two and a half years of forced labour and payment of 10 000 kroner in fines and 10 000 kroner in damages (29). He served his sentence until July 1947.

So Vogt Hauge had her medical licence restored in June 1946, kept her specialist authorisation and resumed her medical practice in Arendal. Previously she had had a surgery in the town centre, but in the autumn of 1946 she set up her practice at home on the Frydentopp farm on the edge of town.

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## Mitigating circumstances

As a mitigating circumstance, the verdict noted that she had helped save a Jewish woman (30). Gisela Wilmersdoerffer (1868–1969) was one of a few German Jews who were able to flee to Norway before the war. She came from Berlin via London to Norway in August 1939. She was granted a temporary residence permit in Flosta near Arendal, but in the autumn of 1942 her local helpers realised that she risked being arrested, and believed that a doctor's certificate might save her. Vogt Hauge was called on Sunday 10 January 1943 (31). The hand-written certificate, which today is found in the files of the State Police in the National Archives of Norway, states that the 74-year-old patient suffered from heart failure with high-grade insufficiency, respiratory problems and cyanosis. Her general condition was 'very poor', and Vogt Hauge deemed her heart failure and general condition to be so serious that she was at risk of dying on the road to Oslo. These were the medical aspects of the matter, but Vogt Hauge went even further. The woman's presence did not represent a threat to anybody, since she did not engage in any kind of agitation. The

arguments included her health condition, that the elderly woman lived in an isolated spot, had no contact with anyone and never made any political statements. The idea was to convince the police that she was a seriously ill person who probably had little time left (31). The attempt succeeded. The next day, Arendal police station forwarded the medical certificate to the State Police, who soon reported back that the woman should not be arrested, because she was seriously ill and bedridden at home. She was one of very few Jews in Norway who were not arrested during the war and were permitted to stay in the country (30).

Wilmersdoerffer lived to a ripe old age. She died 26 years later in 1969, at the age of 101. This story is an example of an NS member who helped people in a difficult situation even if they were not NS members, and of a doctor who made a false diagnosis to prevent a Jewish patient from being taken away (30). The case is not unique. In interrogations after the war, Vogt Hauge explained that she had been told that Sipo, the German security police, had been informed of her membership in NS. Because of this she had been able to save the Jew, she claimed (30).

The verdict noted as a mitigating circumstance that Vogt Hauge had never in any way behaved aggressively during the war, that she was fair and correct in the execution of her public offices, and that she had acted to help fellow citizens who were on the opposite end of the political spectrum. It was underscored that by 'declaring the patient to be extremely ill, [she] had saved her from being arrested and deported from the country' (30).

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## Serving the prison term

Health workers who were sentenced to prison for treason tended to immediately embark on organising health services. They made a great effort to help their fellow inmates (32). One exception was Bredtvedt women's prison in Oslo, where the interned health workers were not permitted to assist the management. Nor was there a sick bay for the up to 400 women inmates. There was great antagonism between the prison management and the prisoners (33), and the prison was considered one of the worst in terms of medical attention (34).

Vogt Hauge, who started her sentence there in late December 1946, was among those who attempted to report the conditions at Bredtvedt. We do not know how well she and the prison medical officer Augusta Rasmussen were acquainted, but they were both born and bred in Oslo, they were approximately the same age, they were authorised specialists with an interval of two years (1), they were both Christians and also related by blood. Ragnar Vogt, professor of psychiatry, was uncle to both of them.

About her prison term, Vogt Hauge wrote that she was not permitted to practise in the prison, but several prisoners nevertheless sought her advice clandestinely. This was quite difficult, she wrote, because the prisoners were not permitted to communicate with each other (34).

After her release in April 1947 she tried to help fellow inmates whom she knew were having a hard time in the prison. She wrote that many came out of Bredtvet with their physical and mental health broken.

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## The final years

Her husband Tom Selmer Hauge died in 1972, and Ragnhild Vogt Hauge spent the last fifteen years of her life as a widow. She died in 1987 at the age of 97.

Why was she forgotten? There can be many reasons. After all, few people are remembered a generation or two after their death. She lived and worked on the periphery. In the 1930s, Arendal had 10 000 inhabitants and was located far away from the capital city and the establishment. Through large parts of her career she practised both as a psychiatrist and as a GP – in other words, she did not practise psychiatry exclusively (Figure 3). Her activities included serving as a doctor to the mother and child clinic during 1934–45, as well as teaching at the school of home economics. Although she wrote some articles for the general public, she did not stand out in any particular way. Her choice of NS during the war could be another reason, but the importance of this factor is uncertain. After the verdict in the Supreme Court in November 1946, the general secretary of the Norwegian Medical Association stated that the sentencing of the NS doctors had been too lenient, but this hardly applied to Vogt Hauge, because Berner thought that she had been 'fairly passive' (35).



**Figure 3** Ragnhild Vogt Hauge worked both as a GP and psychiatrist. Advertisement in the 'Tvedestrandsposten' 6 December 1947. Photo: Tvedestrandsposten/National Library of Norway

In December 1945, nineteen Arendal locals signed a petition in her support, stating that she had never engaged in agitation on behalf of NS and never discussed politics, but had acted as a friend, benefactor and helper of all the

poor in Arendal and its environs. No doctor had helped so many poor people without payment, they claimed. While others preached, Dr Hauge was a living testimony to 'the true Christian in deeds' (36).

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