

July 20, 1944: Strategic Narrative for the Federal Republic
of Germany and the Bundeswehr.
A Critical Analysis.

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

July 20, 1944: Strategic Narrative for the Federal Republic of Germany and the Bundeswehr, A Critical Analysis by Colonel (GS) Michael Kopp, German Army.

This monograph undertakes a study of the conspiracy of the German national conservative resistance, led by a small group of steadfast German officers against the Hitler regime and its effects on the establishment of the postwar Federal Republic of Germany. This conspiracy climaxed in the assassination attempt on July 20, 1944, and led to the physical destruction of the resistance circles. One of the central figures of the conspiracy was Colonel Count Claus von Stauffenberg. After the catastrophic defeat of the Third Reich, West Germany suffered from severe identity problems and was looking for a 'usable past.' Based on historical and political research, the monograph provides evidence that postwar German authorities and elites used the myth of the failed plot, deliberately in order to generate a new narrative after the war. The purpose of the narrative was to submit the message of a "new Germany" towards the new Western allies, as well as to generate internal leverage regarding the German population concerning the foundation of the *Bundeswehr*. The narrative of July 20, 1944 is based on the historical framework of the German military resistance and a specifically-promoted ethical perspective towards the conspirators, which evolved after the war. The strategic significance of the new narrative is a result of political utilization. The positive spin of the 1944 conspiracy against Hitler became an integral part of the self-image of the 'other Germany,' and provided external and internal legitimacy for the nascent West German state in the 1950s in a separated German nation and a constrained Cold War environment. Colonel von Stauffenberg and the 'heroes of July 20, 1944' served as valuable tools to establish ethically-based democratic credentials in deliberate contradiction to the socialist German Democratic Republic. Additionally, the *Bundeswehr*, as the new West German armed forces, received their ethical foundation and tradition from the July 20, 1944 conspiracy.

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Acronyms

ACC	Allied Control Commission
BDO	Bund Deutscher Offiziere (German Officers League)
COLG	Colonel General (highest rank for generals in Germany before the rank of Field Marshal)
EDC	European Defense Community
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
Gestapo	Geheime Staatspolizei (Secret State Police)
GPU	Geheimpolizei der Sowetunion (Secret Police of the Soviet Union)
HJ	Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth)
HQ	Headquarters
Ia	First General Staff Officer (Responsible for Operations and Planning)
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
LTG	Lieutenant General
Major i.G.	Major im Generalstab (Major GS)
MG	Major General
MGFA	Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Military Historical Research Institute)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
O i.G.	Oberst im Generalstab (Colonel GS)
OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres (General Staff of the Army)
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (High Command of the Armed Forces)
PGA	Personalgutachterausschuss (Personnel Screening Board)
PzDiv	Panzerdivision (Armor Division)
RAD	Reichsarbeitsdienst (General Labor Service)
SA	Sturmabteilung (Storm Troopers, Nazi Party Organization)
SD	Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-SS (Security/Intelligence Service of the SS)

SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Socialdemocratic Party of Germany)
SS	Schutzstaffel (originally Hitler's body guard formation, later on a huge armed party formation under the control of Himmler)
VdS	Verband deutscher Soldaten (Association of German Soldiers)
WW I	World War I
WW II	World War II

Introduction

Long live our sacred Germany!

—Outcry of Colonel Count von Stauffenberg, Fabian von Schlabrendorff, *The Secret War Against Hitler*.

On Saturday July 20, 2019, the German Government paid tribute to the seventy-fifth anniversary of the failed attempt to kill Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler in July 1944.¹ This plot against Hitler in July was the last attempt of a wide spread national conservative conspiracy, led by the German military resistance, to overthrow the Nazi regime and end the war. However, the plot failed and Colonel Count Claus von Stauffenberg², who had been the central figure and mastermind of the plot against Hitler, was executed during the night on July 21, 1944.

In the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), von Stauffenberg is the symbol of the German military resistance to the Third Reich.³ Furthermore, he and the main conspirators of the plot became part of the culture of remembrance in postwar West Germany, as well as idols for the *Bundeswehr*. Remembering the events of July 20, 1944 and the involved personnel can be seen as a major part of a public narrative established during the FRG's foundation years. The evolution of this narrative and its meaning for the development of the new West German state will be critically analyzed by this monograph.

