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Kathleen Michelle MacIndoe

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**THE FORGOTTEN FACES OF OPERATION VALKYRIE: MAJOR-GENERAL HENNING
VON TRESCKOW AND GENERAL FRIEDRICH OLBRICHT IN THE JULY 20 PLOT
TO ASSASSINATE HITLER**

An honors paper submitted to the Department of History and American Studies
of the University of Mary Washington
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

Kathleen Michelle MacIndoe

April 2016

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The Forgotten Faces of Operation Valkyrie: Major-General Henning von Tresckow and
General Friedrich Olbricht in the July 20 Plot to Assassinate Hitler

KATHLEEN MACINDOE

HIST 485: Historical Research

Dr. Blakemore

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Abstract

Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg's name has become synonymous with the July 20, 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler and topple the Nazi regime. However, the efforts of two other men, Major-General Henning von Tresckow and General Friedrich Olbricht, made the execution of this coup possible, and the Colonel merely stepped into the framework they established. These two men were the primary, behind-the-scenes architects of the coup due to their experience in the opposition leading up to July 20, which included prior assassination attempts, knowledge of bombs, their guiding hands through the revision of Operation Valkyrie, and the network of contacts they had built. However, because they were so involved, Tresckow and Olbricht also claim a portion of the blame for the plot's failure firstly because of the inherently flawed nature of Operation Valkyrie and secondly because their efforts to recruit loyal participants to the plot fell short.

On July 20, 1944, Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg planted a bomb inside the Wolf's Lair, Adolf Hitler's military headquarters in East Prussia where the Führer was attending a briefing. This bomb was intended to kill Hitler and allow Stauffenberg and his fellow conspirators to seize power from the Nazis via the Replacement Army as specified in Operation Valkyrie. The plotters hoped to end the tyrannical National Socialist regime and bring a swift end to World War II. Unfortunately, the bomb failed to kill Hitler, and Stauffenberg along with many of his accomplices were executed. Although Stauffenberg appears to be the most important figure, the planning and execution of this plot would likely have been impossible without the efforts of two other men, Major-General Henning von Tresckow and General Friedrich Olbricht. Tresckow and Olbricht were the main and most indispensable architects of the July 20 plot because they were seasoned members of the military resistance who applied the lessons they learned from prior experience to this latest putsch, most importantly their knowledge of how to execute a successful assassination and seize power afterwards by utilizing Operation Valkyrie. Because they were the main engineers of this plot, they also deserve a significant portion of the blame for its failure, which is attributed in part to the inherently flawed nature and tardy execution of Operation Valkyrie, as well as Tresckow and Olbricht's lack of success in recruiting loyal participants to the coup.

Upon Hitler's death as a result of the bomb Stauffenberg planted, the conspirators intended to initiate Operation Valkyrie. The Nazis originally conceived Valkyrie as a plan for the mobilization of Replacement Army troops in the case of an internal

emergency,¹ such as uprisings of forced laborers or the death of Hitler, so that order could be restored, and, if necessary, power could be smoothly transferred to the Führer's successor.² However, "Olbricht and others modified those plans to accommodate a military coup following Hitler's assassination" so that the National Socialist government would come to an end rather than continue.³ Essentially, the July 20 plotters would use Valkyrie to gain control of the government by making it appear as if the SS were staging a coup and an attack on the Wehrmacht (thereby creating internal unrest) after Hitler's death, "something the old line soldiers always feared."⁴ General Friedrich Olbricht would issue the codeword "Valkyrie" so the conspirators could seize power, while informing the German public that "a clique of Nazi Party bosses was trying to stab the fighting front in the back, and that the Army was taking over executive power to maintain order."⁵ In order to do this, "High SS officers, in some places the entire SS, and party leaders, were ordered arrested."⁶ To help them take control, the conspirators planned to use the Replacement Army, which included members of "training schools, demonstration units, depot troops, and guard battalions."⁷ This Army was a versatile tool for the conspirators because it was interspersed throughout Germany, making it easier to quickly

¹Helena Schrader, *Codename Valkyrie: General Friedrich Olbricht and the Plot Against Hitler* (Sparkford, UK: Haynes Publishing, 2009), 223.

²Schrader, 186.

³Catherine Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015), 196.

⁴Allen Welsh Dulles, *Germany's Underground* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947), 184.

⁵Peter Hoffmann, *German Resistance to Hitler* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 116.

⁶Dulles, 184

⁷Constantine FitzGibbon, *20 July* (New York: Norton, 1956), 58.

take control of the most important population centers.⁸ General Erich Fellgiebel, the Chief of Signal Troops, would cut off communications between the Wolf's Lair and all areas under German control to allow the conspirators time to set up the new government without interference from the Nazis. As Peter Hoffmann, a leading scholar of the German resistance, put it,

With the 'Valkyrie' orders and their supplementary instructions the conspirators had now created, by perfectly legitimate methods, an instrument with which they could, if conditions were right, set in motion all available mobile military forces in Germany with the exception of the SS. The orders were perfectly sensible and suitable for an emergency; on the face of it they were neutral and non-political.⁹

Unfortunately, Stauffenberg's assassination attempt failed and the coup, set into motion too late, did not succeed. Around midnight on the morning of July 21, Olbricht, Stauffenberg, and other prominent conspirators were executed by firing squad, while Tresckow committed suicide on the Eastern Front.

Despite the critical roles Tresckow and Olbricht played in the July 20 plot, their involvement has largely been glossed over in the secondary literature. Up until the late 1970s, their parts in this coup were largely nonexistent as July 20 itself was not a major topic. However, in 1977, Peter Hoffmann published his book *The History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945*, which made July 20 a hallmark of literature on the anti-Hitler movement and consequently accorded Tresckow and Olbricht critical positions in its planning and implementation. Hoffmann's narrative set a precedent that has continued into the 2000s. However, this trend has not encompassed all secondary scholarship that

⁸FitzGibbon, 58-59.

⁹Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945*, trans. Richard Barry (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 305.

discusses July 20, and many works still delegate Tresckow and Olbricht secondary roles to Stauffenberg without acknowledging the crucial parts they played in the conspiracy. This paper seeks to give them the amount of attention they rightly deserve for their inventive and pivotal influence in regards to the Valkyrie plot, but also accord them an appropriate amount of accountability for the failure of the putsch.

Born in January 1901 to a Prussian family, Henning von Tresckow came from an established line of military officers, making his own entrance into the army unsurprising.¹⁰ Upon his graduation from the war college in 1936, he joined the German General Staff and by the time of Operation Barbarossa in 1941 was the Chief of Staff of Army Group Centre, which was composed of two major armies fighting on the Eastern Front.¹¹ He had been "raised in a devout Protestant tradition, and he always saw his duty to God and country as central to his life."¹² Philipp Freiherr von Boeselager, a surviving member of the July 20 plot, said of Tresckow's faith, he "was inhabited by an ardent piety that he was not afraid to express."¹³ Like many other officers, whose growing dissatisfaction with Hitler and the Nazi regime would prompt them to join the military resistance, Tresckow had initially supported Nazism, and was even an enthusiastic recruiter for them in the late 1920s,¹⁴ before the Third Reich had been established.¹⁵ In

¹⁰Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance*, 265.

¹¹Ulrich Zwygart, "Integrity and Moral Courage: Beck, Tresckow and Stauffenberg," *Military Review* 74, no. 5 (May 1994), accessed March 27, 2015, MasterFILE Premier.

¹²Schrader, 182.

¹³Phillipp Freiherr von Boeselager, *Valkyrie: The Story of the Plot to Kill Hitler, By It's Last Member* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 96.

¹⁴Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death: The Story of the German Resistance* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 36.

fact, Hans Bernd Gisevius, a surviving resistance member, said of Tresckow, "He was for many years able to see only the side of National Socialism attractive to a soldier: the assertion of discipline, the reestablishment of military primacy, and the revision of the Versailles Treaty."¹⁶ This support for Nazism had stemmed from Tresckow's dissatisfaction with the Weimar Republic, which had only exacerbated the worsening financial crisis Germany was experiencing,¹⁷ as well as feelings of anti-Semitism,¹⁸ two elements that were characteristic of Nazi party members. Tresckow, welcoming the change from the dismal years of the Republic, overlooked the Nazi mistreatment of regime opponents, arguing that the achievements of National Socialism, such as the regaining of German military independence, far offset the brutality.¹⁹ However, as Tresckow learned more about the atrocities the Nazis were committing, he began to feel that the current government must be deposed.

Several key events in the 1930s influenced Tresckow's conversion to the opposition. Like many other officers in the military resistance, he "pointed to the events of June 30 and July 1, 1934," during the Night of the Long Knives, as the origin of his "break with the Nazis."²⁰ The Night of the Long Knives refers to the violent purge of the Nazi storm troopers (SA) during which many members were killed, including their leader, Ernst Röhm, due to Hitler's paranoia about their increasing power. Additionally,

¹⁵Theodore Hamerow, *On the Road to the Wolf's Lair: German Resistance to Hitler* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), 109.

