

Recovery and Resistance

SFX - sounds of university; peaceful outdoors atmos - birds, breeze in trees; close conversation, people walking past, distant voices, doors being opening, laughter; then more determined walking; a briefcase being opening

In February 1943 Sophie Scholl and her brother, Hans, student members of the anti-Nazi activist group, White Rose, took a suitcase full of leaflets to the University of Munich. The leaflets argued that the war was lost, and appealed for a renunciation of 'National Socialist subhumanism'. They distributed them around the corridors for students to find at the change of lectures.

SFX - echoing flat shoes on marble stairs, ascending; a flutter of paper being thrown in the air and falling

Realising they had some left, Sophie and Hans climbed the stairs to the top of the atrium. Sophie spilled the remaining leaflets into the void, the pages fluttering down like leaves.

SFX - heavy footfalls; a male German voice, angry, shouting

The university porter came after them shouting 'You're under arrest!' Rather than run, they decided to submit.

The Gestapo interrogated the students over three days. The People's Court hurried down to Munich for a trial. The students were charged with treason. After reading the indictment in her cell on the morning of her trial, Sophie Scholl said to her cellmate 'What does my death matter if by our action thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action?'

SFX - courtroom sounds; a gavel is banged

At their trial – only four days after the initial arrest – the Scholls' parents Robert and Magdalena were not permitted entry. When they tried to enter the

courtroom, Magdalena said to the guard: 'But I'm the mother of two of the accused!' The guard responded: 'You should have brought them up better.'

Robert Scholl forced his way into the courtroom and told the court that he was there to defend his children. He was seized and forcibly escorted outside. The entire courtroom heard him shout: 'One day there will be another kind of justice! One day they will go down in history!'

Sophie told the presiding judge, Roland Freisler:

A female voice speaks these words in German.

Somebody, after all, had to make a start. What we wrote and said is also believed by many others. They just don't dare express themselves as we did.

SFX - banging gavel; courtroom sounds fade into the ambience of a bright sunny day

They walked to the guillotine a few hours later. Confronting death, Sophie said:

A female voice speaks these words in German.

How can we expect righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone willing to give himself up individually to a righteous cause? Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to go.

SFX - a guillotine falls; it cuts out the sunny day ambience; it slowly returns, muddled

This is *Treason*, the remarkable and true story of Claus von Stauffenberg and the plot to assassinate Hitler.

Episode five, "Recovery and Resistance".

MX in - show theme (Africa version)

In Africa, badly wounded Claus von Stauffenberg was rushed to a field hospital. Overworked surgeons amputated his right hand above the wrist, and the ring finger and little finger of his left hand. They also removed his shattered left eye. He had shrapnel under his scalp and in his arm, and injuries to his ear and his knee.

But he survived.

He endured a long ambulance journey – constantly disrupted by fighter-bombers – to a base hospital. At length, he was put on a ship for Italy – the last Axis ship to leave Tunisia.

From Italy, he travelled on a hospital train to Munich. Ahead lay intensive treatment and recovery.

Claus was in a great deal of pain. His knee and scalp were infected. He had undergone traumatic injuries. But he refused to take any painkillers or soporifics. His approach to illness for many years had been to focus his will to overcome it. This made him a formidably strong person.

MX in - Resistance theme (building)

While Claus had been in Africa, events occurred in the German Reich that would have a profound effect on him and on the German resistance.

Throughout the preceding years, the resistance had battled with the idea of Hitler's assassination. Many considered it wrong. No rebuilding of the nation's moral values, it was thought, could be founded on murder.

A key opponent of assassination was Colonel General Ludwig Beck, who had resigned in 1938 in protest at the proposed invasion of Czechoslovakia. All the military conspirators looked to him as their figurehead, if not their leader. With him opposed to Hitler's murder, it would be hard to win others to a plot involving assassination.