¹ Bundesregierung, Gedenken zum 20. Juli 1944, „*Sie handelten, als andere schwiegen*,“ accessed October 8, 2019, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/gedenken-zum-20-juli-1648736>.

² The original title in German is *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg*. In this monograph the term Count von Stauffenberg will be used.

³ Ulrich Schlie, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2018), 19. Some remarks regarding the term military resistance are necessary. Military resistance does not mean that the whole institution was in resistance against Hitler. Military Resistance is about single members of the *Wehrmacht* who were in rebellion towards the Hitler regime and had contact between each other. Joachim Fest makes clear that even the term ‘resistance’ “was not used until after the war.” Therefore, even the saying somebody joined the resistance as a kind of fixed organization is misleading. See Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death the Story of the German Resistance* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996), 326 - 328.

Based on historical and political research, the monograph provides evidence that postwar German authorities and elites used the myth of the failed plot, deliberately in order to generate a new narrative after the war. The purpose of the narrative was to submit the message of a “new Germany” towards the new Western allies, as well as to generate internal leverage regarding the German population concerning the foundation of the *Bundeswehr*. The history and the analysis of this specific resistance narrative will provide a better understanding of the German strategic/political culture. Having this context in mind, the analysis of the narrative is even more crucial to understand how the culture of remembrance is used in German politics.

Framework and academic approach

July 20, 1944 is officially a main part of the culture of remembrance in Germany. This research paper will focus on the postwar perception of this specific event in West Germany over time, using the lens of historical and political developments in postwar West Germany.⁴ Then this perception will be linked to the evolution of the resistance narrative in the FRG and its political instrumentalization. Finally, the narrative will be assessed according to its consistency and deficiencies.

The events of July 20 are directly connected to the military resistance and the historic figure of Colonel Count von Stauffenberg. He was, and still is, the public face of the plot and the resistance against Hitler, and then became the ideal of the “good German” for the dark period of

⁴ The political and economic development between West and East Germany was completely different after the war. Peter Count Kielmansegg speaks about “different worlds” in *Das Geteilte Land, Deutschland 1945 – 1990, Siedler Deutsche Geschichte, Band 4* (München: Bassermann Verlag, 2004), 81. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) identified ‘resistance against the Third Reich’ with the actions of socialist and communist elements of the working class. The socialist regime belittled the conspiracy of July 20, 1944 and earmarked this event as a reactionary imperialist plot directed against the Soviet Union. This monograph does not address the development and the narrative in East Germany. The above mentioned East German perspective is covered by Jay, Lockenour, “The Rift in our Ranks: The German Officer Corps, the Twentieth of July, and the Path to Democracy,” *German Studies Review*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Oct. 1998), 472-473 and Sophie von Bechtolsheim, *Stauffenberg. Mein Großvater war kein Attentäter* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2019), 9.

the Third Reich.⁵ This monograph will first analyze the historical context of the German military resistance and the motivation and intentions of von Stauffenberg. The analysis regarding von Stauffenberg considers the professional military ethic of a German officer in this specific period of time as well as his personal development.⁶ The outcome of this analysis will provide comprehensive insights including: why von Stauffenberg joined the conspiracy against Hitler, what attributes differentiated him from his fellow peers, and which specific role he played for the conspiracy. Furthermore, the analysis of the historical context generates the foundation for the understanding of the evolution of the narrative, as well as its deficiencies, which will be discussed at the end of this monograph.

Following this approach, the analysis of the perception of the military resistance in the postwar period in West Germany is the next step. The main focus is the generation of the narrative after the war in West Germany. The richest source for this endeavor is the book of Fabian von Schlabrendorff, *The Secret War Against Hitler*.⁷ Von Schlabrendorff, a surviving member of the military resistance, was the aide of Major General (MG) Henning von Tresckow, beside von Stauffenberg the main planner of the plot. His story provided a blueprint for the developing public narrative within the FRG with his contemporary and comprehensive view of the events.

