

Our Two Tries to Kill Hitler

By **FABIAN VON SCHLABRENDORFF**

One of the few survivors of the organized resistance movement inside Germany tells, for the first time, the exciting story of how Germans on the highest level conspired to remove the Führer—a story now verified by American authorities.

"ONE OF THE BOLDEST AND BRAVEST OF THE ANTI-NAZIS"

By **Allen W. Dulles**

Formerly in charge of work of the Office of Strategic Services in Switzerland and Germany



Von Schlabrendorff

Fabian von Schlabrendorff, who tells this story, is one of the boldest and bravest of the anti-Nazis who fought Hitlerism from within Germany during the war. A young lawyer serving in German uniform on the east front, he became a leader among those who plotted to eliminate the Führer. It was only by

a miracle that he survived the ruthless measures of Gestapo repression after the unsuccessful bomb attempt on Hitler's life on July 20, 1944.

Only fragments of the story of the German underground have, as yet, reached the outside world. The Nazis were at great pains to conceal it. They neither wished to give this encouragement to their enemies, nor to leave any other legend in Germany than their own. The facts of the matter are that the German resistance to Hitler went far beyond being a little band of conspirators. It had roots in the anti-Nazi forces which existed in

Germany even before Hitler came to power. It became a more cohesive movement as the terrors of the Nazi regime unfolded, but due to the cowardice and subservience of most of the high German generals, it was unable to organize for action until the tide of German victory began to recede after Stalingrad and El Alamein. In addition to its military members, the movement included civilians from various walks of life—government officials, churchmen, leaders of the suppressed labor unions, intellectuals and professional men. Von Schlabrendorff is one of the few survivors of this group of Germans who saw straight and did not compromise. If we are ever to build a better Germany, it is to men like him that Germany must look.

After release from a German concentration camp by the American Army, Von Schlabrendorff was sent to Switzerland to recuperate from the harrowing experiences of trial before the German People's Court, torture and imprisonment. It was while he was in Switzerland that he wrote this story. I am glad to attest to his high character and courage and to his effective services to the anti-Nazi forces during the war and, after Hitler's collapse, in helping to disclose to us Nazi crimes.

PART ONE

TWO years ago this month the world first learned that there was active opposition to Hitler in Germany, when a bomb exploded in his conference room on July 20, 1944, in an unsuccessful assassination scheme. But that was not the first attempt to kill the Führer. There were previous plans, including one which just missed working, through a tantalizing freak of chance.

Now an account can be given of the long, secret plotting of the German resistance movement to overthrow Hitler. I do not pretend to be telling the complete story. There is probably no living man who knows all the details. Most of the resistance leaders were killed by the Gestapo, often with horrible torture, after the final assassination attempt failed. I am now relating what I knew as one of many who worked to rid Germany of Hitler and his gang.

None of our efforts were spur-of-the-moment plots, in the sense of a little band of conspirators meeting one night in a den and improvising a *coup d'état*. They were all part of an organized, enduring resistance movement in Germany. The movement grew out of the anti-Nazi opposition which existed before Hitler took power, and continued through the years before the war.

I had been an opponent of the Nazis since my student days at the University of Halle in 1928, when National Socialism was making alarming inroads among both the student body and the teaching staff. My friends and I founded a countermovement in the university. Young and adventurous enough to cross swords gladly with the National Socialists, we used to heckle their meetings and make life miserable for the local *Gauleiter*.

I kept up the fight after leaving school, as a political assistant to Herbert von Bismarck, a great-grandnephew of the old chancellor, in the Prussian Ministry of the Interior in Berlin. During this period I met Hans Bernd Gisevius, who later became an important resistance worker, and still later a star witness for the Allies at the War Crimes trials in Nuremberg.

When the Hitler dictatorship began in 1933, it was obvious that I should find it impossible to occupy any official position in his regime. I left Berlin



Dr. Karl Goerdeler on trial. He never lost hope, paid with his life for his devotion to resistance.

and began building up a practice as a lawyer. I did not abandon my political work but, since I was out of touch with the capital, it became a rather small-scale private activity.

Nevertheless I succeeded, in Rheinhessen and elsewhere, in building up a trustworthy cell of opposition. The same sort of thing was going on all over Germany.

My real participation in the resistance movement began in 1938, when I returned to Berlin. The situation then was much changed. The political forces opposed to Hitler, now operating under cover, no longer exhausted themselves fighting one another, as they had before 1933. They still retained their individuality, but a loose co-operation had developed, through which they mutually strove for their common objective.

My old friend Bismarck introduced me to Maj. Gen. Hans Oster, a high official in the Counterespionage Division, and I abruptly found myself in the very center of the German resistance. Oster, a man with great strength of character and presence of mind, was an old-line army officer who had long been secretly working against Hitler. Now he was performing a key role in the movement. From his strategic post in the Counterespionage Division, virtually under the nose of the Gestapo, he was establishing anti-Hitler alliances with high-ranking generals. Without such military backing, the civilian forces of resistance were helpless, for this was no democracy, where a ruler could be ousted by peaceful balloting.

