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Letters to The Times

CPYRGHT

Debate on the Hitler Plot

German Attitudes on the Morality of Participation Described

The writer of the following letter was a German soldier in World War I and an American officer in World War II.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

Were the Germans who participated in the July, 1944, abortive attempt to kill Hitler traitors or heroes of their country? No other question has been more actively debated in post-war Germany.

President Heuss recognized the participants as great patriots. In his praise for their supreme courage he quoted the classical words of Friedrich Schiller: "There is a limit to the power of a tyrant; if the oppressed cannot find justice elsewhere, * * * he confidently reaches above to heaven and seizes the eternal rights which are up there as unalienable and undestructible as the stars."

Yet despite the very positive attitude of President Heuss and Chancellor Adenauer, public opinion in Germany today is much divided. While the Germans are ready to concede that civilians may have a right—and perhaps even a duty—to overthrow a criminal regime, many have serious difficulties in judging the deed of a soldier who took an oath of loyalty and in times of war conspired to eliminate his Commander in Chief. Surely such doubts will be shared by Allied officers.

It is therefore rather sensational that on the fifteenth anniversary of the Hitler plot Adolf Heusinger, Inspector General of the new German armed forces, published the following Order of the Day:

The deed of the 20th July, 1944—a deed against wrong and oppression—is a ray of light in the darkest period of Germany * * *. We soldiers of the German defense forces pay our homage to the sacrifice of those men whose consciences were awakened by their knowledge; they are the noblest witnesses against the collective guilt of the German people; their spirit and their conduct are an example for us."

In World War II General Heusinger was Chief of Operations (equivalent to Chief of G-3). In this capacity he attended the historical meeting at army headquarters when the bomb exploded.

Considering that Hitler not only abused his powers as Chief of State but committed the heinous crime of genocide in his own country and in foreign lands which he held under military occupation, the action of the men involved in the July plot—whether civilians or soldiers—appears fully justified. Indeed, it was a holy reaction.

Heusinger's proclamation offers good evidence of the new spirit in NATO-Germany.

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New York, Aug. 10, 1959.

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