

JUL 27 1964

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT

# THE PLOT THAT ALMOST CHANGED HISTORY

FOIAb3b

**July 20, 1944—what if that bomb had killed Hitler?**

**Historians and surviving participants in the assassination plot are convinced this would be a far different world now.**

**The bomb burst did little harm to Hitler, but it may have changed the course of history for Russia, East and West Europe, the U. S.—even for faraway areas in the Pacific.**

**BONN**

It was just 20 years ago, on July 20, 1944, that a bomb came within inches of destroying Adolf Hitler.

Had the blast killed the Nazi dictator, instead of merely injuring him, history since World War II could have been profoundly changed.

Hundreds of thousands of lives, lost in the last 10 months of the European war, could have been saved.

Russia, still fighting on home ground on July 20, might have been stopped from overrunning much of Eastern Europe and Germany.

Possibly no atom bomb would have been used to end the war in the Pacific and no race for nuclear supremacy would have been started.

The men who tried to kill Hitler planned to take over the Government, surrender to the Allies and end the war.

But when they tried to work out some kind of deal with the U. S. and Britain they met with either hostile silence or monotonous repetition of the catch phrase "unconditional surrender."

At that time, the Western Allies were dedicated to total victory in Europe and total destruction of Germany's industrial power. There was no inclination in either Washington or London to make any kind of deal with any German.

Years later, Britain's wartime Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, complained that he had been misled by subordinates as to what the anti-Nazi underground was doing.

Allen Dulles, who spent much of the war as a U. S. intelligence operative in Europe, kept Washington and London informed about the plot to kill Hitler

but ran into a stone wall whenever the idea of co-operation was raised.

**The plotters.** The bomb that almost destroyed Hitler was planted by a ring that included prominent anti-Nazi civilians as well as high-ranking military men.

Gen. Hans Speidel, first head of the armed forces in today's West Germany, was one of the plotters. So was Eugen Gerstenmaier, now President of the West German Bundestag, equivalent to Speaker of the House in the U. S.

Among the many who died because they were involved was Nazi Germany's most popular soldier, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel.

Of the hundreds who were in on the plot, only a handful are still alive. Inside this group there is strong conviction that, if the *Putsch* had succeeded, post-war Europe would have been radically changed.

Says Ludwig von Hammerstein, executive of a West German broadcasting network, "The map of Europe would look different. Soviet influence, not only in Europe, but probably throughout the

world, would be of a different nature today."

Fabian von Schlabrendorff, now a Wiesbaden lawyer, says: "There probably would not be a Berlin problem or a divided Germany. The question of the Soviet satellite countries might not have been posed in the way it exists now."

Hans Fritzsche, now a senior civil servant in Bonn, agrees: "Surely Russia would never have been able to play the dominating role as uncontestedly as she has."

**A winter's losses.** The plotters' plan to end the war in the summer of 1944 was not realized, and fighting continued across the map of Europe until the following spring.

During those months, about 100,000 Western soldiers—U. S., British and French—were killed in battle. Five times as many were listed as wounded and missing. In the German and Russian armies, casualty lists were undoubtedly far longer. And uncounted thousands were exterminated in the still-flourishing Nazi concentration camps.



Keystone Press Photo

PROOF OF FAILURE—Hitler shows Mussolini the wrecked room where a bomb, World War II.

Continued

Approved For Release 2000/05/23 : CIA-RDP70-00058R000300030063-6

The CIA chief wanted to quit fighting could get no cooperation in the West is verified by Allen Dulles. The man who later headed the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency wrote a book, "Germany's Underground," about his European experiences. In it the former CIA chief says:

"After Hitler went to war and Western eyes were finally opened to what Hitlerism meant, no one would have anything to do with any German, whether Nazi or not. All were suspect."

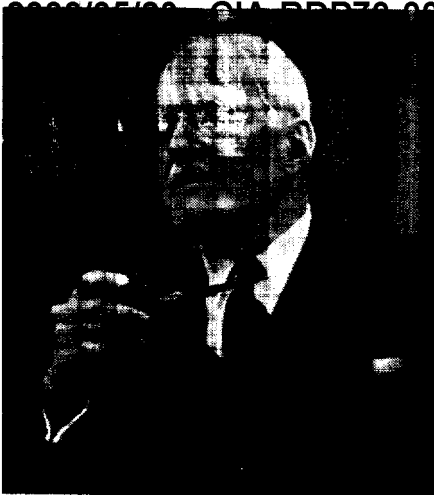
**A difficult task.** Mr. Dulles notes: "Both Washington and London were fully advised beforehand on all the conspirators were attempting to do, but it sometimes seemed that those who determined policy in America and England were making the military task as difficult as possible by uniting all Germans to resist to the bitter end."