Oster's vital spadework was being made possible by his chief, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, head of the Counterespionage Division. Canaris loathed Hitler and National Socialism. He felt that he was too old to take an active part in the resistance himself, but he furnished a protective covering for Oster and allowed him free rein in his scheming.

At this prewar stage, our best anti-Nazi contacts in the army were with Col. Gen. Werner von Fritsch, chief of the German High Command, and Col. Gen. Ludwig Beck, chief of the Army General Staff. However, we were soon deprived of one of these allies. General Fritsch's attitude became known to the Gestapo. He was brought to trial on a



Plotter's dilemma was that Kluge, shown giving Hitler a false smile, never could make up his mind.



BLACK STAR

Heavy, heavy always hung the fearful Führer's head. The author tells how he discovered that the military cap worn by Hitler in this picture was plated with three and a half pounds of protecting steel.

The late Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben, a resolute worker against the Nazi regime, is pictured below at the "trial" which resulted in his being degraded, tortured and finally hanged for treason.



trumped-up charge of homosexuality. Although ultimately acquitted, he did not get back his former post. He was eventually killed in Poland in 1939.

But collaboration with other high officers went on. Meanwhile resistance leaders had decided, as war became a certainty, that it would be wiser to await the actual outbreak of hostilities before taking any open action.

They reasoned that the army, our chosen instrument for unseating Hitler, would get greatly increased powers in wartime. Then our army friends could much more easily bring off a coup, and make it stick.

Another prime objective of the resistance at this time was to strengthen our contacts with foreign countries, especially England. To this end, I was sent to England shortly before the fighting began. I looked up Lord Lloyd, later British Minister of Colonies, and told him that war was about to break out; that it would begin with an attack on Poland; and that England's current efforts to form an alliance with Russia would fail, because Hitler and Stalin were about to conclude a pact. Lord Lloyd asked my permission to pass on this report to Lord Halifax, the Foreign Minister, and I raised no objection.

I also had a talk with Winston Churchill at his estate. I began by saying, "I am not a Nazi, but I am a loyal patriot," at which Churchill smiled and said, "So am I." I am not at liberty now to divulge the conversation that followed.

After completing my English assignment, I returned to Germany. On September 1, 1939, Hitler unloosed his forces against Poland and the second World War was on. In the German resistance, we felt it was time to strike. We had worked out an ambitious plan.

Col. Gen. Kurt von Hammerstein, a Hitler-hater and one-time chief of the German High Command, had been brought out of retirement and given command of an army on the Rhine. It was arranged that Hitler would be asked to visit this army to get a firsthand impression of the forces available to meet the expected attacks by France. When Hitler arrived, General Hammerstein would seize him and force him out of power.

The preliminaries went along smoothly. The visit was duly scheduled while fighting was still going on in Poland. Then Hitler canceled the trip. It is certain that he knew nothing of our plan, but he had an almost uncanny intuition where his personal safety was involved. Soon afterward Hammerstein was relieved of his command and once more put on the inactive list. He died in retirement in 1942.

It was to be more than two years after the Hammerstein scheme before our part of the resistance movement again felt itself ready to carry out a plot against Hitler. The victory in Poland in 1939 was followed in the spring by the unexpectedly easy conquest of France. It would be psychologically impossible to turn a victorious German army against Hitler. Only a major defeat



Hitler hater. General Henning von Tresckow repeatedly risked all to kill his Enemy No. 1.

could break the spell Hitler had cast over the German people and the German army.

I myself was drafted in October, 1939, and stationed, as a noncommissioned officer with an infantry regiment, first in the Hunsrück Mountains and then at the West Wall in Northern Lorraine. This rather isolated me from the resistance movement.

In early 1941, however, I was brought back into it by Maj. Gen. Henning von Tresckow, an indomitable Hitler opponent whom I had met just before the war, and maintained contact with since. Now first staff officer of the Central Army Group on the eastern front, he had me transferred there as his liaison officer. This enabled me to participate fully in his unceasing efforts against Hitler.

By the fall of 1941 we could see the first signs of the coming military defeat in Russia.

Tresckow set out to capitalize on this situation. He had a long talk with Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, chief of the Central Army Group, in which he made a gloomy analysis of the war outlook and placed the entire blame on Hitler.

At heart, Bock disliked National Socialism, but he was obstinately loyal to Hitler. Before Tresckow could finish, Bock jumped up, trembling with anger, and ran from the room, shouting, "I will not tolerate this attack on the Führer! I will defend the Führer against anyone who dares to assail him!" I was sitting in Bock's anteroom and could hear every word. It was obvious that we were not going to convert Bock to our cause.

In the period following this episode I was chiefly occupied with two tasks. Through repeated flights back and forth between Russia and Berlin, I established liaison between opposition groups in the front-line and home armies.

In addition, I maintained our pipeline to England through irregular visits to a Swedish go-between in Berlin. Eventually this contact was to prove most valuable.

But that was much later. We were still in the early phases. On one of my trips to Berlin in the autumn of 1941, I learned from General Oster that Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben, commander on the inactive western front, was contemplating a military blow against Hitler. Unfortunately, I could hold out no hope that Bock would cooperate on the eastern front. Witzleben decided to delay action until he had undergone some surgery. While he was still in the hospital, Hitler relieved him of his command.