¹⁶Hamerow, 11.

¹⁷Hamerow, 31.

¹⁸Hamerow, 67.

¹⁹Hamerow, 109.

²⁰Fest, 53.

the murders of Kurt von Schleicher and Ferdinand von Bredow, two Reichswehr (the armed forces of Germany until it was absorbed by the Wehrmacht in the mid-1930s) generals, fed his growing disdain for Nazism.²¹ Aside from this, Tresckow was also outraged at the dismissal of Werner von Fritsch, the commander-in-chief of the army, in February 1938, after the latter was accused of homosexual activity, and he felt that he and his fellow generals should have acted in support of Fritsch in order to help his situation.²² Later in 1938, when the Nazis conducted a pogrom, known as Kristallnacht, against Jews in Germany, Austria, and the recently occupied Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, Tresckow said that this "was a personal humiliation and a degradation of civilization."²³

By 1939 when Hitler invaded Poland, Tresckow remarked, "War is madness. We have to prevent it. The key person is Hitler. We have to kill him."²⁴ In light of this comment, it is clear that Tresckow was already an active member in the military resistance by the late 1930s/early 1940s, and the harsh treatment of Jews in the Soviet Union during the Nazi invasion from 1941-1942,²⁵ as well as the issuing of the Commissar and additional harsh orders,²⁶ solidified his motivations. The Commissar Order called for "guerillas and Soviet political agents" to be shot immediately.²⁷ However, Tresckow did much to resist it, as Fabian von Schlabrendorff, his adjutant, stated in his memoir *The Secret War Against Hitler* (1965):

²¹Schrader, 184.
²²Zwygart.
²³Zwygart.
²⁴Zwygart.
²⁵Michael Balfour, *Withstanding Hitler in Germany, 1933-1945* (London: Routledge, 1988), 32.
²⁶Balfour, 32.
²⁷Zwygart.

Tresckow had...decided to ignore Hitler's order to murder any Russian commissars who were taken prisoner; he also made it a point to treat other Russian prisoners decently. I still remember the day the first Russian general was taken prisoner by our Army Group. The poor man, who evidently thought his last hour had come, was visibly bewildered to find that he was accorded every courtesy, even to receiving a German general's ration of food, liquor, and cigarettes.²⁸

Although there were many things that turned Tresckow against National Socialism from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s, the primary reason he himself gave for his opposition to Hitler, especially his efforts to kill him, was "the extermination of 'tens of thousands of Jews' in the 'most horrible way.'"²⁹

Unlike Tresckow, General Friedrich Olbricht had quite a different path to the military resistance. Tresckow and Olbricht began communicating with each other in 1941, with the March 13, 1943, assassination attempt being the main resistance effort they worked on together before July 20, 1944.³⁰ Friedrich Olbricht was born in the Kingdom of Saxony in October of 1888, which made him about twelve years Tresckow's senior.³¹ Unlike Tresckow's family, Olbricht's included many educators, making his entrance into the military unpredictable, but understandable because he joined in 1907 when "the military was 'the pride of the nation.'"³² As a young soldier, Olbricht fought in World War I³³ and became a supporter of the Weimar Republic that was subsequently established in Germany after the war ended, making him "one of the few officers who

²⁸Fabian von Schlabrendorff, *The Secret War Against Hitler*, trans. Hilda Simon (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1965), 137.

²⁹Hamerow, 316.

³⁰Anton Gill, *A Honourable Defeat: A History Of German Resistance To Hitler, 1933-1945*, 1st American ed. (New York: H. Holt, 1994), 206.

³¹Schrader, 24.

³²Schrader, 26.

³³Schrader, 30.

was happy to serve the Republic...with inner conviction."³⁴ However, the Great Depression plunged Germany into a sea of economic woes, weakening support for the Republic and increasing that of the Nazis, eventually resulting in Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January 1933 and the National Socialist seizure of power. Nonetheless, Olbricht did not support Hitler's appointment and "was 'outraged, that such a dilettante with such an unsavoury past could become chancellor of the German Reich.'"³⁵ However, Olbricht's disdain for Hitler seemed to exist even in the 1920s, especially due to the first coup attempt made by the future dictator known as the Beer Hall Putsch (1923) and his reading of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (1925).³⁶ Even though he already harbored a disdain for Hitler and the Nazi Party, Olbricht's views of them were still soured by the Night of the Long Knives³⁷ and the Fritsch Crisis in the 1930s, just like Tresckow's.³⁸ A further motivating factor that Olbricht and Tresckow shared was their desire to alter the military command system set up by Hitler, which gave the Führer "direct authority down to divisional, even company, level."³⁹ Understandably, this system of command seemed inefficient and many military officers sought to change it so that the structure would also reflect a smaller, local level.⁴⁰ Like many other members of the military resistance, Olbricht too was outraged by the Nazi mistreatment of Jews. Overall, "Olbricht was primarily motivated by religious and patriotic considerations but

³⁴Schrader, 66.

³⁵Schrader, 81.

³⁶Schrader, 82.

³⁷Schrader, 90.

³⁸Schrader, 105.

³⁹Eberhard Zeller, *The Flame of Freedom: The German Struggle Against Hitler*, trans. R.P. Heller and D.R. Masters (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 155.

⁴⁰Zeller, 156.

also by the profound distaste of a cultivated man for the primitiveness of the Nazis and their moral unscrupulousness."⁴¹ His attitudes towards Hitler and National Socialism eventually led him to formally become a part of the military resistance.

In late 1939, General Ludwig Beck, the Army Chief of Staff forced out in 1938, had put together a list of military officers, which included Olbricht, who may have been willing to take part in the resistance,⁴² and by 1941, Olbricht had become an active member. In late September 1941, Tresckow sent Fabian von Schlabrendorff to Berlin to talk with Beck, stating that if he and his fellow conspirators were willing to stage a coup, Army Group Centre would carry out the assassination.⁴³ Fatefully, Beck "put Schlabrendorff (and so Tresckow's entire group) in touch with Olbricht."⁴⁴ By the winter of 1941-1942, "concrete coup plans started to be formed under the codename "Valkyrie"⁴⁵ and in the winter of 1942-1943, Olbricht began working with Tresckow on a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler, culminating in the brandy bottle attempt on March 13, 1943.⁴⁶ After this failure, the next big conspiracy coalesced and executed an attempt on July 20, 1944. Since January 1940, Olbricht had been the head of the General Army Office, which "was one of three major departments subordinate to the Home [Replacement] Army commander...[and it] was the most important of the three, its principal function being the supply of trained replacements to the German armies in the

⁴¹Fest, 188.

⁴²Harold Deutsch, *The Conspiracy Against Hitler in the Twilight War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), 202-203.

⁴³Fest, 181.

⁴⁴Schrader, 185.

⁴⁵Schrader, 186.

⁴⁶Gill, 206.

field."⁴⁷ Given his position, Olbricht had every incentive to alter Valkyrie so that the Replacement Army would play a crucial role and therefore the conspiracy would be able to seize power. Olbricht actually recruited Stauffenberg, the assassin on July 20 who is often hailed as the most important figure of the putsch, to the resistance in the spring of 1943, and the Colonel was his chief of staff at the General Army Office.

Henning von Tresckow and Friedrich Olbricht both became involved in the military resistance much earlier than Stauffenberg, who did not join until the early 1940s after being recruited by Olbricht. Stauffenberg declined to join the resistance in 1941 because he believed Germany should focus on winning World War II before worrying about changing the government. Furthermore, he "remained reluctant to enter the resistance until the defeats suffered by the Wehrmacht on the eastern front persuaded him that the war was or at least might be unwinnable."⁴⁸ However, Tresckow and Olbricht had gained considerable experience since their entry into the resistance up until the time of the July 20 plot in 1944, and so were able to contribute significantly to the coup for four primary reasons. Firstly, Tresckow had planned and executed prior assassination attempts, most notably that of March 13, 1943. This was important because he was able to learn from his failures and apply the lessons he learned to July 20 so optimal conditions could be created to successfully kill Hitler. Secondly, from their previous assassination efforts, Tresckow and Fabian von Schlabrendorff had procured and tested the type of bomb Stauffenberg would later use. Thirdly, in planning assassination

⁴⁷FitzGibbon, 62.

⁴⁸Hamerow, 285.

attempts, Tresckow realized that in order to make Hitler's death meaningful, he needed a way to topple the Nazi government, so he teamed up with Olbricht, who had spent time working with Operation Valkyrie. Olbricht had gotten the idea in the early 1940s⁴⁹ to use the Valkyrie orders to stage a military coup after Hitler's demise,⁵⁰ which was the basis and ultimate goal of the July 20 plot. He revised Valkyrie several times, as Tresckow would do later on with Stauffenberg's help. Lastly, because they had both joined the resistance well before 1944, Tresckow and Olbricht had formed contacts with other key resisters, from which they were able to create a vast network of support on July 20.

