

Vengeance

SFX - banging gavel; courtroom ambience

Days after the July plot, Hitler appointed Judge Roland Freisler to conduct the trials of the conspirators before the Nazi 'Peoples Court'. Formerly a Bolshevik, Freisler had become a dedicated Nazi. He was fiercely loyal to the Führer. The trials he conducted, including that of Sophie and Hans Scholl, bore only the most superficial resemblance to normal legal process. Nearly all resulted in sentences of death.

MX in - dark drones

From 7 August 1944, less than three weeks after the coup collapsed, those involved in the July plot came before him.

SFX - camera winds up and whirs

The needs of propaganda were paramount. Cameras were hidden behind flags, and Freisler signalled to the operators when he wanted them to record what was coming. He aimed to break the defendants down to misery - or 'atomise' them, as he called it.

The defendants – unshaven, without ties, braces, or false teeth – knew the end was only hours away. They would prove astonishingly difficult to cow into submission.

SFX - trial audio - Schulenburg

Despite the almost apoplectic attempts of Freisler to control him, Count Fritz-Dietlof von der Schulenburg gave a particularly stirring account of himself. When asked whether he was ashamed of his actions, he answered: 'I am proud that we sought to rid the world of one of the greatest murderers in history. I realise I shall be hanged for this, but I do not regret what I did and only hope that someone else will succeed in luckier circumstances.'

SFX - trial audio - Wirmer

The Berlin lawyer, Dr Joseph Wirmer, had been banned from practice for years, but now, in his last case, defended himself with great dexterity – always calmly accepting that he was about to hang. At one point he said: ‘When I hang, I will not know fear. But you–’

Freisler screamed at him: ‘Soon you will be roasting in hell!’

Dr Wirmer bowed curtly and gave the immortal retort ‘Herr President, I’ll look forward to your own imminent arrival.’

SFX - trial audio - Hofacker

Claus von Stauffenberg’s cousin, Cäsar von Hofacker, so instrumental in seizing Paris for the conspirators, could expect no mercy, but he was coldly determined when he addressed the court: ‘On November 9 1923 Hitler tried to stage an insurrection when he conducted his “beer hall putsch”. I acted with as much right as Hitler on that occasion.’

Angling for an abject apology, Freisler asked if he regretted his part in the failed coup.

‘I regret that I was not chosen to carry out the assassination, because then it would not have failed. But I in no way regret that I attempted to save Germany from the destruction to which Hitler and his evil cohorts are leading us.’

MX in - theme

When Freisler tried to respond with righteous indignation, Hofacker cut him off.

‘Be quiet now, Herr Freisler, because today it’s my neck that’s on the block. In a year it will be yours!’

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

Episode ten, "Vengeance".

MX fade

SFX - Hitler's July 21 broadcast (exactly as in previous episode)

In the early morning of 21 July 1944, in the headquarters of Army Group Centre on the Russian front, Lieutenant Fabian von Schlabrendorff, listened to Hitler's broadcast.

SFX - a knock on the door

Uncertain before, he now knew that the coup had collapsed. He rushed to General Tresckow, who had gone to bed, to tell him the news.

Tresckow, fearful that he would be arrested and the names of others extracted from him by force, vowed to take his own life. Schlabrendorff tried to dissuade his old friend and they argued through the night.

When the two men parted in the morning, Tresckow affirmed his belief that they had done the right thing. He called Hitler not only the archenemy of Germany but also the entire world. He would in a few hours stand before his god with a clear conscience that he had done all he could.

Tresckow told Schlabrendorff:

A man's moral worth is established only at the point where he is prepared to give his life for his convictions.

SFX - footsteps in the forest; German countryside; distant gunfire; distant grenade blast

At about three, in the forest north east of Novosiolki, in an area between the lines, Tresckow went for a stroll in the trees. A short time later, those nearby heard the sound of firing and then the blast of a grenade. When they went to investigate, Tresckow's body was found. He was brought back in his staff car, everyone blaming a partisan attack.

As he had told friends he would, Treckow had used two weapons to feign an exchange of gunfire. He then held a rifle grenade to his head. It decapitated him.

At first, no one guessed Tresckow's involvement in the resistance. He was buried with full honours.

