



The German Resistance

By David Feagin

The Rise of Resistance

- When Hitler took over he banned all communist, social democratic, and union worker parties
- Those who escaped arrest were illegals and outlaws
- In 1936 according to police statistics over 1,000 anti-Nazi groups were still at work
 - They printed leaflets disguised as other things
- The resistance was divided and caused no tangible change at first



vs.



Fritz Reck-Malleczewen wrote in his anti-Nazi novel, *Diary of a Man in Despair*, “For more than forty-two months, I have thought hate, have lain down with hate in my heart, have dreamed hate and awakened with hate. I suffocate in the knowledge that I am the prisoner of a horde of vicious apes, and I rack my brains over the perpetual riddle of how this same people which so jealousy watched over its rights a few years ago can have sunk into this stupor, in which it not only allows itself to be dominated by the street-corner idlers of yesterday, but actually, height of shame, is incapable any longer of perceiving its shame for the shame that it is”(Reck-Malleczewen 16). Friedrich Reck was a German author who was extremely anti-Nazi but only ever voiced this through his writings and diaries that he kept secret. This was in reality the only way to voice one’s opinion without the assurance of death or imprisonment. Over 1,000 anti-Nazi groups still existed in 1936 but most of them were essentially rendered useless due to the unrelenting surveillance of the Gestapo(History, Nazi Germany, German Resistance against Hitler.”). Most if not all of these communist and social democratic groups were reduced to making leaflets and using graffiti. If one was caught writing any kind of anti-Nazi sentiment or doing anything else to oppose Hitler, no matter how peaceful, they were immediately sent to concentration camps. Reck’s claims carry an immense amount of weight considering the very large amount of different political parties that were around less than 5 years before Hitler took over. The people of Germany saw that democracy wasn’t working and were desperate for a strong leader who would carry them to victory. Just as Reck described it, the people were so entranced by Hitler and mindlessly devoted to him that they could no longer recognize how shameful what they stood for truly was. They really were in a blind stupor. But, even in the face of the most unspeakable atrocities, there will always be those select few that are willing to risk their lives for a cause that they know is just.

The White Rose

- *In 1942 a group of college students from the university of Munich performed a peaceful anti-Nazi protest using pamphlets and graffiti.*
- *Three of their lead members, among others, Hans Scholl, Sophie Scholl, and Christoph Probst were all executed by guillotine for "High Treason"*



*Hans Scholl, Sophie Scholl, Christoph Probst
(Left to Right)*

Hans and Sophie Scholl are two of those rare German citizens that were willing to take the risk and stand up for truth. Hans and Sophie were two students at the university of Munich who felt the personal impact of Hitler's regime and despised it to the point of action. They like most other young German men and women at that time, grew up blindly following Hitler and were members of the Hitler Youth and Union of German Girl organizations. As time passed they began reading anti-Nazi sermons and they attended a class taught by Kurt Huber, a psychology teacher who's lectures included hidden criticism of the regime. Hans served at the eastern front for three months and saw unspeakable atrocities that exposed him to the true nature of the Nazi cause. When he returned, Hans told many of his friends about his experiences and they formed a peaceful anti-Nazi group called the White Rose(Blakemore). They protested by printing out leaflets to random people that they found in the phone book and by secretly giving them to anyone they could find. They also painted anti-Nazi graffiti all over the walls of Munich. They urged readers to passively resist and break free of the Nazi philosophy that had been holding them captive for so long(Blakemore). They knew the risks and yet they were still willing. Sophie Scholl said, "So many people died for this regime its time somebody died against it"(History, Nazi Germany, German Resistance against Hitler.). They painted phrases on the walls such as "Freedom!" and "Hitler the mass murderer!" Regardless of their courageous efforts, this movement was bound to fail because of the tight watch that the Gestapo had on all anti-Nazi sentiment. On February 18, 1943 Hans and Sophie were showering leaflets off a balcony in the halls of Munich when they were caught by the Gestapo. On February 22nd, they were tried before the "People's Tribunal" in Munich and that afternoon they were executed by guillotine. The most ironic thing about this whole situation is that the jury claimed that the Hans had been "deluded" into no longer believing in the war. Hans's last words were, "Long live freedom!"(Blakemore). The White Rose group was one of the few anti-Nazi movement that actually made an impact on the society. Their movement's impact on history will always be felt and it is astonishing that you don't hear more about this group of students who were willing to die for their cause.