Tresckow's prior attempts to assassinate Hitler up until July 20, 1944, alerted him to several key logistics he needed to keep in mind if the dictator were to be successfully eliminated. The lessons he learned manifested themselves on July 20, demonstrating the considerable influence they had on this latest assassination effort. Since the late summer of 1941, Tresckow had been making plans to assassinate the Führer, with his vigorous action spurred by the issuing of the Commissar Order.⁵¹ His chance came on August 4, 1941,⁵² when Hitler visited Army Group Centre to conference with Field Marshal Fedor von Bock.⁵³ Von Bock was strongly opposed to a recent order for troops in Russia to be transferred away from Moscow, so Hitler deemed it necessary to personally deliver his instructions to him. When Tresckow and Schlabrendorff heard of Hitler's upcoming visit,

⁴⁹Schrader, 223.

⁵⁰Epstein, 196.

⁵¹James P. Duffy and Vincent L. Ricci, *Target Hitler: The Plots to Kill Adolf Hitler* (New York: Enigma Books, 2011), 122.

⁵²Nigel Jones, *Countdown to Valkyrie: The July Plot to Assassinate Hitler* (Barnsley, UK: Frontline Books, 2008), 126.

⁵³Duffy and Ricci, 122.

they embraced the opportunity to assassinate him, and planned to shoot him upon his entrance to the Army Group's headquarters.⁵⁴ Ultimately, this attempt was not carried out because the amount of security surrounding Hitler alerted Tresckow to several tweaks he needed to make.⁵⁵ By the next serious attempts in March of 1943, Tresckow's plans had become more nuanced and sophisticated.

Perhaps the most famous attempt on Hitler's life aside from that on July 20 was Tresckow's brandy bottle plan on March 13, 1943. During the time leading up to March 13, Tresckow had managed to entice Hitler to visit the Army Group Centre headquarters near Smolensk in Russia to meet with Field Marshal Günther von Kluge.⁵⁶ Von Kluge apparently opposed Operation Citadel, "the attack on the Kursk salient."⁵⁷ Tresckow had tried so insistently to get Hitler to Russia because he believed that it would be easier to make an attempt on the Führer's life at Army Group Centre headquarters, rather than sending an assassin to "his impregnable headquarters called the Wolf's Lair (*Wolfsschanze*)" in East Prussia.⁵⁸ By luring Hitler to Russia, the conspirators would gain the upper hand as Hitler and his security guards would not know every detail of the surroundings.

Learning from his previous assassination attempt in the late summer of 1941, Tresckow and his fellow conspirators planned and replanned their course of action. The most important thing to be taken into consideration was how difficult it would be to gain

⁵⁴Duffy and Ricci, 122.

⁵⁵Duffy and Ricci, 123.

⁵⁶Hoffmann, *German Resistance to Hitler*, 110.

⁵⁷Boeselager, 114.

⁵⁸Boeselager, 113.

direct access to Hitler, as the dictator's security detail in 1941 had demonstrated. After taking this into consideration, Tresckow formulated three possible assassination scenarios for Hitler's impending visit to the Army Group, with only one actually carried out. However, the two discarded options would inform subsequent planning for July 20, as it became clear that they were not feasible.

Tresckow's first thought was to have Lieutenant-Colonel Georg von Boeselager, at the time the commander of the "Boeselager" cavalry unit within Army Group Centre,⁵⁹ and later the commander of the Cavalry Regiment Centre,⁶⁰ create a group of anti-Nazi officers that would kill Hitler during his trip from the airport through the woods to Army Group Centre.⁶¹ Tresckow decided not to choose this plan because Hitler had not followed the original route from the airport, meaning that Boeselager's men would not be in the correct location to shoot him, and also because this strategy would place the blame squarely on the Army, as it would be obvious to the surviving Nazis who killed the Führer.⁶² The second option Tresckow devised was to send an assassin in to shoot Hitler while he was dining at the Army Group, but the shooting would have to begin as soon as the doors were opened to the lunchroom, meaning that precision would be sacrificed, leading to unnecessary casualties.⁶³ Also, this method would be incriminating, like the first, because it would be obvious who the assassin was. Furthermore, Hitler would have to be shot in the face because he wore a bullet-proof vest underneath his uniform and his

⁵⁹Hoffmann, *The History*, 273.

⁶⁰Hoffmann, *The History*, 277.

⁶¹Boeselager, 115.

⁶²Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945*, 282.

⁶³Hoffmann, *German Resistance to Hitler*, 110.

cap was metal-lined, further decreasing the possibility of success as the shooter, who did not have the benefit of precision, would likely have missed the vulnerable areas on the target.⁶⁴ These three reasons led Tresckow to abandon the second option before finally settling on the third, in which he employed a bomb to detonate during Hitler's return flight after he left Army Group Centre.

Before Hitler had arrived on March 13, Tresckow had taken great consideration into the nature of his Condor aircraft, knowing that the section Hitler sat in was heavily armored and could be detached from the rest of the plane and parachuted to safety in the case of an emergency, making it vital to blow up this part.⁶⁵ Tresckow was able to obtain drawings of the plane as well as security information from Captain Ludwig Gehre, a conspiracy member in Berlin, so he would know exactly where the bomb should be placed.⁶⁶ For the explosion, Tresckow procured a compact and silent explosive, a task he had assigned to Colonel Rudolf-Christoph Baron von Gersdorff, the Intelligence Officer at Army Group Centre.⁶⁷ The morning of March 13, Tresckow had gone to meet Hitler at his landing site, and noticed firstly that he and his entourage had arrived in two identical planes, meaning that if the bomb were to be planted, the conspirators had to make sure they chose the right plane; secondly, there were a large number of security guards

⁶⁴Boeselager, 114.

⁶⁵Duffy and Ricci, 129.

⁶⁶Duffy and Ricci, 129.

⁶⁷Duffy and Ricci, 130.

accompanying Hitler, so they had to be discreet in smuggling the bomb onto the aircraft.⁶⁸

Fabian von Schlabrendorff gave a detailed account of March 13, stating "During the luncheon, Tresckow approached Colonel Heinz Brandt, a member of Hitler's entourage, and asked him casually whether he would be good enough to take along a small parcel containing two bottles of brandy for General Helmuth Stieff of the High Command at Headquarters. Brandt readily agreed."⁶⁹ After the lunch, Tresckow and Schlabrendorff accompanied Hitler to the airport for his flight back to Rastenberg.⁷⁰ While in the car, Schlabrendorff prepared the bombs so that they would detonate within thirty minutes and bring Hitler's plane down around Minsk, and put them in the brandy bottles. When he had finished, he handed these bottles to Colonel Brandt. After learning the bomb had not gone off on the plane, Schlabrendorff flew to Hitler's headquarters in Rastenberg to retrieve the package, knowing that if it was discovered there was a bomb inside, it would be a death sentence for himself and all his fellow conspirators on the Eastern Front.⁷¹ He replaced the two old bottles of brandy with new ones, explaining that the date on the originals had been incorrect⁷² and Brandt gave him the two original bottles.⁷³ After he had retrieved the bottles, he opened them in his personal sleeping

⁶⁸Roger Moorhouse, *Killing Hitler: The Plots, the Assassins, and the Dictator Who Cheated Death* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2006), 246.

⁶⁹Schlabrendorff, 234-235.

⁷⁰Pierre Galante and Eugene Silianoff, *Operation Valkyrie: The German Generals' Plot Against Hitler*, trans. Mark Howson and Cary Ryan (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 165.

⁷¹Dulles, 67.

⁷²Carol Sue Holland, "The Foreign Contacts Made by the German Opposition to Hitler" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1967), 184.

⁷³Balfour, 128.

compartment on the train while he was en route to Berlin,⁷⁴ and "discovered that the bomb had been properly set, the little capsule containing the acid had been broken, the acid had eaten through the wire, and the firing pin had shot forward. But the percussion cap had not gone off."⁷⁵ This failure of explosion was attributed to too low of a temperature during the flight.⁷⁶ After retrieving the bomb, Schlabrendorff passed it off to Gersdorff, who had offered to make the next attempt on Hitler's life.⁷⁷

Baron von Gersdorff was supposed to be on duty at a ceremony in the Zeughaus in Berlin, where Hitler was going to see a collection of captured Russian weapons on display, as well as attend a ceremony for German soldiers killed in combat.⁷⁸ Gersdorff had a good reason for being present at the exhibition because he worked for the Intelligence section of Army Group Centre, which was responsible for organizing the event.⁷⁹ After Tresckow had approved of Gersdorff's offer to blow himself up with Hitler, Schlabrendorff visited the Baron at the Hotel Eden to deliver the bomb⁸⁰ in the middle of the night on March 20-21.⁸¹ Gersdorff prepared the bomb, which was supposed to detonate as soon as fifteen minutes after being activated while he was taking Hitler through the exhibition, however, Hitler did not spend as much time looking at the weapons as was needed for the bomb to explode. After Hitler left, Gersdorff rushed to

⁷⁴Holland, 184.