MX - dungeon drones; muted Resistance theme

SFX - through the next scene, when relevant: a face being punched; chains; tightening screws; turning a lever; a body being punched

With the Gestapo's net tightening around him, Schlabrendorff was soon arrested – and tortured. It began as he knelt, chained and helpless, with punches to the face. Outwardly calm, Schlabrendorff merely reminded his interrogators that such behaviour was vile and illegal. This only infuriated them more.

Taken from his cell at night, Schlabrendorff was given a final opportunity to confess. When he refused, his hands were chained behind his back and fixed with a device that pressed pins against his fingertips. The turning of a screw pushed the pin points into his fingers.

When his denials continued, he was strapped face down onto a rack. Cylinders were shoved over his bare legs. Inside were nails that pressed against his flesh. Here, too, the turning of a screw pushed the nails into his legs from ankle to thigh. The rack was then expanded, so that his shackled body was pulled in all directions.

Still Schlabrendorff refused to talk. He was savagely beaten.

He lost consciousness, and suffered a heart attack the next day – even though he had been in good health. But the torture failed to make Schlabrendorff confess or to name his fellow anti-Nazis.

All the arrested conspirators endured cruel torments, yet the Gestapo, for all their determination, had great difficulty obtaining useful information. It was the discovery of indiscreet diaries, and the suicide of some previously unsuspected conspirators, which showed the Gestapo that the conspiracy was far more extensive than they had imagined.

MX out

Conspirators who were officers in the army were not subject to the People's Court, or any civil courts. When charged with an offence, they were entitled to be dealt with by military courts martial. Such courts might impose a sentence of death by firing squad, but not hanging. That wasn't good enough for Hitler.

He denounced the conspirators as the basest creatures that ever wore the tunic of a soldier and demanded they be hanged like common traitors. He proposed a court of honour, which would expel them from service so they could be tried as civilians. He predetermined their death sentences, and ordered they occur within hours of the trial, leaving no time for speeches.

MX in - Resistance theme

The first person expelled from the Army, was Colonel Count Claus von Stauffenberg, Iron Cross First Class, Wound Badge in Gold, German Cross in Gold.

A further twenty-one officers were expelled at the first sitting. Once they had been drummed out of the Army, the People's Court took over.

SFX - courtroom murmurs; a camera whirs

On 7 August 1944, three days after their expulsion from the Army, and less than three weeks after the failed coup, the first officers were arraigned in the Great Hall of the Supreme Court in Berlin. The court was decked out with swastikas. A bust of Hitler looked over the judges' shoulders.

Freisler, in his blood-red judicial robes, knew this and played to the cameras. He thundered at the accused men in a voice that could be heard in the surrounding streets.

The Defendants included Field Marshal von Witzleben, Colonel-General Hoepner, General Stieff, General von Hase, and Captain Klausing.

Freisler opened the proceedings with a statement which cast aside any pretence at judicial impartiality.

Today it is the task of the People's Court of the German Reich to pass judgment on the most horrific charges ever brought in the history of the German people. Traitors have come amongst us. Led by the murderous scoundrel, Colonel Stauffenberg, a rabble of criminals, with the character of pigs, has, in the very hour of Germany's need, tried to murder one of the greatest leaders in the history of the world.

To ensure humiliation, the defendants were not permitted ties, belts, braces, or false teeth. The great Field Marshal von Witzleben, without his dentures, mumbled as he held up his trousers in court. The signs of torture and ill-treatment were visible on the defendants, who could only look forward to the inevitable end.

SFX - Freisler going off

The judge threw scorn at those who came before him. He abused them, often in obscene language. He laid traps and stalked his victims, signalling at the appropriate moment for the cameras to roll, so he could engage in histrionic gestures and denounce them with outraged self-righteousness.

SFX - trial audio - Witzleben

But many of the accused would not be cowed. When Freisler taunted Witzleben, no doubt in the hope of intimidating and humiliating him, the Field Marshall stood tall, absorbing the judge's barrages and admitting he could have done a better job than Hitler.

Some of Freisler's attempts to achieve propaganda triumphs were self-evidently pathetic. At one stage, he cross-examined Beck's housekeeper and attempted to draw a link between the General's sleeping patterns and his aptitude for military service.

With others, Freisler's tactics were more successful. When General Stieff, who had once volunteered to blow Hitler up himself, tried to use the forum to provide a statement of his motives, Freisler quickly cut him off. He shouted at the general that the motivation he needed was to obey, triumph and die. He let Stieff say no more.