One of the surviving plotters, Schlabrendorff, had gone to London in 1939 to tip off the British about the impending Nazi attack on Poland. While there, he told Churchill about German hopes for overthrowing Hitler.

"Churchill left me under the impression that he was in favor of our intentions and that he would help us," Schlabrendorff recalls.

But no help came, and a decade passed before the Englishman and the German met again. Said Schlabrendorff:

"Ten years later, after the war, in 1949, I met Churchill again and we had



—USN&amp;WR Photo

ALLEN DULLES, of U. S., kept Washington "fully advised" of anti-Hitler plots.

a long talk about the German resistance, the July plot and its aftermath.

"Then Churchill said to me: 'After our discussion now it suddenly dawns on me that my closest associates and collaborators have not kept me fully informed about these events in Germany during the war—which is deplorable.'"

To the end of the war, the West downgraded the anti-Nazis in Germany. But the Russians, according to Allen Dulles, "were far smarter than we. They took a more realistic view of things."

Mr. Dulles recalls that Moscow radio praised the bomb plotters of July 20 and urged the German people to rebel.

"What," asks Mr. Dulles, "came from Washington and London? The attempt on Hitler's life was dismissed as of no consequence."

In this, the West agreed with Hitler. Twelve hours after the explosion on July 20, Hitler took to the air to tell the world he was still very much alive.

Hitler described the would-be assassins as "a very small clique of ambitious officers, devoid of conscience and at the same time criminally stupid."

Like so many Nazi declarations, this was a lie. Before Hitler's crackdown was over, some 7,000 Germans had been arrested. About 5,000 were executed.

Intellectuals, Socialists, labor leaders, anti-Nazi politicians, Catholic and Protestant churchmen, as well as hundreds of military men, were killed.

**The early conspirators.** Many of those in on the plot were of the Johnny-come-lately type. They joined only when convinced Germany would lose the war.

But others, including those who were to head the new Government, had been plotting against Hitler since before the start of the war in 1939.

One of these was Gen. Ludwig Beck,

who had to have seen the new chief of state. He had resigned as Chief of the German General Staff in 1938 in protest against Hitler's plans to start war.

Another was the Chancellor-to-be, Carl Goerdeler, ex-mayor of Leipzig who broke with the Nazis in 1937.

**Dictator's luck.** The almost-successful explosion on July 20 was the last of literally dozens of German attempts to kill Hitler.

Luck enabled the dictator to escape unhurt on many occasions. Once he left a Nazi party meeting 20 minutes before a bomb killed several of those present. On another occasion, a time bomb was placed on his airplane, but the detonator failed to work.

Chance saved him on July 20, too.

The man who undertook to kill Hitler on that date was Count Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg, a 37-year-old Army colonel. He had been badly wounded in North Africa, losing his left eye, right arm and two fingers of his left hand.

No longer fit for combat, he had been assigned to a staff job in Berlin. His duties included attending many of Hitler's staff conferences.

Just before entering the conference room in Hitler's headquarters at Rastenburg, East Prussia, on the fatal day, Stauffenberg activated the fuse of the bomb concealed in his briefcase. It was set to go off in 10 minutes.

As he entered, he slipped the briefcase onto the floor near Hitler, then quietly left, saying he had to make an important telephone call.

But one of the other officers present inadvertently kicked the briefcase, picked it up and moved it out of his way. Its new position put it farther from Hitler, against the heavy oak support of the conference table. This undoubtedly absorbed much of the impact and probably saved Hitler's life.

Four persons were killed in the blast. But Hitler escaped with minor injuries—a bruised arm, a few burns and deafness in one ear.

Hitler's survival doomed the plot.

In Berlin, conspirators who were supposed to take over direction of armed forces throughout Germany and the occupied areas were frozen into inaction by the news that Hitler was still alive.

On the Western front in France, where a deal to surrender to the Allies was to have been put in motion, top-ranking officers similarly refused to act.

Stauffenberg managed to get to Berlin three hours after planting the bomb and tried to rescue the failing coup, but it was too late. He was handed over to a firing squad before the day was over, one of the first of the thousands who were to die because the plot to kill Hitler had failed.



—European Photo

COUNT von STAUFFENBERG, who planted the bomb for the conspirators.

GENERAL SPEIDEL, plotter, later led West German Army.

—J. I. Boca Photo



JUL 27 1964

Approved For Release 2000/05/23 : CIA-RDP70-00058R000300030063-6