⁷⁵Dulles, 67.

⁷⁶Hoffmann, *German Resistance to Hitler*, 110.

⁷⁷Balfour, 128.

⁷⁸Schlabrendorff, 238.

⁷⁹Hoffmann, *The History*, 284.

⁸⁰Schlabrendorff, 238-239.

⁸¹Hoffmann, *The History*, 286.

the nearest restroom where he removed the bomb from his coat pocket⁸² and tore the fuse off before it detonated. Although two failures in such a short amount of time were nonetheless devastating to Tresckow, he learned valuable lessons that he applied to the July 20 attempt.

Tresckow learned from both his actual assassination attempts, such as that on March 13 and March 21, as well as from the planning he did for attempts that were not carried out, like in the summer of 1941 and the two unused options from March 13. Overall, he learned four important lessons that he would apply to July 20 so that this try would have the greatest chance to accomplish the goal of eliminating Hitler. Firstly, Tresckow learned that an assassination attempt should ideally be made when the war was not going in Germany's favor. The conspirators involved in the late summer of 1941 had competing responsibilities between fighting Hitler's war and planning their resistance activities.⁸³ Furthermore, because the German army was successful during this time, it served to demoralize the military resistance and lessen the incentive of soldiers and officers to offer support to the opposition.⁸⁴ However, in March 1943, the tide of the war had turned against Germany, meaning that greater support emerged for the resistance. This increased support led to a more organized assassination effort, as Tresckow had the resources to prepare three options for Hitler's visit to Army Group Centre. The second lesson Tresckow learned was that the assassin needed direct access to Hitler, as he was alarmed at the security precautions taken by the Führer's entourage. By the end of 1941,

⁸²Hoffmann, *The History*, 287.

⁸³Duffy and Ricci, 123.

⁸⁴Zwygart.

there had already been a number of attempts on Hitler's life, which led to a tightening of security, and by 1943, the detail had become even more extensive.⁸⁵

Thirdly, Tresckow learned that the assassination attempt needed to take place in Hitler's own headquarters where his movements would be more predictable and he would not be as paranoid about security. Tresckow had needed to abandon his first option on March 13, shooting Hitler during his trip from the airfield to Army Group Centre, because the route had changed at the last minute as a security precaution due to Hitler's paranoia. If Tresckow could catch Hitler in his own headquarters, he would be more relaxed as he was assured his security personnel knew the area well and could not be caught off guard. The fourth and final lesson was that the method of assassination must not be shooting, and that a bomb was a better option. Due to the tight security around Hitler as well as the protective clothing he wore (his bullet proof vest and metal-lined cap), the chances of hitting him with a bullet were slim, so a different technique must be employed. Furthermore, shooting Hitler would make it very obvious who the assassin was and incriminate the Army, while the use of a bomb would be relatively anonymous. These four lessons would inform Tresckow's subsequent planning and tries on Hitler's life, as he continued to tweak the blueprint up until July 20, 1944.

Ultimately, the July 20 plot reflected all four lessons Tresckow had learned. Firstly, at the time of Stauffenberg's attempt, the war was not going in Germany's favor. By July 1944, it was clear that Germany had already lost the war to the Allies, as they were fighting on three fronts, had deployed weak fighting divisions that could not stand

⁸⁵Hoffmann, *German Resistance to Hitler*, 107.

up to the immense reserves of supplies and troops the enemy possessed, and the Luftwaffe was powerless to stop the allied bombings.⁸⁶ Secondly, when Olbricht suggested that Stauffenberg be the one to plant the bomb, Tresckow quickly approved, realizing that with Stauffenberg's new position he had direct access to Hitler and therefore a good chance of successfully assassinating him.⁸⁷ Stauffenberg had access because on June 20, 1944, he was appointed Chief of Staff to the commander of the Replacement Army, Colonel-General Fromm,⁸⁸ meaning that he occasionally accompanied his superior to briefings with Hitler, and was even sometimes summoned himself by the Führer. Thirdly and fourthly (respectively), the attempt took place in Hitler's own headquarters, the Wolf's Lair in East Prussia, and it was made with a bomb, rather than a machine gun. The bomb that was used provides the second reason why Tresckow and Olbricht were the primary masterminds behind the July 20 plot: they were responsible for procuring, testing, and storing the bomb Stauffenberg used in his attempt.

From his previous assassination experiences, especially the March 13 attempt, Tresckow had gained extensive knowledge of bombs, and even procured and tested the type that was used on July 20. He first started experimenting with bombs in the summer of 1942 when he asked Gersdorff, who had planned to carry out the March 21 museum assassination, to obtain access to explosives and fuses for an upcoming attempt on Hitler's life. Gersdorff provided dozens of various types of explosives, and Tresckow and

⁸⁶Schrader, 237.

⁸⁷Joachim Kramarz, *Stauffenberg: The Architect of the Famous July 20th Conspiracy to Assassinate Hitler* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 134.

⁸⁸Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945*, 375.

Schlabrendorff set about testing them.⁸⁹ One type Gersdorff gave them was a small plastic explosive that had been captured from the British⁹⁰ and was like those that had been dropped throughout Europe by the RAF to assist the anti-Nazi movement in German-occupied areas.⁹¹ Tresckow chose to use the British bomb and fuses for various reasons, but, like those produced in Germany, the British model had its advantages and drawbacks. Firstly, the British bomb, referred to as the "clam," was about the size of a small pocket book and so able to be easily concealed.⁹² Secondly, the British fuses were far more silent than German ones.⁹³ Although German fuses could cause the bomb to detonate much more quickly than their British counterparts, they made a hissing noise that betrayed the bomb's presence.⁹⁴ Finally, Tresckow chose the British model because of the ability to set the fuse for a specific amount of time, with detonation time determined by the temperature.⁹⁵ After spending additional time testing this model with Schlabrendorff, Tresckow was further convinced that it was the right option for his purposes.

Fabian von Schlabrendorff gave a detailed account in his memoir of the procurement and testing of the British explosive with Tresckow, which they did near the Dnieper River in Smolensk, Russia.⁹⁶ Schlabrendorff reiterated the benefits of the British model mentioned above, and stated that it had two great advantages: it could inflict a

⁸⁹Fest, 191.

⁹⁰Gill, 207.

⁹¹Jones, 131.

⁹²Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945*, 274.

⁹³Gill, 207.

⁹⁴Gill, 207.

⁹⁵Gill, 207.

⁹⁶Jones, 131.

very powerful blow without being bulky itself, and the fuse had different timing mechanisms to choose from, meaning that the conspirators could select the one that best suited their needs.⁹⁷ These timing mechanisms were calculated using a fixed temperature of sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit, and included a chart for predicted detonation times in different temperatures, which Tresckow decided to ignore and instead created his own chart based upon the tests he conducted with Schlabrendorff.⁹⁸ Most of the tests that the two performed worked out as expected, but some of them did not and the bomb exploded later than they had anticipated.⁹⁹ But, they did not possess the knowledge to determine what had gone wrong.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, they casually asked explosives experts to explain the mishap, and through these conversations learned that the cold slowed down the detonation process.¹⁰¹ Although the tests did provide useful information, the testing had its limitations. For example, although Tresckow and Schlabrendorff knew that a confined area would greatly magnify the blast, they did not know how powerful it would be nor how many bombs would be necessary, so in planning assassination attempts, especially those in March of 1943, they always planned to use more than one bomb.¹⁰² Tresckow got his opportunity to use the bomb on March 13 after Hitler's visit to Army Group Centre, and the brandy bottles Schlabrendorff handed to Colonel Brandt contained the

⁹⁷Schlabrendorff, 232-233.

⁹⁸Hoffmann, *The History*, 274.

⁹⁹Schlabrendorff, 223.

¹⁰⁰Schlabrendorff, 233.

¹⁰¹Schlabrendorff, 233.

¹⁰²Hoffmann, *The History*, 275.

tested explosives. Additionally, these bottles "contained the same type of bomb Stauffenberg used more than a year later."¹⁰³

When Stauffenberg entered the military conspiracy in September of 1943, Tresckow again procured British explosives, and delivered them to Berlin.¹⁰⁴ In January of 1944, Schlabrendorff hosted a meeting at his Berlin flat, which Tresckow, Stauffenberg, Gersdorff, and Freytag-Loringhoven (the head of Branch II of the Abwehr, a German military intelligence organization, where Gersdorff had originally obtained the British model) attended.¹⁰⁵ At this meeting, the procurement of more explosives was discussed, as well as prior experiences with the assassination methods they had tried to use, of which Tresckow had considerable knowledge.¹⁰⁶ In selecting the explosive, "Stauffenberg relied on the experience gained with these bombs in British Commando raids...[and] on the numerous tests Tresckow had made."¹⁰⁷ When the bomb had been selected, Olbricht entrusted its safekeeping to Lieutenant-Colonel Fritz von der Lancken, whom he knew personally.¹⁰⁸ Von der Lancken lived in Potsdam and for each of Stauffenberg's attempts in July of 1944, on the 6th, 11th, 15th, and the 20th, they were retrieved from this location.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³Dulles, 67.