SFX - trial audio - Hoepner

When Colonel General Hoepner, who had narrowly avoided execution at the hands of Fromm, recounted the events of 20 July, there were constant interruptions from the bench. At length, the back and forth between Hoepner and Freisler absurdly reached a point where Hoepner stated he was not a bastard, mangy dog.

Freisler pressed him: what type of animal was he? Hoepner, in front of cameras, and evidently thinking he still had a chance to save himself, muttered that he was an ass.

He was abjectly humiliated.

The trial continued into the following day, 8 August, when Freisler pronounced the death sentence on all those before him. He found the defendants guilty of treason, ruled by their own ambition. They had abandoned their country and engaged in the most shocking betrayal.

Witzleben shot back:

You can hand us over to the hangman. In three months the enraged and tormented people will call you to account, and will drag you alive through the muck in the street.

SFX - banging gavel

MX - dungeon drones; muted Resistance theme

At Gestapo headquarters, Fabian von Schlabrendorff's ordeal continued. The Gestapo showed him an area with unmistakable signs of having been used as a shooting range, hinting that it was to be his fate too. Then they took him to a coffin, still muddied from the ground. They threw open the lid and revealed the exhumed headless body of Tresckow.

SFX - trial audio - Schwanenfeld

On 10 August the next tranche of conspirators came before the Peoples' Court. They included, amongst others, Claus's brother Berthold von Stauffenberg and General Fellgiebel.

In the silence following pronouncement of his death sentence, General Fellgiebel called out: 'Then hurry with the hanging, Herr President – otherwise you will hang before we do!'

Count Helldorf, Adam von Trott and Hans-Bernd von Haeften were in the next group of conspirators to face the court. More than once, simply by being direct, Haeften reduced Freisler to speechlessness.

On one occasion, Haeften stated that loyalty to the Führer was not required because Hitler's role in history was the incarnation of evil. Freisler allowed him to say no more.

On 20 August Count Schwerin von Schwanenfeld came before Freisler. At one stage he spoke of the 'many murders' of the regime.

Freisler yelled his interruption: 'Murders!?'

But the count was not to be put off: 'At home and abroad.'

Freisler yelled again: 'You really are a low filthy louse! Are you not ashamed to be making such base allegations? Are you breaking down under this rottenness!? Are you breaking down under it!? Yes or no, a clear answer!'

Schwerin answered, more in sorrow than in anger: 'No.'

Freisler was left to resort to impotent invective: 'Nor can you break down any more. For you are nothing but a small heap of misery that has no respect for itself any longer!' Schwerin was given no further opportunity to speak.

The diplomat Ulrich von Hassell was tried in early September. Despite the Nazis' attempt to humiliate him by refusing to let him wear a belt or tie, and allowing him only a rumpled suit, Hassell cut a stylish figure with his pocket handkerchief and his poised bearing.

At one point in the trial, he calmly told the foaming Freisler: 'Herr President, I have not lived sixty-two years to be told by you that I am a liar.'

And so the trials continued, week in and week out, well into 1945, ultimately proving a propaganda disaster. Freisler's histrionic antics contrasted unfavourably with the quiet assurance of those who had stood up to the regime. If anything, the newsreels generated sympathy, even admiration, for the conspirators.

Hitler forbade further public reporting of the conspirators' trials. In the end, not even the executions were announced in the newspapers.

MX in - Fromm score

Fromm's hopes of saving himself by turning against the coup leaders and having them shot, turned out to be fruitless. He was charged with cowardice (care was taken to avoid the more politically embarrassing charge of treason on the part of the commander of the Home Army) and tried before the People's Court in early 1945. Self-deluding to the end, his death sentence shocked him.

In a bizarre parody of the way Claus faced death, he called out, just before he died, 'Heil Hitler!' Perhaps he thought he was backing another winner – or might yet save himself.

MX in - transition to drones

At noon on 14 October 1944, two generals called on Field Marshal Erwin Rommel at his home. They had been sent by Hitler.

Rommel had almost recovered from his strafing injuries, and by now his awareness of the conspiracy, and sympathy for it, had become all too clear. Hitler did not want the embarrassment of placing his most popular military commander on trial.

The generals offered the Field Marshal a choice: trial before the People's Court and execution, in which case his entire staff would be executed and his family punished, or take cyanide.