Assassination attempts on Hitler



Georg Elser

November 8, 1939
Elaborate plan using
large bomb placed in a
Brewery that Hitler was
speaking at
Hitler left early
8 people were still killed



Henning von Tresckow

March 13, 1943
Smuggled a bomb onto Hitler's
plane
Hitler escaped unharmed
The bomb failed to detonate



Rudolf Christoph Freiherr von
Gersdorff

March 24, 1943
Suicide bomber at a weapons
exposition
Hitler left early and Gersdorff
defused the bomb



Claus Von Stauffenberg

July 20, 1944
Planted a briefcase bomb
next to Hitler
Hitler was unharmed
4 men died

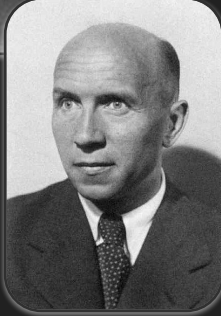
The peaceful protests and passive defiance toward the Nazi regime was simply ineffective and for any real change to occur, there needed to be a more active form of resistance. Movements such as the White Rose inspired many others to take action and in some cases through means of violence. Thus arose the many different attempts that were made on Hitler's life throughout his rule. One of the first assassination attempts was by Georg Elser a carpenter and communist who vehemently opposed the Nazi regime. He, along with many others, believed that Hitler would lead their country into war and financial ruin. He knew that Hitler would be making a speech at a brewery in Munich on November 8, 1939. He then made an elaborate plan using a bomb that he slowly planted into a pillar in the brewery throughout several weeks. He set the bomb on a 144 hour timer set to detonate right in the middle of Hitler's speech at 9:20. A day before Hitler's speech, he received news that he needed to return to Berlin because of the war. On November 8th, Hitler ended his speech at 9:12 pm and narrowly escaped the bomb. The bomb still detonated killing 8 people and Elser was later discovered and executed (Andrews). On March 13, 1943 Hitler visited the post of a German officer named Henning Von Tresckow. The visit was fairly uneventful but when Hitler was boarding the plane to return to Berlin, Tresckow handed a parcel containing a bomb on a 30 minute timer to one of Hitler's officers and told him that it was two bottles of brandy to give to a friend in Berlin. Tresckow along with many conspirators thought that assassinating Hitler would cause a coup against the Nazi high command. Tresckow was later horrified to hear that Hitler arrived unharmed in Berlin and that his plot had failed. Tresckow rushed to Hitler's headquarters and was able to retrieve the bomb. He later discovered that there was a defective fuse. Tresckow and his people refused to give up and only a week later planned another assassination this time at an exhibition of captured Soviet flags and weapons. The triggerman this time was a German officer named Rudolf Christoph Freiherr Von Gersdorff. He realized that security was too tight to plant a bomb so he strapped the bomb to his chest and set it to a ten minute timer. On March 21, he tried to stay next to Hitler throughout the exhibit but Hitler slipped away after a few minutes and Gersdorff ran to a bathroom and safely defused the bomb with seconds to spare (Andrews). Hitler yet again barely escapes completely unaware of the fact that an attempt was just made on his life. Gersdorff's plan was

utterly absurd because of the fact that he placed a bomb on his chest and set it on a timer. One would think that it would be much more convenient to simply have a detonator in hand. In 1944, a new resistance movement of German officers concocted a plan to kill Hitler at his command post in Prussia. Claus Von Stauffenberg, a handsome man with one eye and one hand, was the leader of this group. They planned to use a bomb hidden in a briefcase to kill Hitler during a meeting. They believed that by killing Hitler, they would start a revolt that would overthrow the Nazi regime. On July 20, 1944, Stauffenberg had everything set in place. He set his briefcase in the room with Hitler and left, saying that he needed to make a phone call. The bomb detonated and killed 4 people. Hitler although Escaped with minor injuries and again avoided death by a matter of a few feet. It was later revealed that one of Hitler's officers simply moved the briefcase to a different seat which ended up saving his fuhrers life. The planned revolt obviously failed and this caused Hitler to only further see himself as an immortal deity(Andrews).