¹⁰⁴Peter Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg: A Family History, 1905-1944*, 3rd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 225.

¹⁰⁵Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg*, 229.

¹⁰⁶Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg*, 230.

¹⁰⁷Zeller, 344.

¹⁰⁸Zeller, 146.

¹⁰⁹Zeller, 344.

Effective use of the bomb to kill Hitler, however, would only eliminate the head of the Nazi regime, and Tresckow realized, as early as 1941, that to bring the entire government down, a plan for a seizure of power needed to be organized as well. To achieve this, he turned to General Friedrich Olbricht, whose work with Operation Valkyrie provided just the solution to his dilemma, and supplies another reason why Tresckow and Olbricht were the main architects of the July 20 plot. Olbricht had been thinking about how to use Valkyrie to allow a coup since shortly after the commencement of Operation Barbarossa in mid-1941.¹¹⁰ During this time, he realized that it would provide the ideal means to stage a coup.¹¹¹ In late September 1941, Tresckow sent Schlabrendorff to Berlin to talk with General Ludwig Beck, stating that if he and his fellow conspirators were willing to stage a coup, Army Group Centre would carry out the assassination.¹¹² Fatefully, Beck "put Schlabrendorff (and so Tresckow's entire group) in touch with Olbricht"¹¹³ who "conceived and worked out the first serious plans for seizing power at home."¹¹⁴ In the winter of 1941-1942, Olbricht realized that if Valkyrie were rewritten to deal with internal unrest, especially an uprising by slave laborers, then this would create the ideal conditions for a military coup.¹¹⁵ After telling Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the head of the Abwehr, his thoughts, "Canaris used his position...to persuade Hitler that there was a (completely fictitious) risk of a forced-labourer uprising. The paranoid dictator obligingly ordered one of his bitterest domestic enemies to start making

¹¹⁰Schrader, 223.

¹¹¹Schrader, 223.

¹¹²Fest, 181.

¹¹³Schrader, 185.

¹¹⁴FitzGibbon, 42.

¹¹⁵Schrader, 224.

plans that could, and would, be used as a blueprint for a coup against him."¹¹⁶ Canaris also convinced Hitler that the Replacement Army should carry out Valkyrie.¹¹⁷ Because Olbricht worked in the General Army Office under the commander of this Army, General Friedrich Fromm, this gave the conspiracy an advantageous position.

By March of 1942, "the first 'shadow government,' or post-Hitler government, was drawn up on paper, and drafts of radio announcements and so on started to circulate among the conspirators."¹¹⁸ In the late autumn of 1942, Olbricht and Tresckow began to seriously discuss employing Valkyrie, as this plan would provide a "body of armed troops [the Replacement Army] without which they could not hope to carry out their coup d'état."¹¹⁹ However, these plans would be shelved for a time because drumming up support became more difficult throughout 1942 as the German army found success in the Russian campaign.¹²⁰ However, "the winter of 1942-1943 brought the anticipated reverse in Germany's military fortunes" and "at once the anti-Nazi conspirators in the military intensified their activities," seeing an opportunity to capitalize on the dismay many German soldiers felt towards Hitler.¹²¹

By early 1943 Valkyrie was ready to put into action. In February, Olbricht had Schlabrendorff relay a message to Tresckow in which he said, "We are ready. The

¹¹⁶Schrader, 224.

¹¹⁷FitzGibbon, 64.

¹¹⁸Schrader, 186.

¹¹⁹FitzGibbon, 63.

¹²⁰Schrader, 187.

¹²¹Schrader, 187.

"ignition" can be turned on."¹²² Olbricht had been working in Berlin handling the logistics of seizing power in the capital of the Third Reich.¹²³ He had set about assigning fellow officers to secure key locations in Berlin and kill Nazi leaders who would undoubtedly try to sabotage the coup.¹²⁴ With the plans set in place to establish a new government, the only task that remained was to eliminate Hitler, which Tresckow attempted to do on March 13 and 21, 1943. As there would be on July 20, 1944, there was communication on March 13 between the assassin and Olbricht so the latter would know when to initiate Valkyrie. Schlabrendorff contacted Olbricht in Berlin to give him the first codeword, "Flash," saying that the assassination would be taking place shortly, and spoke with him again when Hitler's plane had taken off.¹²⁵

Although the assassination attempts in March 1943 were not successful and Olbricht did not have the chance to initiate Valkyrie, his further analyses during this time alerted him to several things that needed to be corrected before it could be set in motion, making it a blessing in disguise that both attempts were unsuccessful, as the conspirators did not yet have a complete way to grasp power after Hitler had been killed.¹²⁶ In July of 1943, after the failed March attempts, Hitler approved the supplement to Valkyrie that Olbricht had added. While the original iteration of the Operation, ""Valkyrie I" designated a strategy to ensure the combat readiness of all units..."Valkyrie II" provided for their "swiftest possible assemblage" into "battle groups ready for action" so that the

¹²²Hans Bernd Gisevius, *To the Bitter End*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1947), 468.

¹²³Jones, 137.

¹²⁴Jones, 137.

¹²⁵Jones, 139-140.

¹²⁶Schlabrendorff, 239.

coup would progress at a faster rate.¹²⁷ Tresckow was able to take a few months' sick leave in order to help Olbricht make these changes.¹²⁸ Even after these alterations, Olbricht and his fellow conspirators, including Tresckow and Stauffenberg, continued to make more adaptations to the plans as the course of the war shifted and the infrastructure in Germany changed.¹²⁹

In September of 1943, Tresckow was able to take leave again from the Eastern Front to go to Berlin and work on polishing the Valkyrie orders with Stauffenberg.¹³⁰ When Tresckow had been transferred to the Eastern Front, he left Stauffenberg with the responsibility of executing Valkyrie, demonstrating that the latter simply stepped into the framework established by Tresckow and Olbricht.¹³¹ In early September 1943, Tresckow and Stauffenberg began revising again Olbricht's Valkyrie plans. They added a new opening statement, which read: ""The Führer Adolf Hitler is dead! A treacherous group of party leaders has attempted to exploit the situation by attacking our embattled soldiers from the rear in order to seize power for themselves!" The Reich government, the announcement continued, had "declared martial law in order to maintain law and order."¹³² Tresckow and Stauffenberg created a large hoax that blamed the Nazi Party for internal unrest and a coup, when in reality it was the Valkyrie conspirators who would be

¹²⁷Fest, 219.

¹²⁸Duffy and Ricci, 136.

¹²⁹Schrader, 225.

¹³⁰FitzGibbon, 64.

¹³¹Hans Mommsen, *Alternatives to Hitler: German Resistance Under the Third Reich*, ed. and trans. Angus McGeoch (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 243.

¹³²Fest, 219.

seizing power.¹³³ Thus, apparently legal action would be used for the purposes of the coup d'état," which were typed out by Frau von Tresckow and her friend Fräulein von Oven.¹³⁴ Although the revised Valkyrie plans were important, Tresckow and Olbricht realized they needed a solid base of supporters in order to help them execute it, and their recruitment of crucial figures to the July 20 plot provides the final reason they were the main creators of the putsch.

The fourth advantage Tresckow and Olbricht had gained from being seasoned members of the military resistance was a complex web of contacts with other opponents of Nazism. The July 20 plot brought together different resistance sectors, such as the conservatives led by Carl Goerdeler and Ludwig Beck after he resigned as army chief of staff, and the military, within which there were several mini groups of resisters, like that surrounding Admiral Wilhelm Canaris in the Abwehr.¹³⁵ Aside from these more established circles, Tresckow and Olbricht also made contact with members of the police apparatus in Germany. The July 20 plot required resisters from these different sectors because it was not only about killing Hitler and taking over the government (which the military and police largely handled), but also about making peace with the Allies and ending World War II, which would have been the responsibility of diplomats from the conservative sector. Tresckow and Olbricht had contacts with many people in both these areas, although it is impossible to provide a comprehensive list. However, their contacts and recruitments that were given the most influential roles to play on July 20 were Carl

¹³³Fest, 219.

¹³⁴Kramarz, 135.

¹³⁵Fest, 5.