After taking a short time to consider, Rommel explained his decision to his wife and son, and went out to the generals' car. A short way out of the village the car stopped and Rommel took the cyanide.

MX in - bells

SFX - Rommel's state funeral

His death certificate stated he had suffered heart failure. He was given a state funeral with full military honours, complete with a message of praise from Hitler.

MX in - dungeon drones; muted Resistance theme

Fabian von Schlabrendorff, having been tortured for a long period, was finally brought before the People's Court on 21 December 1944.

There were five other cases that day. He was the last in the list. At the conclusion of the session, no time was left to deal with his case. He was returned to prison.

Six weeks later, Schlabrendorff was brought back to court.

SFX - air raid sirens; bombing raid

Just as his case was called, Allied bombers began the bombardment of Berlin. The court hastily sought shelter in the vaulted cellars of the building. The crump and clamour of a terrible bombardment followed, culminating in the deafening crash of a direct hit. As part of the ceiling collapsed, it burst into flames. A beam fell on Roland Freisler. He died with Schlabrendorff's file clutched in his fist.

MX out - finish with a triumphant Resistance theme melody

Some days later, at the Gestapo headquarters building, Schlabrendorff was taken to a shelter during an air raid. He was able to speak furtively with Kurt von Plettenberg, a resistance member and friend of Claus. Plettenberg said the Gestapo had given him 24 hours to consider whether he would voluntarily name the confederates he knew.

The next day, two guards took Plettenberg away for interrogation. As a young man, Plettenberg had trained as a boxer. Now he suddenly broke loose, knocked the two guards down with well-aimed blows, and jumped out of the fourth floor window to his death.

Most of the conspirators were afforded very little time between sentence and execution. Back in prison, and under dazzling lights to assist the whirring cameras capturing each moment for Hitler, they were made to strip off their clothes and don prison garb, then led straight to the execution chamber.

Claus's brother Berthold and his Uncle Nux were hanged on the day of their sentence.

Some were kept alive for days for interrogation.

After receiving a death sentence, the main case for which had been his friendship with Claus, Adam von Trott was interrogated for eleven days. In an adjacent cell languished Rev Eugen Gerstenmaier, who one day was gifted a roll. Biting into the roll, he found a note: 'Adam von Trott must immediately reckon with death.' It came for Trott the next day.

Sympathetic guards smuggled correspondence for the conspirators. Confronted with their impending death as traitors, a sublime clarity settled over the condemned men as they wrote their last farewells to loved ones.

Count Schwerin von Schwanefeld had liaised between the conspirators and Field Marshal Witzleben. He had stood up to Freisler in court, referring to the 'many murders' at home and abroad.

MX in - piano

Schwerin had just enough time to write a short letter to his wife before he was executed:

SFX - writing on paper

My darling: Now the last hour has come.

I can give you no further counsel, I can ask you only to make the youth of our children as happy as possible under all the present restrictions.

I go to my death unbowed, with the firm conviction that I have done nothing for myself, and everything for our fatherland. This must remain ever a

certainty for you, and something you tell our sons over and over. You know that my actions were at all times directed to the welfare of Germany, in the family tradition of an ardent patriotism outweighing all else ...

And finally, from my overflowing heart, thanks to you for your love that made my life beautiful. Be brave, and preserve your love to the end of your life.

I must stop. Greet all those whom I love and who have loved me and cherished me.

I embrace you and the boys in thought, with eternal gratitude to you.

MX out

The wife of a political prisoner reported:

I was standing at the heavy iron inside door of the prison, trying to talk an SS man into taking in a parcel for me. Suddenly the prison door opened, and through it strode calmly and erectly a man with his hands bound behind his back, followed by a little Gestapo man who looked to me like a reptile. The SS man whispered to me: 'That is Count Schwerin – Plötzensee.' I knew that Plötzensee was the place of execution, and through my mind there flashed the realisation: 'Here is a man who knows how to die.'

And so the conspirators prepared themselves for death. Contrary to popular legend, piano wire was not used.

Prison pastors eased their last hours, until Hitler, in an act of petty cruelty, ordered that pastoral consolation before death was to be denied.

But despite his treatment under Gestapo interrogation, it was Fabian Schlabrendorff who became one of the few whom fortune favoured. When he returned to court on 16 March 1945 for the third time, when the Red Army was almost at the gates of Berlin, he was able to prove that he had been tortured – something that remained

illegal in Germany throughout Nazi rule, even though it was widely practised. He was acquitted of all charges.