The resistance had made plans for seizure of power, but involving Hitler's arrest and trial. For hard-headed men like General Tresckow, however, Hitler being kept alive provided a fatal focus for the Nazi apparatus. There would be doubt on the part of many army officers as to whether they ought to obey the coup leaders against their lawful head of state. If Hitler were merely arrested, there was a real risk of civil war. As Hitler said to Göring when they climbed the Reich chancellery steps after seizing power, "the only way I'm leaving is in a coffin.

But the resistance received reliable information that provided the impetus to overcome this ethical hurdle.

MX out

In October 1942, word began trickling back to the German resistance that an 'SS blast furnace' had been established at Auschwitz. It was said that in this furnace the Nazis burnt 6,000 of their victims' corpses daily.

Now, even Beck agreed that Hitler must be assassinated.

MX in - cold drones

In early March 1943, key figures in the conspiracy met at Army Group Centre headquarters in Smolensk, Russia. Hitler was coming to the headquarters to discuss the forthcoming 'Operation Citadel' – which we now know as the Battle of Kursk. The conspirators took the chance to coordinate plans to assassinate the Führer and seize control of the Reich. They called it: 'Operation Flash'.

The primary plan was to gun Hitler down as he drove from the airstrip to headquarters. To this end, a cavalry regiment would take up carefully prepared positions along the route. Each officer was hand-picked for the purpose. Each was heavily armed and ready to act. Hitler would have his SS bodyguard, so it would be a matter of dealing with them, as well as Hitler.

If that failed, there was a backup plan: shoot Hitler at lunch in the officers' mess.

The commander of Army Group Centre was Field Marshal Günther von Kluge. While he was opposed to Hitler he was also a changeable, vacillating man. Tresckow worked tirelessly to stiffen Kluge's resolve to act against Hitler.

When Kluge gave permission for the cavalry regiment to assassinate Hitler, it seemed that the Third Reich's fate was sealed. Overnight, the cavalry regiment prepared.

MX in - upbeat drones

During the morning, whilst waiting for Hitler, Kluge had a change of heart. It would be wrong, he said, for him to sanction the slaughter of the man coming as his guest. It would be much better, he insisted, to wait until the military situation had developed to a point that would force Hitler's elimination.

Kluge forbade the assassination.

The officers would not carry out the mission against Kluge's order. Not only did they respect the Field Marshal, the military command structure was so powerful that there was no question of circumventing it.

SFX - three planes come into land

At about noon, on 13 March 1943, three Focke-Wulf Condors approached the runway, accompanied by an escort of Messerschmitt 109 fighters. Kluge and his staff, including Tresckow, met Hitler when he emerged from the first Condor.

Now simply posing as an extra security force, the cavalry unit remained in position, training its guns on Hitler's bristling entourage, and watching every metre of the journey.

MX out

The unit made no move to shoot.

The next possible means of eliminating the Führer that day was to assassinate him at lunch. Security rules forbade pistols being brought into the officers' mess, and Kluge had expressly forbidden any assassination attempt at lunch – he considered it unseemly to shoot a man while he was eating. A bomb could have been taken in, but would have killed many officers, including Kluge who sat beside Hitler, and this no one wished to do.

But Tresckow and Schlabrendorff were not done. Their backup plan was to secrete a bomb onto Hitler's plane. They did not tell Kluge.

MX in - upbeat German music (public domain)

Colonel Tresckow had obtained from the *Abwehr* captured British explosives and timing fuses. The British explosives were 'clam' mines – magnetic and fairly small, but composed of powerful plastic explosive. The Germans did not make silent timing fuses, but the British had devised one that used a glass phial filled with acid. When the phial was broken, the acid dissolved a wire retaining the firing pin, releasing it to strike down into the detonator.

SFX - two people walking in the forest; bombs go off

Tresckow and Schlabrendorff had practised with the mines and timing fuses in the forest near their headquarters. The fuses were of three kinds, giving two-hour, half-hour and ten-minute time delays. Tresckow and Schlabrendorff found the times to be very approximate – a ten minute fuse could go off in anything from four to thirteen minutes. But none of the fuses ever failed.