⁵ Schlie, 9. The narration of Sophie von Bechtolsheim looking at her grandfather's photo in a German school book as the "face" of the German Military Resistance is convincing. Von Bechtolsheim realized as a teenager that her grandfather, Claus von Stauffenberg, has become a "public good." In the meantime, countless numbers of schools, streets and public places are carrying the name of Claus Graf von Stauffenberg. See von Bechtolsheim, 47-58.

⁶ Professional military ethic is here used in terms of Samuel Huntington: "The continuing objective performance of the professional function gives rise to a continuing professional *Weltanschauung* or professional 'mind'. The military mind, in this sense, consists of the values, attitudes, and perspectives which inhere in the performance of the professional military function." Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and The State, The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), 61.

⁷ Fabian von Schlabrendorff, *The Secret War Against Hitler* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1994). The first German edition of this book was published directly after the war under American supervision under the title *Offiziere gegen Hitler* (Officers against Hitler) in 1946 by Europa Verlag Zürich. See Schlie, 196.

After a short description of the political and historical context regarding the foundation of the FRG, the evolution of the narrative will be researched according to the political and military realm, including its political instrumentalization. Finally, the deficiencies of the narrative will be addressed.

State of research

The historical background and the sequence of events regarding the plot of 1944 have been exhaustively researched.⁸ Many biographies and standard literature have been written to explain the circumstances and the involvement of historical figures in the conspiracy. Even several TV shows and the Hollywood movie *Valkyrie* with Tom Cruise portrayed the dramatic events around the conspiracy and kept it in the public German consciousness.⁹ However, July 20, 1944 is still an important subject of the academic debate in Germany, especially during the 2019 anniversary. The sequence of events and the prominent involvement of Colonel Count von Stauffenberg are evident and are not questioned in the historic debate. But the motivations of the conspirators and the interpretation of the plot regarding the culture of remembrance are still under discussion and not only in circles of historians.

Primary sources about the preparation and the detailed planning for the plot in July 1944 are relatively rare. The risk that compromising papers would have fallen into false hands was simply too big. The conspirators deliberately did not keep many written files, or destroyed them

⁸ Rüdiger von Voss, *Der Staatstreich vom 20. Juli: Politische Rezeption und Traditionsbildung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2011), 16. Von Voss provides a comprehensive overview of the standard literature about July 20, 1944. Jay Lockenour noticed that some six thousand publications had been devoted to the German anti-Nazi resistance, and many of these dealt with the 20 July plot. See also Lockenour, 472.

⁹ The 2008 film *Valkyrie* is the latest movie about von Stauffenberg and the events of July 20, 1944. Tom Cruise starred as Colonel Count von Stauffenberg, Manohla, Dargis, "Mission Imperative: Assassinate the Führer," *New York Times*, December 24, 2008, accessed October 09, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/movies/25valk.html>.

after the failed coup, so they could not be used against them. The detailed writings of Dr. Carl Friedrich Goerdeler regarding the design and politics of a new German government after the plot and the revealing diary of Ullrich von Hassell, who was the conspirator's political advisor for foreign affairs, are exceptions.¹⁰

The surviving contemporary witnesses of the conspiracy became the most important source for academic research. They started to portray their perspective right after the war and then ensured their view became the accepted perception of the conspiracy for a long time.¹¹ Therefore the analysis of these statements provides insights regarding the evolution of the narrative. During the last decade, the facets of knowledge have widened because more and more sources in the outer sphere of the conspirators have been researched in order to illuminate different perspectives, involved networks, and specific backgrounds of those involved in the plot against Hitler.

Colonel von Stauffenberg, as the iconic figure of the plot in 1944, became the focal point for many researchers.¹² The first comprehensive monographs about the opposition against Hitler by Rudolf Perchel, *Deutscher Widerstand*, in 1947 and Hans Rothenfels' *The German Opposition to Hitler*, in 1948 emphasized the role of Colonel Count of Stauffenberg. Contrary to the still echoing Nazi propaganda, he was portrayed as a "moral warrior" in the empire of evil. Using the