So far, our luck had been almost all bad, but after November, 1941, it took an important shift for the better. The great German defeat we had been expecting took place in Russia. Bock was out as chief of the Central Army Group.

He was succeeded by Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, who proved more susceptible to Tresckow's persuasion than Bock had been.

Kluge was not so able an organizer as Bock. Moreover, he was then simply a non-Nazi, rather than an anti-Nazi. But there was a small spark of light in him.

For months Tresckow struggled to fan it into flame. Always Kluge vacillated. Time and again, Tresckow thought he had brought Kluge around, only to discover a few days later that he was backsliding.

Meanwhile, I was expanding my contacts in Berlin. From July, 1942, on, I was in frequent touch with Col. Gen. Ludwig Beck and Dr. Karl Goerdeler, the two top leaders of the resistance. Beck might be described as the brains and Goerdeler as the heart of the movement.

Beck was not the typical general. He was a profound man whose wisdom was not limited to purely military matters. His every word and gesture demonstrated a remarkable balance and precision of mind. He had resigned as chief of the Army General Staff before the war, in protest against the occupation of Czechoslovakia, but was still influential. Although the German resistance was drawn from widely divergent groups, none ever questioned Beck's right to leadership. If Beck had a weakness, it was that he entered the movement because of a compelling sense of duty, rather than from deep emotional feeling.

Doctor Goerdeler was nominally a representative of the Bosch industrial enterprises. He had been mayor of Leipzig and also price administrator for Germany, but resigned because he was unable to work under Hitler. He strove single-mindedly to build up the widest and most effective possible opposition to Hitler. Some key men in the German resistance were impelled by innumerable disappointments to turn to other plans or abandon the work altogether, but not Goerdeler. He never lost hope. His driving spirit helped keep the movement alive during some of its most discouraging periods.

I suggested to Goerdeler that he go with me to Smolensk and help out Tresckow in his efforts to swing Marshal Kluge, our irresolute Central Army Group commander, permanently to our side. Goerdeler did not hesitate. His friends in the high command provided the necessary forged papers, and with them he came to Kluge's headquarters in Smolensk. Building on Tresckow's groundwork, Goerdeler secured a definite pledge of support from Kluge. Although Kluge later wavered periodically and tried to back out, from then on he inwardly felt himself committed to us.

Near the end of 1942 there were promising new war developments. In November, the Americans and British landed in North Africa. Shortly afterward the 6th German Army was encircled at Stalingrad and destroyed. Out at Central Army Group headquarters, Tresckow and I agreed that there should now be definite action to overthrow Hitler.

In high resistance circles in Berlin, the same sort of thinking was going on. There had long been disagreement between the civilian and military elements of the resistance on the method by which Hitler was to be unseated. The civilians, led by Doctor Goerdeler, favored taking Hitler prisoner and putting him on trial, as it were, before the court of world opinion. They shrank from assassination, feeling that it would make Hitler a martyr.

But the military group, whose chief spokesman was General Beck, considered it wholly impractical to take the Führer alive. Seventy million Germans, as well as much of the non-German population of Europe, had been bewitched by Adolf Hitler. The German soldier had taken an oath of allegiance to him. Only by killing Hitler, Beck felt, could the evil spell be broken.

This military view had finally prevailed, and the German resistance was now united in its determination to kill

the Führer. Obviously, an assassination alone would not be enough. It must be followed promptly by the armed seizure of the key positions in Berlin and the installing of a new administration.

Ideally, the assassination should be carried out by the front-line army, with the home army ready to take over instantly in Berlin, before the Nazis knew what was happening. Gen. Hans Oster, whom I have already described as a sort of managing director for the resistance, had worked out plans for the occupation of Berlin, in cooperation with Infantry Gen. Friedrich Olbricht, a key commander in home-army headquarters. Now they needed a man in the front-line army who could light the fuse for a *coup d'état* by killing Hitler. They found their man in my mentor, Henning von Tresckow.

Oster and Tresckow never saw or spoke to each other. It was my duty to maintain secret liaison between them. Anyone who lived in Germany during the war can realize the precautions we had to take to keep the Gestapo from getting on to our plot. We avoided any conference that was not absolutely imperative.

Our plans were near completion by the end of 1942. However, General Olbricht, of the home army, asked for an extension of eight weeks, so that he and Oster might complete their arrangements for seizing Cologne, Munich and Vienna, as well as Berlin. When the eight weeks were up, on instructions from Tresckow, I had another conversation with Olbricht.

"We are ready," he said. "The fuse can be touched off."

For some time Tresckow had been making preparations to light the fuse. He redoubled his missionary work on our Central Army Group chief, Field Marshal von Kluge, for not only was Kluge in a position to make or break the assassination attempt but his example would undoubtedly influence many wavering commanders throughout the army.