Allen Dulles



Hans Gisevius



Fritz Kolbe

- *Allen Dulles was one of the original CIA agents and directors*
- *He was the American James Bond*
- *He received classified information from a German clerk named Fritz Kolbe and a German intelligence officer named Hans Bernd Gisevius*
- *He was the source of vital German info to Washington*

Allen Dulles was an American OSS spy master who led a web of connections with the resistance movement in Germany. He grew up in a wealthy and powerful family and was constantly meeting new American dignitaries. During his early life he was an international lawyer and he accumulated a very large amount of wealth overtime. He also became a sort of maverick and desperado who hated following the rules. When he was originally asked to join the OSS he was not to fond of the idea of having a boss and having to follow orders but he simply could not resist the life of adventure and mysterious that this job entailed. Dulles was eventually sent to Switzerland to gather as much information about Germany as he could. He was sent over in November of 1942 and was enthralled by this new life of danger and adventure. He was the perfect man for the job. Before he arrived, the US had no connection with the German Resistance and had no inside info. Dulles truly had to start from scratch and he did an excellent job of doing so. He at first tried to buy intelligence but was unsuccessful. Then a man named Fritz Kolbe entered the scene. Kolbe was a clerk in the German Foreign Ministry who had a very meek and unimtimidating stature. His job allowed him to read dispatches from the German Military to the foreign ministry. These dispatches contained highly secretive information. Kolbe would come in on Sundays and take notes on them in unintelligible handwriting. He was very anti-Nazi and anti-communist so his best option was to reach out to the Americans and the British. The British immediately refused his information. After some time Kolbe became an incredibly valuable source of info for Dulles. Another man that Dulles connected with was a German officer named Hans Bernd Gisevius. He was an early member of the gestapo who began to disdain Hitler and the Nazi regime. He was Dulles only true link to the German underground and became even a sort of trusted companion to Dulles. (Harris)

The Failure of the Resistance

- *On July 14-24, 1943 the Casablanca conference was held where FDR declared that "Unconditional Surrender" was required of the Axis countries*
- *This declaration greatly hurt Dulles' efforts of connection with the resistance*
- *The German people now had no assurance of a better life after the war*
- *America never truly took the Resistance seriously*
- *They were simply bound to fail with no real external backing*



The Casablanca Conference

These situations and contacts were optimal for Dulles. He was receiving crucial information at no financial cost and had really created a web of connections to the resistance. So what went wrong? In 1943, during the Casablanca conference, FDR declared that the allied side required "unconditional surrender" from the axis countries(Harris). This deceleration shattered any real chance of America being able to work with the resistance. Dulles pleaded with Roosevelt to loosen the terms of this deceleration but he would not budge. Dulles tried his hardest to convince the Germans that they would be taken care of after the war but there was no real assurance. What had been years of meticulous planning now became a suicide mission because these brave men and women had no real external support. These men were honorable men who felt the need to stand up against the atrocities that Hitler committed. Because of Roosevelt's stubbornness and America's unwillingness to even take the resistance seriously, the German resistance was simply bound to fail. This of course would not stop many of them from pushing on towards a better future. Wilhelm Canaris was yet another example of a very highly ranked German officer who was actually anti-Nazi and was able to form small hot spots of Resistance. It is men like him and Tresckow and Stauffenberg that needed American support. They wanted the assurance of safety after the war but were now faced with a similar situation to what happened in wwI. If they did end up overthrowing Hitler there was no assurance of a future prosperity. This also caused the German people who were with Hitler to have a renewed sense of passion in their battles because they now adopted a "we might as well die fighting" mentality(Harris). It is a shame that America refused to take the Resistance seriously. This was not simply a silly movement that carries no real significance. There were many several on Hitler's life that were minutes or feet away from actually happening. If these men had real backing from America, one can only imagine the amount of lives that could have been saved through a successful assassination of Hitler.

A Long Lasting Legacy

The ending for the Resistance was not necessarily a happy story but regardless they will always be remembered in history for their incredible courage and willingness to fight for justice even in the face of death.



A memorial to the members of the German Resistance in Berlin and a statue of Stauffenberg



Many of the brave men and women of the German Resistance were unable to see the fruits of their labor due to them being executed or killed in concentration camps. Hitler's reign of terror did eventually come to an end but the German people still suffered greatly from the conditions that the allies imposed on them. For the surviving members of the Resistance there was immense relief that Hitler was dead but there also remained a sense of despair in the fact there years of fighting for their freedom amounted in yet another struggle to regain their footing as a country. The resistance fighters received little immediate recognition and many of them were even disgraced by their fellow Germans due to many of them still holding loyalty to Hitler(Harris). While the Resistance did not have a happy ending and was in many ways unsuccessful, their bravery and courage will always be remembered. In Berlin there is a museum exhibit dedicated to the German Resistance. There have been manly films created about the different assassination plots on Hitler's life. The sacrifice that these men and women made for their country should never be forgotten and should be looked upon as a testament of human willpower, honor, and courage.

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