Many times Schlabrendorff came close to death, but survived the war to become one of Germany's most respected judges.

MX in - saintly drones

After her arrest, the Gestapo took Nina von Stauffenberg, then three months' pregnant, to Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin. Many members of the resistance spent weeks and months there, but she was soon moved on to the Alexanderplatz Prison.

Throughout her time in custody, the Gestapo repeatedly questioned her as to her associates, hoping for insights into the extent of the conspiracy. But Claus had shielded her from most details of the coup and she could tell the Gestapo nothing of interest.

In August, she was removed to the Ravensbrück Concentration Camp, where she was held in solitary confinement.

In early January 1945, with her pregnancy in its final stages, Nina was transferred to the Nazi maternity home near Frankfurt an der Oder. She was still kept in isolation.

About one week later in Berlin, Hitler and his senior staff moved into the Führerbunker, an underground air-raid shelter that would be his home until his death.

SFX - a large crowd moving along the road

Towards the end of that month, German defences on the eastern border collapsed into chaos before the advancing Russian steamroller. Refugees streamed past Nina's window at the maternity home. It was evacuated.

SFX - newborn cry

On 27 January 1945, in a private clinic Nina gave birth to a daughter – her fifth child, Konstanze. Nina continued to be held in solitary confinement.

Shortly after the birth, Nina developed an infection and was unable to stand. Konstanze also became ill. Mother and baby were bundled into a hospital train heading west. They were unloaded at Potsdam, near Berlin, where they were held in hospital for three months.

The entire extended Stauffenberg clan had been taken into custody under the doctrine of Sippenhaft (kin vengeance or blood guilt). The Nazis wanted to rid Germany of any Stauffenberg legacy. They changed Nina's surname to 'Schank'. Other family members had their names changed as well.

Nina's mother – who was never to see her grand-daughter – died in February in an SS penal camp.

Nina's sister-in-law Melitta, the wife of Claus's brother Alexander, had been held for a time but then released because of her work as a test pilot – despite her Jewish birth. She contrived (at great risk) to fly to visit Nina in hospital, as well as many of the other members of the Stauffenberg clan, largely holding their hopes together in those months.

From Melitta, Nina learnt that her other four children, with the new surname 'Meister', were being held in an orphanage at Bad Sachsa in the Harz Mountains. But early in April, Melitta brought Nina the ominous news that the children had been sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Nina had some sense of the horrors of Buchenwald. She desperately sought some way to reunite with her children.

MX in - Nazi theme

At the start of April 1945, Hitler gave orders from his bunker in Berlin that the *Prominenten* (the VIP prisoners of the Nazis) were to be sent south, out of the converging Allied lines. The Nazi leaders ordered that they were not to fall into Allied hands. Although the orders were that these prisoners should be executed, some

Nazis saw value in using the VIP prisoners as bargaining chips to secure their own freedom.

SFX - tired walking; an old bus slowly driving

There were some 140 prisoners of 22 different nationalities. About a third were relatives of conspirators in the July plot held under kin vengeance. They also included dethroned royalty, industrialists, leaders of countries invaded by the Nazis, clergymen, survivors of the Great Escape, senior German officers who had offended Hitler, and Claus's brother Alexander von Stauffenberg.

Alexander's wife, Melitta, had earlier discovered that the part of Buchenwald where Alexander had been held had been evacuated. She made urgent inquiries, at one stage claiming to represent Himmler, and learned that he was a part of the caravan heading south with the other VIP prisoners. He was now in Schonberg, Bavaria, in the hands of an SS death squad. Fearful that his death was imminent, she set off to rescue him.

SFX - small plane starting up; taking off; flying

Melitta climbed aboard her slow-moving training aircraft, a Bucker Bu 181 Bestmann. She headed south, flying at treetop level so as to evade fighters. Over the village of Strasskirchen just 50 kilometres short of Schonberg, a US P-47 Thunderbolt spotted her plane.

SFX - machine gun bursts

The Allied fighter fired two machine gun bursts into Melitta's unarmed Bestmann. She managed to bring it down. She'd broken a leg, and had fractures to her ankle and skull. She was aided by locals and taken away by ambulance.

