

HISTORY EXTENSION

Project Proposal: Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg

Background to the resistance

When we cast our minds back to the totalitarian nature of the Nazi regime that was present in Germany prior to and during the Second World War, the layman can be forgiven for believing that the German population all advocated the policies of the National Socialists. Upon a little more research, however, one can find that this was not in fact the case. Large factions of the German populace at this time in fact condemned the Nazi rule, in one form or another. Whether this be through political or passive resistance, religious or moral resistance, or stronger, military resistance as demonstrated by groups such as the Kreisau circle and those involved in the 1944 July Plot, resistance to Hitler was always there and at the forefront of German societal issues at this time. As we are aware, the Gestapo was swift to eliminate all forms of active resistance to Hitler through the use of sheer force, and so the for the activity of military resistance of Stauffenberg and company to go unnoticed up until the bomb plot in July 1944 is something of a minor miracle.

In my essay I will be discussing the historical merit of Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, according to the changing attitudes of historians, and evaluating how his spotless portrayal in the media has sparked ongoing debate as to whether or not he was in fact, the hero that demonstrated that one could either serve Germany, OR the Fuhrer, but not both...

What research have you taken to arrive at this question?

I have arrived at this question as a direct result of my ongoing interest in this aspect of German history. Subsequently, I have unknowingly been researching this topic for some time. I have previously read articles, books, and personal memoirs, which have served to provide me with a basic foundation upon which to base my knowledge of the German resistance to Hitler through the Second World War. From this, I was able to identify a number of debates relating to the historiography of these events.

In terms of research, my first avenue can be found in the memoirs of Philipp von Boeselager, the last surviving member of the Valkyrie July Plot. Boeselager, (though it remains to be proven) was most likely the individual who manufactured the explosives in the operation. Through reading this, I was able to gain the intriguing German perspective, from within the operations inner circles.

Boeselager, Philipp Von, **Valkyrie, The Plot to Kill Hitler – The Memoirs of the conspiracy’s last survivor**, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009

Following this, I sought to find a source of information that would lead me to some form of historical debate. I found the following book in the school resources centre:

Graml, Mommsen, Reichardt, Wolf, **The German Resistance to Hitler**, London: B.T. Batsford LTD, 1970

This piece, first published in 1970, is able to identify background information to the resistance, provides political and moral motives for the resistance, resistance in the labour movement, and resistance thinking on foreign policy. One thing it also identifies is the differing opinions of various historians, one of the key aspects of my essay. It recognizes the differing concentration of West

German Historians on the role of the military, July plot, and attempts on Hitler's life, and East German historians on the communist activity. As well as this, it also reads, "Several very prominent British historians, too, consider the whole German opposition to Hitler highly overrated¹".

After reading this, I was inclined to research more into this debate, and without fail, I came upon an internet article that, in review of the writing of a man named "Zeidler", who was responsible it seems for a set of writings that revolve around the historiography of the July conspiracy specifically. According to this article, Zeidler "is intended primarily for Germans attempting to better understand the July conspiracy and its legacy within German History". In saying this, the article references several other historians which would be more beneficial to an English speaking audience. The two names that appear are Hans Mommsen and Peter Hoffmann.

Following this research, I found myself trawling through the internet in order to find a healthy debate with which I could really look into. What I found was an article, written by a German named Karl Heinz Bohrer. This article is in counter of an article written by the widely accepted British historian, Richard Evans. Evans discusses the historical honour of one particular participant in the July 20 plot, that of Colonel Stauffenberg. Evans dismisses Stauffenberg as a "failure", and that his "moral gesture was not enough to undo the crimes committed under Germany's Name²". What I had come to discover seemed like an interesting debate.