But first Hitler had to be induced to leave his headquarters in East Prussia and visit the Central Army Group. Tresckow went to a long-standing acquaintance, Gen. Rudolf Schmundt, Hitler's Chief Adjutant. Schmundt was devoted to Hitler, but not clever enough to realize that Tresckow had any hidden motives in requesting the visit. Thus it was officially decreed that Hitler should call upon Marshal von Kluge in Smolensk during the first part of March, 1943. Characteristically, there were several postponements, but finally, on March thirteenth, Hitler came by plane to Smolensk.

A cavalry regiment commanded by one of our confederates, Lt. Col. Georg von Boeselager, was posted at Kluge's headquarters, and Hitler could easily have been done away with there. But shortly before Hitler's arrival, Kluge had got cold feet again. He protested that the world, the German people and the German soldiers would not understand an assassination at this time. He refused to go through with the plan.

This was a severe jolt, but Tresckow and I were not ready to give up. We decided to do the job ourselves, trusting that once Hitler's death was an accomplished fact, Kluge would follow his natural inclinations and swing openly to the Nazi opposition.

Our method was one which would not implicate Kluge—would, in fact, make the whole thing seem like an accident rather than an assassination. We were going to plant a bomb in Hit-

ler's plane and time it to explode during his return flight. German explosives would not do, for they could be set off only by a fuse which made a slight hissing sound and might be discovered. We chose an English bomb, of a type we had been experimenting with for months. It had a silent time fuse, and could be set for ten minutes, half an hour or two hours. It was compact yet powerful; a single bomb, no larger than a thick book, could destroy everything in a medium-sized room.

To be on the safe side, we took two bombs and made a package of them that resembled two bottles of cognac. We had to pack them in such a way that it would be possible, without disturbing the wrapping, to press the fuse. The day Hitler was due, I temporarily locked the package in a trunk. I alerted our organization in Berlin, by phoning to an intermediary a code word meaning the attempt was about to begin.

Meanwhile, Kluge and Tresckow drove to the Smolensk airfield and met Hitler, who appeared as usual with an incredibly large retinue, including his doctor and his cook. Hitler rode with Kluge directly to headquarters, where they went into conference in Kluge's office.

As he entered the office, Hitler laid down the peculiar military-style cap he always wore. I had always been curious about this cap. Now, with no one watching, I impulsively reached to pick it up and have a look. I was startled to find it heavy as a cannon ball. On examination, I saw why. Our dauntless dictator, who professed to be beloved by all Germans, had his cap lined with fully three and a half pounds of steel plating for protection.

After the conference in Kluge's office, there was a luncheon in the higher officers' mess. As always, Hitler was served a special meal prepared by the cook he had brought along, and the food had to be tasted in his sight by his doctor. Watching Hitler eat was a most disagreeable experience. He shoveled in the food, consisting of assorted vegetables, with his right hand. However, he did not lift his hand to his mouth, but kept his mouth down over the plate. Now and then, he drank various nonalcoholic beverages that were arranged at his place. By his order, there was no smoking after the meal.

During the meal Tresckow asked one of the men in Hitler's escort if he would mind taking back a little package containing two bottles of cognac for Maj. Gen. Hellmuth Stieff, of the High Command. The man unconcernedly agreed. After the luncheon, Hitler, accompanied by Kluge and Tresckow, drove back to the airfield. In the meantime I got the package from the trunk and brought it to the airfield. I waited until Hitler had dismissed his hosts and was about to enter his plane. Then I started the fuse, which was set for half an hour, and gave the package to the man Tresckow had spoken to. The man climbed into Hitler's plane. In a few minutes the plane took off.

We drove back to our headquarters, where I again phoned to Berlin, to notify them that the first step had been taken. We knew that Hitler's plane was equipped with special safety devices. It was compartmentalized into several separate cabins. Hitler's section was armored, and had a mechanism enabling him to make a parachute descent directly from it. But we expected our bombs to disintegrate the whole plane or at least tear such a large

piece from it that it would crash without warning.

But nothing happened. After two hours, an announcement came that Hitler had landed as scheduled in Rastenburg and returned to his headquarters.

The assassination had obviously failed, but we could not understand why and, naturally, we were greatly agitated. It was bad enough that Hitler had escaped death, but it was almost worse that discovery of the bombs would inevitably lead to our own exposure and endanger a wide circle of important collaborators.

First I called Berlin once more, to report in code that the attempt had misfired. Then Tresckow and I tried to figure out what could be done to salvage the situation. The package of bombs must not reach General Stieff, for he was not then a member of our conspiracy.

Finally, Tresckow called up the man in Hitler's escort who had carried the package and asked him to hold it for a day, since it had got mixed up with another. From the manner in which the man assented, we knew the package was still assumed to contain cognac.

The next day, on a military pretext, I flew in the regular courier plane to Hitler's headquarters and got back the package with the bombs, in exchange for one that really consisted of two bottles of cognac. Even today I can vividly recall my alarm as the man smilingly handed back the fateful package, carelessly jostling it so violently that I was afraid it might go off.

I drove directly to Korsche, where a special army train of sleeping cars left in the evening for Berlin. I went into my compartment, locked the door and cautiously opened the package with a razor. Then I saw what had gone

wrong. The bomb's mechanism had worked up to a certain point and then stopped. The fuse was supposed to break a small bottle of acid, which then ate through a wire holding back the firing pin. All this had happened and the firing pin had shot forward. But the percussion cap had not gone off.