¹⁰ Schlie, 193. Writings of Goerdeler and von Hassell were hidden and published after the war. There are only a few original documents left from von Stauffenberg. His wife, Nina Countess von Stauffenberg, destroyed most of the written political documents after the failed plot. In the meantime, the catalogue of the travelling exhibition of the Military Historical Research Institute of the *Bundeswehr*, "Rebellion of Conscience" contains an outstanding collection of sources regarding July 20, 1944. See Thomas Vogel im *Auftrag des Militärgeschichtlichen Forschungsamtes* (ed.), *Aufstand des Gewissens: Militärischer Widerstand gegen Hitler und das NS – Regime 1933 bis 1945, Begleitbuch zur Wanderausstellung des Militärgeschichtlichen Forschungsamtes* (Hamburg: Mittler Verlag, 2000).

¹¹ Thomas Karlauf, *Stauffenberg, Porträt eines Attentäters* (München: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2019), 26. Beside Fabian von Schlabrendorff, the following reports or memoirs from the following companions are mentioned: Rudolph –Christoph von Gersdorff, *Soldat im Untergang* (1979), Hans von Herwarth, *Zwischen Hitler und Stalin, Erlebte Zeitgeschichte* (1982), Kunrath von Hammerstein-Equord, *Sphätrupp* (1963), Ulrich de Maiziere, *In der Pflicht, Lebensbericht eines deutschen Soldaten im 20. Jahrhundert* (1989), Ferdinand Prinz von der Leyen, *Rückblick zum Mauerwald, Vier Kriegsjahre im OKH* (1966), Otto John, *Zweimal kam ich heim* (1969). Hans Speidel, *Invasion 1944, Ein Beitrag zu Rommels und des Reiches Schicksal* (1949) Alexander Stahlberg, *Die verdammte Pflicht* (2005), Walter Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier der deutschen Wehrmacht 1939 – 1945* (1964).

¹² Bechtolsheim, 10.

statements of contemporary witnesses, this positive image was exploited in further biographies by different authors.¹³ Nevertheless, critical voices regarding von Stauffenberg were raised right after the war as well. Hans Bernd Gisevius, one of the few surviving members of the conspiracy, claimed in his autobiographical Book *To the Bitter End*, that von Stauffenberg wanted to retain specific elements of the National Socialist ideology.¹⁴ Other reproaches referred to his long-time support of the regime. The British historian Richard Evans declared in a very critical historical essay in 2009 that Colonel Count von Stauffenberg, because of his antidemocratic views and motivations, was not suited to serve as an ideal for further generations.¹⁵ Based on these wide-ranging perceptions of von Stauffenberg, questions regarding his motivations, political positions, and the influence of his personal development towards his actions are still framing the academic debate. This debate obviously had influence on the design of the public narrative of the attempted coup and its political instrumentalization.

The meaning of narrative

Finally, the term narrative is addressed in order to provide a brief interpretation of the narrative concept, which is used for the further analysis. From a popular perspective, narrative could be defined as “first public and personal ‘stories’ that we subscribe to and that guide our behavior.”¹⁶

Beside the fact that a narrative could be seen more or less as a simple story, this monograph is using the narrative concept in a broader sense in order to consider the power and social functions of narratives. Lance W. Bennett and Murray Edelman, both American political

¹³ Ulrich Schlie provides a short review regarding the literature about von Stauffenberg, 197–199.

¹⁴ Hans Bernd Gisevius, *To the Bitter End* (Boston: Houghton Riffelin Company, 1947), 503, 513/514. Gisevius, an agent of the German Abwehr in Switzerland, disliked von Stauffenberg. He even accused von Stauffenberg having social-revolutionary thoughts and leaning towards the Soviets. See Schlie, 128–130.

¹⁵ Karlauf, 30; Bechtolsheim, 9.