Melitta died soon after. Alexander learnt of her death some days later.

SFX - tired walking; an old bus slowly driving

As the VIP prisoners moved south, Hitler authorised the immediate execution of several of them. Late night makeshift trials were convened in Flossenbürg concentration camp. Key leaders of the Abwehr, including Admiral Canaris, General Hans Oster, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, were condemned and executed.

Hans von Dohnányi's wife smuggled infected food to him, hoping this might mean he would be transferred to medical care, and find it easier to escape. When the order came for him to be transferred to a concentration camp, his doctor gave him drugs to incapacitate him, hoping this would mean no trial could be held. However, he was taken away and, semi-conscious and lying on a stretcher, tried and sentenced to death. He was hanged that day.

Josef Müller was also sentenced to death, and twice brought to stand naked below the gallows. But the head of the Gestapo thought Müller's contacts might make him useful in negotiations with the Allies, and he was spared.

The Nazis commandeered whatever trucks, buses and cars they could find for the convoy of VIP prisoners, and the transport had to be replaced at Dachau when Allied aircraft destroyed it.

MX in - drones

SFX - an old bus stops; a cold wind

In the early hours of Saturday 28 April, in the Brenner Pass, one of the buses broke down, and the prisoners waited for hours by the roadside in freezing conditions. It was a place the Allies regularly bombed. The next day they were finally able to reach Niederdorf in Italy.

One of the prisoners made contact with the Wehrmacht commander in Italy, General von Vietinghoff. Unknown to the Nazis, Vietinghoff was in active negotiations with the Allies to surrender all forces in Italy. He now sent troops to rescue the prisoners.

On 30 April a standoff took place between the SS and Gestapo guards of the prisoners, and a force of 150 Wehrmacht soldiers under Captain Wichard von Alvensleben. Finally, the guards threw down their weapons and departed.

The prisoners then moved to the nearby Pragser Wildsee Hotel. For the next several days the prisoners were free, but not safe, as a number of groups vied to control them.

Finally, at dawn on 4 May 1945, an Infantry Regiment of the US Army reached the Pragser Wildsee and took over security of the VIPs.

From that time, their safety was assured.

MX out

Nine months on from the failed July plot, the immolation of Germany was inevitable. The bombing and fire bombing of German cities accelerated. After obliterating Dresden and all its beauties in February 1945, the Allies dropped almost as many bombs on Germany during March 1945 as they had managed in the whole of the first three years of the war.

The Allies squeezed the Nazi regime from east and west, while Soviet submarines torpedoed crowded refugee ships in the Baltic, consigning tens of thousands to the freezing waters. Nearly five million Germans – soldiers and civilians – died in the last nine months of the war. This was nearly twice as many as had died in the five years to 20 July 1944. Had Claus and his fellow conspirators succeeded, these lives may have been spared.

MX in - Nazi theme (for the last time)

The Red Army laid its final, dreadful siege on Berlin. Hitler, transfixed by his fate, sat impotently in his bunker. With him was Goebbels, his wife, and their six children.

On 29th April, 1945, Hitler married his long-term mistress Eva Braun. The following day, with Eva, Hitler bit into a cyanide capsule and took a pistol to himself, accomplishing what so many in the German resistance had sought.

The next day, Magda Goebbels fed her children cyanide in a sweetened drink. She and her husband joined them hours later.

MX in

Nina began an odyssey across war-ravaged Germany to find her children. It had been nearly a year since she had last seen her family. Ostensibly still a prisoner, she was accompanied by a military escort. Signs of the collapse of Germany were everywhere – bombed buildings, and the need to endlessly change trains. In public places signs saying ‘Flying Court Martial’ hovered near hanging corpses. Each adorned with the placard ‘deserter’.

Finally, in the town of Trogen, with the Americans only a few kilometres away, Nina dismissed her guard, and remained where she was. The fighting was drawing to a close. The Nazi hierarchy had lost its power.

newsreader: The National Broadcasting Company delays the start of all its programs to bring you a special bulletin. It was announced in San Francisco a half an hour ago by a high American official not identified as saying that Germany has surrendered unconditionally to the Allies, no strings attached. And that the announcement is to be made formally by General Eisenhower.

Churchill: Yesterday morning, General Jodl, the representative of the German high command signed the act of unconditional surrender of all German land, sea and air forces in Europe to the Allied expeditionary force...