They also noticed that two of the mines together made a shape very like that of a Cointreau bottle. An idea occurred to them. They wrapped four of the mines in raffia to look like a gift box of the apéritif.

Over lunch Tresckow spoke to Colonel Heinz Brandt. As a member of Hitler's staff he would be riding in the Führer's plane, and Tresckow asked him if he would take a small parcel containing two bottles of Cointreau to General Helmuth Stieff at headquarters. Brandt readily agreed.

MX in - it's on!

Schlabrendorff fetched the bomb from his headquarters and took it to the airfield. Hitler, ever wary, drove to the airfield on an unexpected route, and insisted Kluge travel with him. When Hitler had farewelled the officers of Army Group Centre, and was preparing to board his aircraft, Schlabrendorff pressed down on the fuse activating the bomb. He handed the parcel to the unsuspecting Brandt.

SFX - plane takes off and disappears into the distance

The fighter escort took off and circled. Then, without delay, Hitler's plane swept into the air, and disappeared into clouds.

Tresckow and Schlabrendorff returned to their quarters. Schlabrendorff telephoned Berlin indicating that 'Operation Flash' was under way.

In Berlin, General Olbricht and his officers stood ready to secure the city with all available troops. They only waited for word of the aircraft's fate. They all expected detonation somewhere over Minsk.

Half an hour passed without word. Then an hour. Two hours. Two and a half hours later, their anxiety mounting, Tresckow and Schlabrendorff received a routine communiqué:

The Führer's plane had landed without incident at Rastenburg.

MX out

They were shattered.

Not only had the assassination failed, but a cold realisation struck them: Colonel Brandt still had the bomb. He could discover what it was at any moment – indeed, he may already have discovered its true nature. They knew what that might mean for themselves, their fellow conspirators, their friends and their families.

Schlabrendorff called Berlin again, giving the code word for failure.

SFX - a ringing phone is picked up; the next passage is played slightly in each stereo channel depending on who is the focus

Shaken, and after careful deliberation, Tresckow telephoned Brandt. In the course of a pleasant conversation he asked casually whether the Cointreau had been given to General Stieff. Brandt said he had not had the chance to do so. Tresckow told him the wrong parcel had been sent by mistake. He asked him to hold it till the following day, when it could be exchanged.

It was clear the bomb had not yet been discovered, but this could happen at any time. Or it could go off.

MX in - ticking clock tension

The following morning Schlabrendorff caught the first courier plane to Rastenburg. Immediately on arrival, he went to see Brandt.

Serenely unaware of what the parcel contained, Brandt juggled it back and forth as he grinned and chatted to Schlabrendorff, whose blood ran cold. Forcing himself to stay outwardly calm, Schlabrendorff eventually handed over his substitute parcel – containing real Cointreau – and took the bomb.

With haste, Schlabrendorff made his way to the sleeping compartment reserved for him on the train to Berlin. Gingerly, using a razor blade, he removed the wrapping. Step by step, trying to keep a steady hand, he dismantled the bomb.

Inside, Schlabrendorff noticed the phial had been broken to release the acid, which had eaten away the wire holding the firing pin. The firing pin had been released and had struck the detonator correctly, but the detonator hadn't ignited. Schlabrendorff attributed this to the detonator being a dud which had slipped past a British inspection. Another possibility is that the extreme cold at altitude over Russia was responsible.

MX in - Resistance theme

The resistance had come so close. The setback seemed inexplicable.

MX continue (chapter break)

Terrible though the failure had been, the conspirators were not done.

The following week, 'Heroes Memorial Day' on 21 March 1943, was to be marked with a ceremony at the glass-roofed Zeughaus in Berlin. It was an annual commemoration for fallen soldiers, and Hitler would attend. Army Group Centre had compiled an exhibition of captured Russian weaponry for

the occasion, which Hitler was to inspect. Göring, Himmler, and other Nazi leaders would also be present.

Tresckow, who had arranged the exhibition, insisted that Army Group Centre's Intelligence Officer, Colonel Baron Rudolph-Christoph von Gersdorff, attend.