Karl Heinz Bohrer: Unmasking the July 20 plot (13/02/2009) - signandsight (Internet) (2008) Available from: <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1825.html> (Accessed 4 February, 2010)
Richard J. Evans: Why did Stauffenberg plant the bomb? (10/02/2009) - signandsight (Internet) (2008) Available from: <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1824.html> (Accessed 4 February, 2010)

I then discovered that this ongoing discussion regarding Stauffenberg as a supposed "war hero" as such, had been in the works ever since his last actions mid-1940s, and the view of him held by Germans has changed over time. In recent times, as a result of his media portrayal, particularly in the 2008 film "Valkyrie", starring Tom Cruise as Stauffenberg himself, he has been largely thought of as a heroic figure, who had used what he had available to him in order to carry through with a courageous act of limitless bravery.

This preliminary research has allowed me to arrive at a question that I am not only hold interest in, but will challenge me in my historical investigation.

Proposed methodology

In terms of sources, I have ready and existing access to a number of avenues:

- Historians accounts (Mommsen, Hoffman)
- Personal Memoirs (Philipp von Boeselager)
- Internet and Magazine articles
- Current Historical discussion
- Media i.e. film and television (such as the film "Valkyrie)
- Biography (historians perspective)
- University of Sydney Library
- Five Dock public library

¹ Introduction page viii

² "Why did Stauffenberg plant the bomb?" Evans, Richard. Page 2 of article.

Books

My base knowledge regarding my topic has largely come about as a result of reading books. This shall continue throughout the duration of this project, and I wish to utilize several different avenues of historical literature in order to maximize my approach to my question. These shall include personal memoirs of those involved in the resistance movement, historian's accounts of the events, factions and personalities relevant to my topic, historical biographies, as well as making use of Library services in my local area (i.e. Sydney University and Five Dock library).

Internet and web media

It is through the internet that I have been able to narrow down my thinking and locate a number of things that I would like to use as the basis of my essay, mostly from the knowledge I have gained from books and historical accounts. It is how I came about the Stauffenberg debate, as recorded in my process log. I will continue to use the web as a major research method, as it is able to provide information that I desire on demand, without the need for ongoing searches, as may be the case with research avenues such as the library etc.

Film Media

The 2008 film "Valkyrie", starring Tom Cruise as Colonel Stauffenberg, is a potential staying point in my investigation. This film has served to reignite the dying embers of a debate, of which I will be closely examining in my essay. It is in this way that I have chosen to use this film to represent Stauffenberg's portrayal in the media as a significant part of this debate.

What other research do you intend to pursue?

Throughout the duration of this research essay, I will aim to base my writing on the findings of other, well established historians. I have now developed a list of possible avenues that I will pursue in order to gain the best historiographical insight into my question. I have established names of those who have written pieces regarding a similar subject matter to mine, all of which I will try and look to for guidance in my historical investigations. People such as Zeidler, Mommsen and Hoffman, Evans and Bohrer, writing about the historiography surrounding the resistance, in particular the July Plot of 1944, People such as Boeselager, Stauffenburg, Beck, and others that were physically involved in the military arm of the resistance, and even the outlook of Hitler himself, as head of the Third Reich and the National Socialist Nazi's. Such historians have published countless works regarding the actions of Stauffenberg himself, and so will provide valuable contextual information, and of course covering the changing attitudes of historians on the subject of Stauffenberg himself.

Enquiry Questions

In order to fully explore this historical issue, I will need to answer a number of questions. These will include:

- How have historians attitudes to Stauffenberg changed over time?
- Has his portrayal in the media affected these attitudes?
- What has created the common concept of Stauffenberg that many have today?
- What were Stauffenberg's ideals, motives, political alignments etc?
- How did this affect his actions throughout the 1930s and 40s?
- Did his background and contextual upbringing affect his outlook and social views?

This is quite simply a small number of possible questions, and this list is likely to grow throughout the research process.

Preliminary sources

Boeselager, Philipp Von, **Valkyrie, The Plot to Kill Hitler – The Memoirs of the conspiracy’s last survivor**, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009

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