Goerdeler, General Erich Fellgiebel, Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, and Arthur Nebe. Because "Each new initiate learned the names of only a few of the other conspirators," Stauffenberg had to rely on Tresckow and Olbricht to widen his contact base.¹³⁶ Olbricht's rooms in the Army Headquarters Office in Berlin were often used to hold conspiracy meetings, although due to the danger of being caught by the Gestapo, meetings did not occur with extreme frequency.¹³⁷ Nonetheless, Tresckow and Olbricht managed to create a network of colleagues that would prove useful when Stauffenberg made his assassination attempt.

In the conservative sector, the main member Tresckow and Olbricht had contact with was Carl Goerdeler. Goerdeler yearned for the days of monarchy and after seeing the disorderly conduct of the Reichstag during the Weimar Republic, he had adopted the conservative view of "strict majority (not proportional) representation and more power for the executive."¹³⁸ Nevertheless, Goerdeler, who possessed a PhD in law as well as satisfied the qualifications for becoming a lawyer, was offered the position of economics or foreign minister in Chancellor von Papen's cabinet in the last days of the Republic.¹³⁹ After leaving politics, he became an opponent of National Socialism and traveled around Europe where he sought to establish contacts for the anti-Nazi movement. It was during this time, in the late 1930s, that he and Olbricht first met¹⁴⁰ and in the winter of 1941-1942, "the 'political wing' of the conspiracy [which included Goerdeler]...started to look

¹³⁶Dulles, 33.

¹³⁷Dulles, 33.

¹³⁸Schrader, 98.

¹³⁹Schrader, 98-99.

¹⁴⁰Schrader, 100.

at the political requirements of a coup."¹⁴¹ Fabian von Schlabrendorff established official contact between Goerdeler, and the military resistance in the summer of 1942,¹⁴² with a meeting occurring between Tresckow, Olbricht, and Goerdeler at the end of the year.¹⁴³ Their communication intensified in the late summer of 1943, when it became clear that using Valkyrie was inevitable.¹⁴⁴ Goerdeler presented his Peace Plan to the generals, which included the formation of a civilian government, the cessation of Nazi atrocities, the liberation of European nations from German control, and a return to true obedience of the law and general education,¹⁴⁵ as he would play a part in handling the political negotiations with the Allies after the putsch had been successful.¹⁴⁶ Tresckow kept in constant communication with Goerdeler about the political objectives of the coup d'etat, knowing that civilians played a crucial role in the plan, as it could potentially be dangerous if the Army was given too much political power.¹⁴⁷ Goerdeler was to occupy a prominent position in the putsch government, most likely Chancellor,¹⁴⁸ and therefore would be vital in attempting negotiations with the Allies.¹⁴⁹ He first met Stauffenberg

¹⁴¹Schrader, 186.

¹⁴²Mommsen, 244.

¹⁴³Schlabrendorff, 191

¹⁴⁴Mommsen, 244.

¹⁴⁵Peter Hoffmann, ed., *Behind Valkyrie: German Resistance to Hitler: Documents* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 270-273.

¹⁴⁶Klemens von Klemperer, *German Resistance Against Hitler: The Search for Allies Abroad, 1938-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 345.

¹⁴⁷Schlabrendorff, 257

¹⁴⁸Hoffmann, *The History*, 367.

¹⁴⁹Hoffmann, *The History*, 471.

when the latter joined the coup preparations in the summer of 1943, and the two often met to discuss plans.¹⁵⁰

Tresckow and Olbricht had also managed to build up a base of contacts within the military. Tresckow recruited General Erich Fellgiebel, the Chief of Communications and an ardent opponent of Nazism since before the war.¹⁵¹ Fellgiebel had been involved in previous assassination attempts, such as that on March 13, 1943,¹⁵² and he was assigned two crucial roles on July 20, 1944,¹⁵³ which brought him into close collaboration with Olbricht.¹⁵⁴ Firstly, Fellgiebel was supposed to sever all communications coming from Hitler or his entourage after Stauffenberg's bomb exploded in the Wolf's Lair.¹⁵⁵ There were four main means of communications available at Hitler's headquarters, and included the telephone, teleprinter, radio (capable of transmitting both speech and Morse code), and a courier service (both land and air).¹⁵⁶ The lack of connection Fellgiebel was supposed to create would allow the conspirators in Berlin sufficient time to take over the government without interference from the Nazis. Fellgiebel's second task was to keep the communications flowing from Olbricht's office to other offices involved in the coup.¹⁵⁷ This second task was achieved so well that the coup was nicknamed the "Switchboard Putsch."¹⁵⁸ However, Fellgiebel's overarching objective was to "gain control of the

¹⁵⁰Hoffmann, *The History*, 365-366.

¹⁵¹Hoffmann, *The History*, 337.

¹⁵²Hoffmann, *The History*, 281.

¹⁵³Schlabrendorff, 185.

¹⁵⁴Schrader, 225.

¹⁵⁵Schlabrendorff, 185.

¹⁵⁶Hoffmann, *The History*, 338.

¹⁵⁷Schlabrendorff, 186.

¹⁵⁸Schlabrendorff, 186.

Wehrmacht and the apparatus of military command as quickly and smoothly as possible" so that the newly established government would be able to bring an end to the war and order troop withdrawals from both the western and eastern fronts.¹⁵⁹ Bringing a swift end to the war would fall on the shoulders of Field Marshal Günther von Kluge.

Field Marshal von Kluge, who was appointed the commander of Army Group Centre in the winter of 1941, was one of the most important figures that Tresckow had managed to recruit.¹⁶⁰ He was somewhat sympathetic to the resistance,¹⁶¹ and this gave the conspirators hope because Tresckow realized that if a coup was to be successful, it needed to include a high-ranking and well-known military commander.¹⁶² Tresckow was Kluge's Chief of Staff at the Army Group, and persuaded him that Hitler needed to be eliminated.¹⁶³ Tresckow fought a back-and-forth battle with Kluge, as the latter often vacillated between support for Hitler and support for the resistance.¹⁶⁴ In one of his efforts to win Kluge over, Tresckow persuaded him to host Carl Goerdeler, another key contact discussed above, and a man who was always clear about his disdain for Nazism, in late 1942 at Army Group Centre to discuss resistance plans, but this was unsuccessful.¹⁶⁵ After this visit, Tresckow continued to apply constant pressure on Kluge. Fabian von Schlabrendorff "teasingly dubbed Tresckow 'the watchmaker' because

¹⁵⁹Hoffmann, *The History*, 341.

¹⁶⁰Schlabrendorff, 145.

¹⁶¹Schlabrendorff, 145.

¹⁶²Fest, 189.

¹⁶³Balfour, 149.

¹⁶⁴Schlabrendorff, 145-146.

¹⁶⁵Fest, 190.

Kluge had to be wound up each day until his resolution [to join the conspiracy] had reached the pitch that Tresckow had inculcated in him the night before."¹⁶⁶

Through the summer of 1943, Kluge was very supportive of the conspirators, although he never acted on his own, only when Tresckow urged him.¹⁶⁷ On March 13, 1943, the date of Tresckow's brandy bottle assassination attempt, Kluge said to him, "count me in."¹⁶⁸ In July 1944, Kluge was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the west, putting him in an advantageous position for the conspiracy. Later in the month on July 12, Kluge had aligned more with the military resistance, and when Tresckow sent Colonel Georg Freiherr von Boeselager to visit him, he said that he would be ready to support the conspiracy after they had eliminated Hitler; "On July 20 Kluge kept precisely to the limits of this agreement."¹⁶⁹ Tresckow wanted Kluge to support the conspiracy by allowing the Allies to break through his lines,¹⁷⁰ after which he could negotiate an armistice, as he was an Army Group commander and a field marshal, and so wielded the authority to do so.¹⁷¹

Conspirators were also found in the Abwehr, the army's military intelligence branch. Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the chief of the Abwehr, and Hans Oster, Canaris's assistant,¹⁷² became connected with Tresckow in 1941.¹⁷³ Canaris had worked on

¹⁶⁶Jones, 130-131.

¹⁶⁷Fest, 200.

¹⁶⁸Balfour, 150.

¹⁶⁹Hoffmann, *The History*, 354-355.

¹⁷⁰Balfour, 150.

¹⁷¹Schrader, 208.

¹⁷²Schlabrendorff, 168.

¹⁷³Boeselager, 98.

revising Operation Valkyrie with Olbricht in 1941-1942 so the conspirators could use it to seize power, as mentioned above.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, conspirators like Tresckow and Olbricht, who were more involved in the logistical planning of the plot, depended upon Canaris to keep them informed about the Gestapo and protect them from it so they could proceed with planning for July 20 as smoothly as possible.¹⁷⁵ Fabian von Schlabrendorff stated in his memoir, "Without the protective shield furnished by such men as Canaris...the German opposition would never have survived, or had a chance to develop right under the noses of the Gestapo."¹⁷⁶ For example, Schlabrendorff recalls a comment made by Olbricht in which he said, "Admiral Canaris came to see me [in late 1943, early 1944] and told me of a conversation with Himmler. Himmler said quite bluntly that he knew very well that influential circles within the Army were hatching plans for a rebellion."¹⁷⁷ Therefore, without Canaris, the conspiracy very likely would have been discovered before July 20.