We weren't quite finished with that obstreperous bomb. A few days later, Hitler was to attend the annual ceremonies in Berlin commemorating the fallen soldier. Col. Rudolf von Gersdorff, of Central Army Group headquarters, was ordered to attend. On a hunch, Tresckow approached him and won him completely over to us. Gersdorff volunteered to use the bomb in another attempt on Hitler's life.

At Tresckow's instructions, I looked up Gersdorff at the Hotel Eden in Berlin, and handed him the bomb. But we didn't have any more fuses for

this British-made device, and we never succeeded in getting one. One of Hans Oster's most reliable collaborators, Councilor Justus Delbrück, son of the famous historian, tried to find one for us, but had no luck.

This completed the failure of our first attempt on Hitler's life. The whole episode was a tremendous disappointment, of course, but it had its bright side. It had served as a test run on the movement's preparations for seizing power in Berlin, and glaring inadequacies in that end of the operation had been disclosed. Now we would dedicate ourselves to organizing a bigger and better plot.

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"...one assassination scheme after another was planned. Always something intervened..." A survivor of the authenticated German underground gives the true story of how the last try failed—and the Gestapo pounced.

PART TWO

THE German resistance movement was busier than ever after March 13, 1943, when the bombs we had planted in Hitler's plane failed to explode. Although this effort to kill the Führer had miscarried, it had at least gone undiscovered by the Gestapo and had taught us valuable lessons. We saw that our preparations for seizing power upon Hitler's death had been inadequate. We buckled down to more thorough planning for the overthrow of Hitler and the Nazis. This renewed activity was to culminate the following year in the famous assassination attempt in Hitler's conference room, through which a startled world first learned two years ago this month, that Hitler had determined opponents inside Germany.

My own role continued to be that of an emissary and all-around handy man, particularly for Maj. Gen. Henning von Tresckow, one of the most intrepid figures in the resistance movement. Tresckow was first staff officer of the Central Army Group in Russia, and I was his liaison officer. Together we had undertaken the March thirteenth effort to blow up Hitler's plane which came so close to success.

The biggest single weakness which had been revealed during this episode, Tresckow and I felt,

was inadequate co-ordination between our front-line army group and the home army in Berlin. To help straighten this out, he pretended to have been exhausted by the strain and excitement of the Russian campaign. He was given several months' leave to take a rest cure, and went to his sister's home in Neubabelsberg, between Berlin and Potsdam.

This put Tresckow in an excellent position for resistance work, but about the same time another key man in the movement got into difficulties. This was Maj. Gen. Hans Oster, an official in the Counterespionage Division who had been serving as a coordinator of resistance activities. Shortly before summer, one of Oster's closest collaborators, Councilor Hans von Dohnanyi, was arrested on suspicion of disloyal activity. Oster was compromised in the ensuing court-martial investigation. Until then, Oster had been shielded by his chief, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, but now Canaris could no longer keep him in the Counterespionage Division. Oster was shunted to the officers' reserve, and so the movement lost its managing director.

An able replacement was found, however, in Col. Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg. Count Stauffenberg was chief of staff in the General Army Office under Infantry Gen. Friedrich Olbricht, one of our leading army collaborators.

Count Stauffenberg was even more strategically placed than Hans Oster had been, and he was ideally fitted to take over the work. He was a man of unusual organizational experience and abilities, with a deep-seated loathing for Hitler. The Stauffenbergs were an old Bavarian family rooted in Catholicism. Count Stauffenberg had a distinguished war record. As a member of the General Staff, he made a fine showing in staff work; transferred to the Afrika Korps, he similarly excelled in the field. He was badly wounded while fighting the English in Italy, losing one eye, his right hand and two fingers of his left hand. These wounds led to his transfer back to the General Staff.

Over-all leadership of the resistance movement continued to be exercised by Col. Gen. Ludwig Beck, now on the retired list, but still our most influential military champion, and Dr. Karl Goerdeler, former mayor of Leipzig and our No. 1 civilian spark plug.

Four major problems faced us. We had to draw up detailed military plans for seizing Berlin. We had to decide what political form our new government would take. We must win more high-ranking army commanders to our side. Finally, it was necessary to work out a new assassination scheme. Groundwork on all these matters was completed during ten summer weeks in 1943.



Showing the effects of the final assassination attempt, Hitler has to shake with his left hand at a subsequent meeting. The little guy with his arm extended is Goebbels; the smiling terrorist with glasses (left center) is Himmler.

The military details for the coup were largely developed by Count Stauffenberg and Maj. Ulrich von Oertzen, in collaboration with General Tresckow. The starting point was to find out what home-army troops would be available to us in and around Berlin, and what SS units would be there to oppose them. The precise disposition of forces at any future date was, of course, impossible to predict, but it was apparent that the SS would have a distinct advantage in numbers and equipment. Furthermore, the SS barracks were close to the government offices, radio stations, utilities and other key points. Thus it was inevitable that the situation would be critical during the first twenty-four hours following the assassination; after that the army could overcome the numerical superiority of the SS.