King George: Germany, the enemy who drove all of Europe into war has been finally overcome.

MX continues

Although she knew her children had been sent to Buchenwald, Nina was determined to find them. She made her way back to Lautlingen where she could rekindle contacts.

One morning in early June, just as she was about to set out, a car drove up. Behind the wheel was a female friend of Claus's aunt. There, in the front seat beside the woman, was Nina's eldest son Berthold. Nina raced to the car, and then saw that in the back seat, were her other sons, Heimeran and Franz-Ludwig.

The children had never reached Buchenwald. While they were on their way to the concentration camp, enemy bombers destroyed the Nordhausen station, where they were to board the train. They were returned to Bad Sachsa.

When Bad Sachsa was occupied by the Americans, the new mayor took charge of the children. He told them: 'Now you can use your real names again. You have no need to be ashamed of them, or of your fathers, for they were heroes.'

Then, with the war over, Claus's aunt, known to the family as Üllas, obtained a car and drove with others to Bad Sachsa. There she found all of Nina's children and their cousins.

Üllas sent the boys back to Lautlingen in a car with her friend. She procured a large bus to transport other children, including Nina and Claus's daughter Valerie. She brought the children away just before the Russians took over.

Finally, Nina was reunited with all her children.

MX in

Claus and Nina's children flourished.

Berthold, their eldest son, who was ten when his father fell before the firing-squad, became a soldier. He retired as a major general.

Heimeran became an industrialist, dying in 2020.

Franz-Ludwig became a lawyer and parliamentarian.

Valerie married, but died young in 1966.

Konstanze grew up and married in Bamberg, then moved to Switzerland. She has four children and has written an acclaimed biography of her mother.

Reflecting on the events of 1944 fifty years later, Nina said:

Naturally I didn't anticipate that I would disappear for months on end, and I also didn't expect that it would be so hard with the children, that I would have to struggle to survive. But I never questioned what my husband had done.

...

My life was shaped by him and continues to be shaped by him to this day. He is still with me daily in a practical way, but not placed in a shrine. Through all these years, at just about any time that I have been faced with a major decision, I have asked: 'How would he have decided?' or 'What would his attitude have been?' Perhaps he would have decided some things differently, but anyway, I always tried. To live for the future in his spirit, that seems the essential thing to me.

Nina died quietly in Bavaria in April 2006, having reached the grand age of 92.

[MX in - show theme \(long version\)](#)

On 20 July each year, dignitaries convene at the Bendlerblock – and throughout Germany – to remember Claus von Stauffenberg and the conspirators who opposed Hitler.

The courtyard of the Bendlerblock survived the massed bombing raids at the close of the war. After conquering Berlin in 1945, Marshal Zhukov went to see the place where Claus had died, now strewn with the rubble of battle.

Today the Bendlerblock houses the memorial to the German resistance. It is possible to visit the offices of Claus and Fromm. In the courtyard stands a statue of Claus facing the firing squad. It is a sacred place, where it is possible to feel some closeness to the courage of the conspirators on that July night.

With his final words, “Long live sacred Germany!” flung back at the firing squad and at all those who came to witness his end, Claus showed he was not overcome by despair at his failure and doom – he defiantly proclaimed a greater cause – a nation, of which he was an heir, and which he wanted restored to outlive himself.

Few would wish to face the death Claus did. But in his efforts to restore Germany’s moral integrity, he was clear-eyed that this was the likely outcome. In facing this challenge, Claus met his death, but it is in facing challenges that we also experience life most fully. Had Claus turned away from the challenge that his life offered, he would have suffered a kind of death there and then. As it was, his life was never diminished in this way. He lived his life to the full. The outcome was not what he struggled to achieve, but there is life in a struggle for a just cause.

As Claus and Nina’s daughter Konstanze puts it:

When I was growing up I never had to ask my parents ‘Why didn’t you do something?’

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

You can learn more about Claus von Stauffenberg and the German Resistance movement with the book, *Treason*. Available through Apple Books or the website brianwaltersauthor.com

You can find a link in the episode's show notes.

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As this series comes to a close I'd like to thank Mike Vernon for his graphics, my wife Sally, and my daughters Rachel and Georgia for the delight they give, and all those who helped bring this project to fruition.

Thanks for listening. All the very best. May you find the inspiration you need in your life.