Aside from the established conservative and military resistance sectors, Olbricht was also able to convince Arthur Nebe, a member of the police apparatus in Nazi Germany, to join the July 20 coup effort.¹⁷⁸ A true asset to the anti-Hitler movement, Nebe was able to pass himself off as a dedicated SS officer while quietly and intentionally sabotaging the orders he received from Heinrich Himmler after the SS

¹⁷⁴Robert B. Kane, *Disobedience and Conspiracy in the German Army, 1918-1945* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), 186.

¹⁷⁵Schlabrendorff, 168.

¹⁷⁶Schlabrendorff, 179.

¹⁷⁷Schlabrendorff, 273.

¹⁷⁸Zeller, 124-125.

absorbed the police after 1933.¹⁷⁹ In the lead up to July 20, Fabian von Schlabrendorff was tasked with keeping in contact with Nebe, who was able to obtain information on Himmler and other high-ranking Gestapo officials so that the conspirators could avoid getting caught and executed.¹⁸⁰ On July 13, 1944, a week before the attempted assassination, Nebe arrived at Olbricht's office to receive the plans for police actions on the twentieth, and was given maps of Berlin so that they would know which parts of the city to occupy.¹⁸¹ On July 20, the police were to set up barriers around "the Berlin circular autobahn."¹⁸² Nebe himself was to be in charge of thirty raiding parties that would arrest the most important Nazi "functionaries and dignitaries."¹⁸³ Furthermore, Nebe was also influential in procuring the correct type of explosive for use on July 20, and discovered that ten pounds of explosives was adequate to create a high powered blast, but that four pounds was useless, giving the conspirators a range to think about.¹⁸⁴

Due to the fact that Tresckow and Olbricht were the primary masterminds behind July 20, they do deserve a significant portion of the blame for the plot's failure for two reasons. Firstly, Operation Valkyrie itself and its execution were flawed, and the plan was not put into motion in a timely manner after the bomb exploded on July 20. This first failure largely falls on Olbricht's shoulders, as he was mostly responsible for the revisions of Valkyrie so it would permit a military coup. However, Tresckow is also at fault here since he helped in the final revisions of the plan. Secondly, two key military

¹⁷⁹Schlabrendorff, 173-174.

¹⁸⁰Schlabrendorff, 176.

¹⁸¹Gisevius, 514.

¹⁸²Hoffmann, *The History*, 429.

¹⁸³Hoffmann, *The History*, 429.

¹⁸⁴Hoffmann, *The History*, 336.

figures were not recruited to the resistance, while one did not remain loyal to the conspiracy. Tresckow deserves a larger portion of this blame as two of his contacts failed, while Olbricht can also be criticized for his failure to convince Fromm to support the plot.

Operation Valkyrie itself was fatally flawed in three ways. Firstly, the initiation of the coup depended upon the inflexible precondition of Hitler's death. The teleprinter messages sent by the conspirators on July 20 began with, "(1) The *Führer* Adolf Hitler is dead. An irresponsible gang of Party leaders, far behind the front, has tried to exploit this situation to stab the hard-pressed army in the back and seize power for its own ends. (2) In this hour of supreme danger the *Reich* government, to maintain law and order, has proclaimed a state of military emergency."¹⁸⁵ From the outset, Valkyrie declared that Hitler's death was necessary to activate the orders and hand power over to the army. In fact, this requirement to set the plan in motion did not give the conspirators any room to readjust in the event that Hitler survived the bomb explosion. Due to Tresckow and Olbricht's prior experience and failures with assassination, they should have known that "however devoutly to be wished, [the assassination of Hitler] was infuriatingly difficult to achieve," and therefore the attempt on July 20 also may not succeed.¹⁸⁶ Unfortunately, this possibility of failure did not prompt Tresckow and Olbricht to write in an alternative means to grasp power that did not include the *Führer's* demise. The failure to kill Hitler

¹⁸⁵Hoffmann, *The History*, 755.

¹⁸⁶Jones, 160.

exacerbated the second fatal flaw of Valkyrie, the incomplete takeover of communications.

Operation Valkyrie did not account for the conspirators' monopoly over all forms of communication, especially the radio waves. From the beginning, the plotters recognized the importance of sending out radio announcements about Hitler's death, as well as messages containing the Valkyrie orders, making them fortunate to have Major General Erich Fellgiebel, the chief signals officer of the Wehrmacht, on their side.¹⁸⁷ Fellgiebel "would insure that the headquarters [the Wolf's Lair] would be cut off from the outside world for several hours, so that the initial action could not be thwarted by counter-orders."¹⁸⁸ However, Fellgiebel had stated that Hitler must be killed before communications could be completely secured. Aside from Fellgiebel, other signals operators who were not part of the coup would likely not aid the conspirators until they were sure Hitler was dead, again demonstrating how the dictator's death was too rigid a requirement for the initiation of Operation Valkyrie.¹⁸⁹ However, although Fellgiebel did promise to ensure that the conspirators' messages went through with no issues, "On the other hand he never promised that he would destroy or cause to be destroyed any signals installations," which included the telephone, teleprinter, radio, and courier services coming from the Wolf's Lair, with the first three being the most important.¹⁹⁰ It was virtually impossible to stop radio traffic coming from the Lair without the use of force, and these conspirators would not be available in the early stages of the coup, meaning

¹⁸⁷Kramarz, 139.

¹⁸⁸Gisevius, 519.

¹⁸⁹Hoffmann, *The History*, 369.

¹⁹⁰Hoffmann, *The History*, 338.

that radio messages could only be ceased via an order. It was unlikely that high-ranking Nazis such as Ribbentrop and Himmler would obey an order of this nature from Fellgiebel, even though he had considerable power, and he did not have the troops to enforce his demands.¹⁹¹

Because the conspirators were not able to block the Nazis from getting back on the radio network for long enough, Hitler was able to get on and announce that he was alive, stating, "So that you may hear my voice and know that I am in good health and quite uninjured; and in addition so that you may hear the details of a crime unparalleled in German history...A conspiracy was hatched by a tiny clique of ambitious, conscienceless, and at the same time stupid and criminal officers."¹⁹² Hitler's announcement that he was alive blew the cover of legality the conspiracy had enjoyed for a short time, and alerted the Nazis to the coup. The Nazis were also able to issue the following radio message that aided in unraveling the plot, "The *Führer* is alive! In perfect health! *Reichsführer-SS* C-in-C Replacement Army. Only his orders valid. Orders from Colonel-General Fromm, Field Marshal von Witzleben and Colonel-General Hoepner not to be executed! Maintain contact with *Gauleiter* and Senior SS and Police Commander!"¹⁹³ Furthermore, due to the fact that the conspirators had issued the Valkyrie orders in Fromm's name, this announcement also hurt their official cover. Although Fellgiebel blocked these radio messages from the Nazis for almost an hour, "as

¹⁹¹Hoffmann, *The History*, 339.

¹⁹²Ruth Andreas-Franklin, *Berlin Underground, 1938-1945* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947), 148.

¹⁹³Hoffmann, *The History*, 757.

soon as Hitler demanded to be put through to Berlin, he was forced to comply."¹⁹⁴ As soon as it was announced that no orders from Fromm were to be obeyed, the third flaw of Valkyrie became apparent.

The third reason Valkyrie itself was imperfect was because its issuance depended upon the cooperation of Colonel-General Fromm, a fair weather supporter of the conspiracy and the Commander of the Replacement Army.¹⁹⁵ Fromm was careful to appear neutral and would frequently shift his allegiances so he would always be on the victorious side.¹⁹⁶ With the July 20 coup, he had decided that if the assassination attempt failed, he would not support the conspirators.¹⁹⁷ Stauffenberg and Olbricht were the second and third ranking officials respectively in the Replacement Army, yet despite this they could not issue the Valkyrie orders.¹⁹⁸ When Olbricht went to inform Fromm that Hitler was dead and that Valkyrie should be set in motion, Fromm "refused to proclaim martial law on the strength of an single uncorroborated report."¹⁹⁹ Fromm called the Wolf's Lair and to Olbricht's surprise Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel answered and informed him that everything was fine, and although there had been an attempted assassination, Hitler was alive.²⁰⁰ The Valkyrie orders were only issued when Stauffenberg returned to Berlin from the Wolf's Lair and arrested Fromm.²⁰¹ Fromm's lack of compliance demonstrated this third flaw of the Valkyrie plan itself and was a

¹⁹⁴Galante and Silianoff, 11.

¹⁹⁵Jones, 161.

¹⁹⁶Deutsch, 213.

¹⁹⁷Duffy and Ricci, 175.