Tresckow, Stauffenberg and Oertzen worked out detailed plans for the entire operation, and put them in the form of a series of commands. The first command asserted that the SS had attempted a *Putsch*, which had to be suppressed. Army troops were ordered to disarm the SS forces and, if necessary, destroy them. To make this and other commands in the initial twenty-four hours convincing, they were to be issued in the name of Col. Gen. Fritz Fromm, commander of the home army, although he was not a member of our conspiracy. After twenty-four hours, we would drop all sham, and from then on orders would go out over the signature of Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben, a sturdy Hitler opponent whom we had slated to become commander in chief of the German armed forces. When Tresckow, Stauffenberg and Oertzen submitted the set of orders to Witzleben, he promptly gave them his formal approval.

Meanwhile, equally vital planning was being done on the political front. Immediately after the assassination, there would doubtless be a period of widespread unrest and uncertainty, during which a military dictatorship would be necessary. But this was to last no longer than three months. Then the military would withdraw to the background and turn over full power to a civilian government.

This new government was to be democratic, with representatives of every political faith. For years, Dr. Karl Goerdeler, our civilian leader, had been negotiating with men of all parties from the left wing to the right. Catholic forces of the center pledged co-operation. Labor-union men and even the Communists declared their willingness to participate.

There would be a two-house parliament, along the lines of the English system. The chief executive would be a chancellor, corresponding to a prime minister. In addition, it was felt that there must be one department that stood above political discussion, for the character and history of the German people are such that leadership cannot be built up exclusively from below. To meet this need, many of us favored a monarchy.

In the two top posts of this new government, the resistance planned to install its two top leaders. Col. Gen. Ludwig Beck was to serve as chief of state, until a final decision was made as to the form of government. Doctor Goerdeler was to be chancellor. A labor leader was to be made Minister of the Interior, and leftists were to get some of the other cabinet posts.

In addition to our specific military and political preparations, we also needed to line up the support of more

high-ranking army commanders. We already counted on Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, under whom Henning von Tresckow and I were serving in the Central Army Group in Russia. Tresckow set out to win over at least two more field marshals with front-line commands.

Tresckow was already well acquainted with Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, and thought he had valuable organizational talents. He strove to convert Manstein to our cause. Manstein was obviously moved when Tresckow preached that he had a responsibility to history, but he could not bring himself to take the plunge. Finally he became afraid of Tresckow's influence. When, at the end of 1943, the Personnel Office nominated Tresckow to be chief of staff of Manstein's army group, Manstein objected strongly. Gen. Rudolf Schmundt, Hitler's Chief Adjutant and head of the Personnel Office, was surprised at this, and asked the reason.

"Tresckow is an excellent staff officer," Manstein said, "but his adjustment to National Socialism is negative."

This judgment, which Schmundt later reported to Tresckow himself, effectively stymied Tresckow's military career. He was never able to advance to posts from which he could have served the resistance even more usefully.

Another general who refused to commit himself to the conspiracy was Col. Gen. Heinz Guderian. Tresckow and Doctor Goerdeler negotiated with him, but found that he was an opportunist, who would come in only if success were assured. Ultimately he was to cash in on the failure of the assassination attempt, emerging from the episode with the post of chief of the Army General Staff.

However, two other generals with field commands declared their readiness to co-operate. They were Col. Gen. Otto von Stülpnagel, commander in chief in France, and Infantry Gen. Alexander von Falkenhausen, commander in chief in Belgium and Northern France.

Our political plans were now complete. All that remained was to arrange the vital opening move in the *coup d'état*—the assassination of Hitler.

To make sure of the precise situation at Hitler's headquarters, I flew there twice and talked with Lt. Dietrich von Bose, a resistance adherent who was familiar with the place. He gave me an exact outline of Hitler's daily schedule.

Hitler slept until ten o'clock in the morning, when a servant awakened him. At the same time his breakfast was brought to his bedroom on a dumbwaiter, along with excerpts from foreign newspapers which Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop had selected. Anything Hitler wanted to read was typed out on a special typewriter with unusually large letters, so that he would not betray his nearsightedness by the way he held the paper. At eleven o'clock he received his chief adjutant, who informed him on personnel matters. A conference on the military situation began at noon, with the chief of the High Command and the chief of the Army General Staff giving reports. Other officers attended as needed. Here Hitler personally decided all military questions.

Lunch began at two and lasted, because of the monologues he inflicted on his table companions, until four o'clock. Next Hitler took an afternoon nap, from which he got up between six and seven.

Then he held audiences. Dinner was from eight to ten. After that, Hitler gathered around him a circle of carefully selected men with whom he conversed until four in the morning, doing most of the talking himself. Then he went to bed. The night dissertations were attended by his two secretaries. He did not bring his mistresses, of whom he had several, to his headquarters, but kept them at Obersalzberg. His daily routine was altered only in emergencies, and under no circumstances was he awakened from his sleep.