Gersdorff was a committed member of the resistance. Tresckow summoned him. He spoke with 'the utmost gravity' about the situation and the 'absolute necessity' of saving Germany from destruction. He asked Gersdorff to assassinate Hitler during the weaponry inspection. Gersdorff would probably be killed. He was married, with a daughter. As Gersdorff put it:

At that time we were so caught up in the mission we had set for ourselves, that of eliminating Hitler, that I did not need much time to answer 'yes' to the most momentous question that anybody ever asked me.

On 20 March 1943, the day before the ceremony, Gersdorff flew to Berlin. He spent some hours at the Zeughaus, investigating assassination possibilities, and slowly the realisation came that there was nowhere to secrete a bomb, and the only way to succeed was to plant a bomb on his own person.

That evening, Schlabrendorff delivered clam mines to Gersdorff in his hotel. They were the same type as were used for the Cointreau bomb.

Facing imminent death, Gersdorff was unable to sleep all night.

Next morning, he placed a bomb in each pocket of his overcoat. He had a single silent fuse, which he attached to one bomb, expecting the detonation of that would set off the other. The fuse had a ten-minute delay. Gersdorff would need to remain close to Hitler after he had activated the fuse.

MX in - Bruckner's 7th Symphony (public domain)

The ceremony started an hour late. Hitler spoke briefly. The Berlin Philharmonic played the first movement of Bruckner's 7th symphony. Then, with a small entourage including Göring and Himmler, Hitler walked over to the exhibition.

While attention was distracted, Gersdorff, with his right arm raised in the Hitler salute, reached into his pocket (a risky gesture) and squeezed on the fuse, activating it. He hurried to Hitler's side. The bomb was minutes away from detonation.

But Hitler paid almost no attention to the exhibits, walking at an ever-accelerating pace, until he was almost running through the display. Gersdorff struggled to keep up. Hitler showed no interest in Gersdorff's explanations. Even an old Napoleonic standard, unearthed in a riverbed by German engineers, did not interest Hitler.

About two minutes after entering the exhibition, Hitler suddenly ducked out of a side door. Outside, he saw a captured Soviet T34 tank and spent some time clambering over it. Gersdorff was not permitted to accompany him outside. He could do no more.

But Gersdorff still had a live bomb in his pocket, with the timer well on the way to exploding.

He rushed to the nearest toilet and with frantic hands fumbled the bomb out of his pocket. He ripped out the timer.

Another assassination attempt had come to nothing.

MX out

One of the factors that repeatedly frustrated the resistance was Hitler's erratic timetable. Hitler spoke of this as a deliberate measure on his part:

Not a soul could cope with an assassin who, for idealistic reasons, was prepared quite ruthlessly to hazard his own life in the execution of his object. I quite understand why 90 per cent of the historic assassinations have been successful. The only preventive measure one can take is to live irregularly – to walk, to drive and to travel at irregular times and unexpectedly. But that, after all, is merely normal caution, and not prevention.

As far as possible, whenever I go anywhere by car I go off unexpectedly and without warning the police.

As well as his random behaviour, Hitler relied heavily on the Gestapo to keep him from insurrection. And by April 1943, this secret police force was closing in on the resistance movement. Count Fritz-Dietlof von der Schulenburg, an active figure in the resistance, went recruiting. This time, when he raised the topic, his target called the Gestapo and Schulenburg was arrested. He put on a tremendous show of outrage, and protested complete innocence. He was released.

Soon after, the Gestapo visited German Military Intelligence, known as the *Abwehr*. It was one of the main centres of the resistance. General Oster, the *Abwehr* chief of staff, and widely regarded as the 'general manager' of the resistance fell under suspicion when he tried to remove notes from a file the Gestapo officers were seizing. He was placed under house arrest and dismissed from the *Abwehr*. The resistance had lost its central organiser. Several others in the *Abwehr* were marked for trouble. Things were growing ever more dangerous and uncertain for those working against the Nazis.