¹⁹⁸Jones, 160.

¹⁹⁹Galante and Silianoff, 11.

²⁰⁰Gisevius, 545.

²⁰¹Kramarz, 191.

primary reason for its delayed execution, another part of the explanation for why the coup failed.

Due to Fromm's lack of cooperation, Olbricht did not initiate Operation Valkyrie because his superior and commander of the Replacement Army did not believe it necessary since there was uncertainty of Hitler's demise. Olbricht was not willing to issue Valkyrie by forging Fromm's name because he "lacked revolutionary energy."²⁰² He preferred to wait for Fromm to approve the issuance of Valkyrie rather than take the initiative himself.²⁰³ However, Olbricht was supposed to have issued the Valkyrie orders two hours prior to the bomb explosion in order to account for the time it would take to get troops assembled and moving.²⁰⁴ Being that Olbricht was the original revisor of Valkyrie, he knew that there was no time to waste in setting the plan in motion, yet in spite of this fact he did not. Olbricht went to lunch instead and did not return until 3 p.m. when Stauffenberg's flight arrived back from the Wolf's Lair. Valkyrie was not officially signed into action until 4 p.m. and therefore the teleprinter orders did not reach their intended destinations until after normal office hours. This waste of time meant that approximately three precious hours were lost as the bomb had detonated around 12:50 p.m.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, at 6:30 p.m. the Nazis broadcast a radio message (quoted above) stating that there had been an attempt on Hitler's life but that the Führer was fine. This

²⁰²Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg*, 258.

²⁰³Ulrich von Hassell, *The Von Hassell Diaries 1938-1944: The Story of the Forces Against Hitler Inside Germany, as Recorded by Ambassador Ulrich von Hassell, a Leader of the Movement* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1947), 286.

²⁰⁴Kramarz, 181.

²⁰⁵Hoffmann, *German Resistance to Hitler*, 121-123.

meant that the justification for the conspirators issuance of orders was now gone.²⁰⁶

Operation Valkyrie was executed late, but also incorrectly once it began due to a major mistake that Olbricht made.

Olbricht's serious blunder was his miscommunication with Arthur Nebe and the police, who were assigned the crucial task of arresting Nazi leaders. On July 13, a few days before Stauffenberg's attempt, Nebe paid Olbricht a call so that the two could discuss what the duties of the police would be. Olbricht presented Nebe with maps of Berlin so the police would know where to occupy, but it dated to the time of Stalingrad from 1942-1943. Since that time, many of the buildings and other infrastructure had been destroyed by Allied bombings. Furthermore, many offices that had been housed in destroyed buildings had moved locations, but, according to the maps, did not indicate where they might have moved.²⁰⁷ Additionally, the map did not specify how strong the SS units were or where they were located in Berlin, although this would be necessary to know because the justification for initiating Valkyrie was that Hitler had died and party leaders, possibly the SS, were trying to seize power via their own coup.²⁰⁸ Aside from the map, Olbricht did not arrange with the police how the arrests of major Nazi officials were supposed to take place.²⁰⁹ The result was disorganization and confusion on July 20.

While Olbricht claims primary blame for why the seizure of power in Berlin did not run smoothly, Tresckow is mainly faulted for his failure to recruit key military figures

²⁰⁶Hoffmann, *German Resistance to Hitler*, 123-124.

²⁰⁷Gisevius, 514-515.

²⁰⁸Galante and Silianoff, 12.

²⁰⁹Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *The Men Who Tried to Kill Hitler* (Skyhouse: New York, 2008), 194.

to the conspiracy. The main actor not convinced to join the resistance was Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, whose inclusion would have provided several advantages.

Furthermore, some of the contacts Tresckow had tried to establish did not hold up. Field Marshal von Kluge, who often wavered between support for the conspiracy and for Hitler, chose allegiance to the latter on July 20. Likewise, Olbricht failed to convince Colonel-General Fromm, the commander of the Replacement Army and his immediate superior, to join the resistance, which would have made it much easier to initiate Operation Valkyrie.

Since late 1939, Tresckow had tried repeatedly to convince Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, a commander at Army Group South, to join the conspiracy,²¹⁰ however, the latter always put the oath he had taken to Hitler first, which prevented him from engaging in rebellious activity against the Führer.²¹¹ As part of his duty to Hitler, Manstein saw it as his responsibility to prevent the Russians from breaking through Germany's borders, while Tresckow may have preferred him to let the enemy break through, as he wanted Kluge to do on the Western Front.²¹² Still, there was perhaps an even more negative result of Manstein's refusal to cooperate. At the end of 1943, Manstein refused to appoint Tresckow as his chief of staff, which would have given the latter access to Hitler's headquarters.²¹³ If Tresckow had gotten admittance to the headquarters and he, instead of Stauffenberg, had planted the bomb on July 20, this would have made a difference. Stauffenberg had sustained injuries during the war that

²¹⁰Deutsch, 252.

²¹¹Schlabrendorff, 187.

²¹²Schlabrendorff, 187.

²¹³Manvell and Fraenkel, 87-88.

had left him severely handicapped, and which prevented him from activating two bombs for use at the Wolf's Lair. Tresckow, who was fully able to prepare the bombs and who was very familiar with them due to the tests he conducted with Schlabrendorff, may have been able to actually kill Hitler and afford the conspiracy a better chance to seize governmental power from the Nazis. As with Manstein, Tresckow also experienced bad luck in regards to Kluge's allegiance.

Tresckow had realized early, as mentioned above, that in order for the coup to be successful, it needed to include an established military figure. To persuade Kluge to support the conspiracy, he arranged a meeting between the Field Marshal and Carl Goerdeler, and also made sure that his staff provided Kluge with the worst information about Nazi wartime activities, such as the atrocities committed by the Einsatzgruppen, hoping that these reports would convince him that the regime must be destroyed.²¹⁴ After a back-and-forth battle, Tresckow finally won Kluge over by early 1943, and the latter pledged to let the enemy break through his lines on July 20 so he could negotiate an armistice with the Allies. However, Kluge only promised to do this if Hitler was successfully assassinated. One of the main reasons he had this precondition was that it would be difficult to gain willing support from soldiers if the person they had taken an oath of loyalty to was still alive.²¹⁵

On July 20, since Hitler had not been killed, "Kluge remained true to his own principles. Since Hitler was not dead, he would not countenance the coup; but he did

²¹⁴Fest, 189.

²¹⁵Schrader, 205.

utter the wistful words, 'If only the pig were dead...'"²¹⁶ If Tresckow had been with Kluge on July 20, it would have been interesting to see if the latter would have supported the conspiracy after all, because the Field Marshal was intimidated by his chief of staff and "was the perfect anti-Nazi" when he was around.²¹⁷ Overall, Kluge did not possess the moral courage of men like Tresckow and Olbricht, which held him back from rejecting Nazism and seeking to work out a cease-fire with the Allies, which could have played a large role in ending the National Socialist regime.²¹⁸ A few days after July 20, Kluge became paranoid that his pseudo-involvement in the conspiracy would be discovered and Hitler would order his execution, so he committed suicide by swallowing poison.²¹⁹

While Tresckow was unsuccessful in gaining the support of Field Marshals von Manstein and von Kluge, Olbricht did not persuade Colonel-General Fromm to join the conspiracy. Even as early as 1942, when Olbricht and Tresckow were working on the assassination attempt that would ultimately occur on March 13, 1943, Olbricht was still trying to recruit Fromm to the resistance, but to no avail.²²⁰ The inclusion of Fromm as a conspirator would have made it much easier to put Valkyrie into action, as it would not have aggravated the third fatal flaw of the plan. This defect, as mentioned above, was that the initiation of Valkyrie required Fromm's signature. Because Fromm did not put the plan into motion and Olbricht did not possess the vigor to bypass his superior, the result was a delay, which allowed the Nazis time to send out radio announcements

²¹⁶Schrader, 254.

²¹⁷Dulles, 63.

²¹⁸Jones, 177-178.

²¹⁹Fest, 290-291.

²²⁰FitzGibbon, 59.

announcing that the Führer was alive and the military was trying to take governmental control. If the orders had been issued two hours prior to the assassination, like they were supposed to have been, then there is a chance, however slim, that the conspiracy would have met with success, even though Hitler survived.

Although Major-General Henning von Tresckow and General Friedrich Olbricht continue to be overshadowed by Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, this does not change the fact that they, and not the Colonel, were the primary architects of the July 20 plot and its two corresponding parts, assassination and coup. Without the work of these two men during their time in the military resistance leading up to July 20, 1944, the conspiracy would likely have never been attempted, let alone gotten as close to success as it did. However, being that they were the main engineers of this plot, a majority of the responsibility for its failure falls on their shoulders. The July 20 plot came the closest to success of any before it, but nonetheless served to be a death knell for the military resistance, as the Nazis severely punished those involved.

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