Our best opportunities in this schedule were the noon military conference and the night session. Our assassin would have to get himself invited to one or the other. He would have to use explosives. A swarm of SS men who never left the room made it virtually impossible to draw a pistol and shoot.

One of the hardest jobs was finding an assassin. Among our small group of possibilities some men frankly said they lacked the nerve to carry it through. Others had moral scruples about being responsible for the deaths of bystanders in the room with Hitler.

Finally, Maj. Gen. Hellmuth Stieff, of the High Command, offered to do the job with the help of two aides, Major Kuhn and Lt. Albrecht von Hagen. There was some thought at that time of introducing a new uniform in the German Army. Stieff and his aides planned to get into Hitler's room on the pretext of showing him the uniform, and then commit the assassination. The exhibition of the uniform was scheduled several times, but in his usual fashion, Hitler kept putting it off, and finally canceled it altogether.

Another plan was to have Hitler repeat his earlier visit to the Central Army Group in Russia, where Tresckow and I had almost brought about the Führer's death in March, 1943, but nothing could prevail on Hitler to travel again to the Central Army Group.

Then came a new cause of delay. General Beck, who was to be regent in the proposed new government, was taken sick and had to undergo an operation. I went to Berlin at this time to talk over the situation with Count Stauffenberg and General Olbricht, our key men in the home-army setup.

"I have news for you as bad as any we have ever got in the whole war," Olbricht told me. "Admiral Canaris (chief of German military intelligence and a resistance sympathizer) visited me recently and gave me an account of one of his conversations with Himmler. Himmler told Canaris to his face that he well knew there were considerable numbers in the army who were toying with plans for an uprising. But he would not let it reach that point; he would take countermeasures

in time. He had only tolerated the situation this long in order to ferret out who was really behind it all. Now he knew. He would deal with people like Beck and Goerdeler soon enough."

This was a most disturbing development. The only thing to do was to try to keep our nerve and to redouble our efforts. We wanted desperately to stage our coup before the expected western invasion by the Allies took place. But one unfortunate accident followed another until, on June 6, 1944, the invasion began.

Was there any point now in carrying out our plot? We deliberated and decided to go through with it. Even if Hitler's overthrow would no longer do much good, we felt that we must risk ourselves in open action, to vindicate

the German resistance movement in the eyes of history and the world.

On June 22, 1944, the Russians followed up the western invasion with their great offensive in the east. Time was now running very short. Ten days later, I received a message from Count Stauffenberg. He had decided it was impossible to wait any longer. He was going to kill Hitler himself. We should be prepared for the assassination to take place any day.

In the original planning, Stauffenberg had not been considered as a possible assassin, since he had only one hand, from which two fingers were missing. But he was fearless and able, and one of the few resistance men who were in a position to get at Hitler. He was now chief of staff for Col. Gen. Fritz Fromm, commander of the home army. Stauffenberg had told Fromm that he was anti-Hitler, and Fromm had indicated sympathy with this viewpoint.

Out at Central Army Group headquarters we waited hopefully for the big news. On July 20, 1944, there finally came a coded telephone flash from a go-between in Berlin, reporting that the assassination had succeeded. A short time later, however, the German radio announced that an attempt had been made on Hitler's life, but he had been only slightly wounded. At first, Henning von Tresckow and I were confident that this was a lie. We began to have our doubts when an order arrived through regular military channels stating that no commands originating in Berlin were to be followed. We did not know definitely that the assassination had failed until Hitler himself came on the radio at midnight in a special broadcast to the German people.

What had happened, I later learned, was this: Count Stauffenberg had taken into Hitler's office a brief case loaded with explosives, timed to go off within a few minutes. He left the brief case there and departed unsuspected. Soon after, he heard an explosion so tremendous that he was sure Hitler and everyone else in the room had been killed. For many hours Stauffenberg believed Hitler was dead. This was the reason for the false report of the Führer's death we had received from Berlin.

There was wild confusion in Berlin immediately after the assassination attempt. For a period of several hours, Stauffenberg, General Olbricht and another associate held General Fromm, commander of the home army, a prisoner. Stauffenberg told him that Hitler was dead, but the High Command had assured Fromm this was not so. Fromm had previously shown sympathy for our aims, but now he stubbornly refused to co-operate in having Berlin seized by his troops.

By evening, when Hitler's survival became definitely established, the opportunity was gone. Fromm was now able to make captives of his erstwhile captors. He ordered the immediate execution of Stauffenberg, Olbricht, Beck, and two of their colleagues. General Beck asked and received permission to take his own life; the others fell before firing squads.

Ironically, Fromm's conduct on this fateful day pleased the Nazis no more than it had us. Although his obstinacy had done much to wreck the conspiracy, the Nazis charged him with cowardice for failing to act immediately. Ultimately, Fromm himself was executed.

All this I found out much later. On the night following the assassination attempt, Henning von Tresckow and I

knew only that the undertaking to which we had dedicated ourselves had failed. Tresckow said he was going to kill himself immediately, before the Nazis could capture him and try to force the names of other conspirators from him. I urged him to wait. We argued almost the entire night, but he could not be dissuaded. It was finally agreed that Tresckow was going to commit suicide at the front, while I would try to stay alive, so that I might someday work to justify the resistance movement before public opinion.