MX in - Nazi theme

There were more than 100,000 officials in the German Reich charged with the security of the Nazi regime. They paid informers, compiled dossiers, cross-referenced information, and kept watch on persons of interest. Where necessary they engaged in 'intensive interrogation', or torture, of suspects.

The security apparatus hovered darkly over all those who opposed the regime. Schlabrendorff describes something of the experience:

For those who have never had to live under such pressures, it will be quite impossible to imagine the persistent terror that was our constant companion by day and robbed us of our sleep at night. The ever-present fear of spies and the possibility of being under surveillance by the Gestapo were a paralysing burden which every member of the resistance had to bear day after day, month after month, without a moment's relaxation or relief. Shaking off this weight anew each morning was in itself an effort that sapped much of our energy and stamina.

The *Abwehr* – referred to by the Gestapo as the Schwarze Kapelle (black orchestra) – had long fed important information to military and civilian resistance circles, but now largely fell silent. The Nazis had closed down the opposition group known as the 'Red Orchestra' within the Luftwaffe, as well as the White Rose student group and the 'Solf Circle', which included a number of former diplomats.

The resistance movement was flailing and largely rudderless. It needed someone to step forward and lead it.

SFX - hospital ambience

MX in - Claus' theme

In hospital in Munich, Claus von Stauffenberg received a stream of high-ranking visitors. The Chief of the German General Staff, General Kurt Zeitzler, presented him with the Wound Badge in Gold, and a gift of wine. Soon after, he was awarded the German Cross in Gold for repeated bravery.

In late April 1943, Nina visited Claus for the first time. He was maimed, had undergone many operations and endured several bouts of fever, but he was already thinking ahead.

To Nina he said: 'As General Staff officers we are all responsible.' Then, in a half-humorous, half-serious tone, he said: 'It is time for me to save the German Reich.'

She replied: 'You're in fine shape to do that now!'

But the idea grew.

And despite not needing to return to duty, despite being entitled to a discharge and pension, it seems that at no stage did Claus seriously consider retiring on the grounds of ill-health. He did not even undertake all the treatment his doctors required, continually postponing the fitting of a prosthetic hand and eye, as well as some operations. He was impatient with his disability. Again and again he said to visitors in hospital, 'We must save Germany.'

With his efficiency, energy and reputation, Claus was in keen demand as a staff officer. Several high-ranking commanders sought him as their chief of staff. He rejected the offers. But then Lieutenant General Olbricht, the conspirator in charge of the Berlin end of 'Operation Flash', approached him. Olbricht was head of the General Army Office. He knew Claus from his time on the General Staff, and he knew that he was opposed to the regime.

Claus accepted the offer to serve as Olbricht's Chief of Staff. Not only was the post a distinction for him – it was designated for a full colonel – but Claus expected that the new post would give him 'opportunities for decisive intervention'. He told Olbricht that he hoped to be available soon.

SFX - hospital atmos becomes countryside ambience

After three months in hospital, Claus was finally able to move home to recuperate with his family. He spent precious time playing with his children, making up for the long months of absence. He read extensively, and he exercised regularly, building up to climbing local peaks.

For the most part, in spite of pain, he glowed with vitality. He insisted on dressing himself, using his three remaining fingers and his teeth, as well as tying his own shoelaces – laughing as he showed off this skill to a visitor who offered to help. Another visitor described him as radiating an ‘inner fire’

MX in - show theme

Meanwhile, the Nazi regime was moving to ever-greater excesses. The military, and particularly the General Staff, were heavily implicated in furthering the ambitions of Hitler and the Nazis, and in their atrocities. For Claus von Stauffenberg, there was no escaping moral responsibility for his country now.

If Claus did not take a stand, who would?

To a friend he said, ‘I have been spared for a purpose.’

Treason is written and narrated by me, Brian Walters. Script editing, original music, sound design and editing is by Sam Loy.

You can learn more about Claus von Stauffenberg and German Resistance with the book, *Treason*. Available through Apple Books or the website brianwalters.com You can find a link in the episode’s show notes.

All the very best, and may you find the inspiration you need in your life.