Tresckow had no regrets about his participation in the movement. He was satisfied that what he had tried to do was for the good not only of Germany but of the world. "God once promised Abraham that He would not destroy Sodom if even ten righteous men could be found there," Tresckow said. "I hope that for our sakes God will likewise not destroy Germany."

In the morning Tresckow proceeded to the 28th Rifle Division, went past the forward positions, and entered no man's land unaccompanied. He used two pistols to simulate an exchange of shots, and then took out a rifle grenade and blew off his head.

For some days I waited for my own fate to catch up with me. I was not surprised when, on August seventeenth, I was awakened by a staff officer and placed under arrest. The following night I was delivered under military guard to the main prison of the Gestapo on Prinz Albert Strasse in Berlin.

Many notable resistance figures were imprisoned there. There was Dr. Karl Goerdeler, whom we had hoped to make chancellor of a new Germany; Maj. Gen. Hans Oster, co-ordinator of the resistance movement until he became suspect in 1943; former Ambassadors Ulrich von Hassell and

Werner von der Schulenburg, chief prospects for the post of foreign minister in our proposed government, and Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, head of German military intelligence. All these men were eventually executed.

This is an appropriate point at which to list other important personalities in my story who also paid the death penalty. They include Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben, who was to be our commander of all German armed forces after Hitler's assassination; Maj. Gen. Hellmuth Stieff, of the High Command, and his aide, Lt. Albrecht von Hagen, who had hoped to perform the assassination themselves; Col. Gen. Otto von Stülpnagel, who had pledged us his support as commander of German forces in France; Maj. Ulrich von Oertzen, prominent in our military planning for the seizure of Berlin, and Councilor Hans von Dohnanyi, an effective collaborator in the capital.

As for myself, I had almost nine months at the tender mercies of the Gestapo ahead of me, most of it in solitary confinement. I underwent a series of questionings by a Gestapo examiner named Habecker. From the beginning, I had a hunch that the Gestapo had no real evidence against me. I declined Habecker's invitation to save everyone time by making an immediate confession. So he went to work on me.

At first Habecker merely resorted to clumsy verbal ruses to trick me into confessing. Later he turned to force. His secretary, a girl of about twenty, joined in hitting me in the face as I stood there handcuffed and defenseless. When this system produced no results, they resorted to outright torture. The torture came in four stages. First my fingers were inserted into an instrument set with thorns, which

bored into each finger separately. Then a somewhat similar contrivance was applied to my legs. Next my whole body was racked on an instrument that resembled a bedstead. Finally I was tied in a bent-over position and repeatedly clubbed from behind with heavy cudgels. Each blow knocked me over forward, so that I fell with my full weight on my face and head.

None of these treatments caused me to confess. It ended with my losing consciousness. It was days before I had recovered sufficiently to get out of bed. My reward was to go through the entire torture process all over again.

Finally I thought of a way out. I confessed to having known that there was a conspiracy to induce Hitler to relinquish his active direction of the armed forces. The Gestapo was satisfied with this, which in itself was enough to hang me. They did not attempt to implicate me any more deeply in the plot or to pry the names of any other conspirators from me.

On February 3, 1945, I came to trial in the so-called People's Court that the Nazis had created to handle political charges. Before my case could be heard, an American air raid ended proceedings for the day. When the trial finally took place, on March sixteenth, I described with deep emotion the tortures to which I had been subjected and, unexpectedly, I was acquitted.

This did not, however, make me a free man. Back to prison I went. There I was told that the verdict of the court had obviously been wrong, and that it would be respected only to this extent: I would be shot, instead of hanged, as the other conspirators had been.

After a few days, I was taken to Flossenbürg Concentration Camp, in Upper Franconia, a so-called extermination camp, where I lived in daily ex-

pectation of death. But the American forces drew near before my turn came. I was moved to Dachau, and then to a camp near Innsbruck. The advance of the Americans was irresistible. Again I was shifted, with a large number of prisoners of many nationalities, this time to Pusterthal, south of the Brenner Pass. Because of the retreat of the German troops, the place where we were to be quartered had already been requisitioned by an army unit.

Thus we stood on the street in a driving rain, without accommodations, guarded by SS men whose expressions clearly showed that they had been badly shaken by the Allied sweep. A few of them began to discuss whether they should still kill some of us. This was too much for Pastor Niemöller, one of the most illustrious of our group of prisoners.

He went up to the SS officer in charge and said, "If these SS men here are not removed we shall kill them."

This made the impression that was intended. There were a few more critical days, but we survived them, and on May fourth we were finally liberated by an American company.

Two months later, I was delivered back to my wife and two small boys in an American jeep, loaded with toys I had bought while recuperating under Allied auspices in Switzerland. Words are scarcely adequate to describe my homecoming. My wife had long since given me up for dead, and told the children I was in heaven.

"Are you back from heaven to stay, daddy?" they asked. "Did you get these toys from the angels?"

It would be a long while, I knew, before Germany could recover from the debacle Hitler had brought upon it. But just then it seemed to me that I finally had entered heaven.

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