¹⁶ Mona Baker, *Translations and Conflict, A Narrative Account* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 19.

scientists, noticed that a “narrative shapes people’s view of rationality, of objectivity, of morality and of their conceptions of themselves and others.”¹⁷ This purpose makes narratives powerful and politically relevant instruments, because narratives of the past might define and determine the construction of present reality. The perception of ‘stories’ is crucial, because every accepted narrative involves the rejection of others and this makes the issue “politically and personally vital.”¹⁸ Keeping this argument in mind, narratives of the past can become means of control. The narrative lines people into an established social, moral and political order.¹⁹

The narrative surrounding the failed assassination of Hitler and the coup will be interpreted within this context and is seen in the category of a public narrative, which is defined “as stories elaborated by and circulating among social and institutional formations larger than the individual, such as the family, religious or educational institution, the media, and the nation.”²⁰ The meaning of the July 20, 1944 public narrative for the German nation makes it relevant on the strategic level, because this narrative served as a valuable tool for the West German government to “establish its democratic credentials” and to pursue a policy of rearmament despite a fierce domestic opposition.²¹ Therefore, this narrative is seen in the context of this monograph as a strategic narrative.

The critical analysis of the strategic narrative at the end of this monograph will end in a short assessment of the July 20, 1944 narrative. Consistency is the main criteria, which will be discussed in a political context. Consistency will be assessed in terms of how lasting this narrative has been over time and which flaws can be recognized.

¹⁷ Mona Baker, *Translations and Conflict, A Narrative Account* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁰ Definition by Somers and Gibson (1994). See Baker, 33.

²¹ Lockenour, 473.

Historical context of the narrative

In 1952, General Dwight D. Eisenhower asked General (ret.) Adolf Heusinger, German adviser to the so-called *Amt Blank*: “How is it that you never succeeded in getting rid of Hitler?” Heusinger answered by stating the question, “If I asked you to get rid of Truman, would you do it?” His provocative counter question is an important hint regarding the general loyalty and obedience of military forces towards its head of state.²² Bound by their oath, most German officers remained loyal and obedient to Hitler, even when his ruthlessness and true character became obvious.²³ Therefore it is important to understand the historical framework which led to the disobedience and final conspiracy of the few officers of the German military resistance in 1944, including Colonel Count von Stauffenberg.

German military resistance - A historical chronological framework

The road to the conspiracy of July 20, 1944 was very long for the few German officers involved. The 1944 plot was the climax of the efforts of the German military resistance to overcome the ruthless Hitler regime and can be divided into three phases: The identification phase 1933 to 1937, the evolving and war fighting phase 1938–1942, and the climax and doom phase 1943 to 1944.

²² Robert B. Kane, *Disobedience and Conspiracy in the German Army, 1918 – 1945* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc, 2002), 1. The first German chancellor after the war, Konrad Adenauer, appointed Theodor Blank in 1950 as the “Commissioner of the Chancellor for Questions relating to the Augmentation of Allied Troops.” The so called *Amt Blank* became the predecessor organization of the West German Ministry of Defense. General Adolf Heusinger was German Army Chief of Operations during World War II. After the war, he worked in the *Amt Blank*, as the military adviser to the German government. See Donald Abenheim, *A Valid Heritage, the Policy on Military Tradition in the Emergence of the Bundeswehr, 1950 – 1965* (Anna Arbor: UMI Dissertation Information Service, University Microfilms International A Bell & Howell Information Company, 1988), 41.

²³ Since August 2, 1934 all members of the German armed forces took the following oath: “I swear by God this sacred oath that I shall render unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler, the *Führer* of the German Reich, supreme commander of the armed forces, and that I shall at all times be prepared, as a brave soldier, to give my life for this oath.” See Kane, 2.

Identification with the aims of the regime earmarked the first phase from 1933 to 1937. Adolf Hitler became chancellor of the Weimar Republic on January 31, 1933 and, soon after met with the senior leaders of the *Reichswehr* and laid out in broad terms his national security strategy. Hitler reassured the present high-ranking officers that the *Reichswehr* would be the sole bearer of arms in Germany and “to keep the party formations separate from the army to counter stories from Ernst Röhm and the SA (*Sturmabteilung*) that the Storm troopers would soon supersede the army.”²⁴ Eventually he made it very clear that his main goal was to get rid of the Versailles Treaty restrictions for the German military and that he would increase military spending. In accordance with the minutes of Lieutenant General (LTG) Curt Liebmann, at this time Commander 5th Division and Army District V in Stuttgart, Hitler’s speech was well received by the assembled high-ranking officers. Subsequently, as the German historian Hermann Graml noticed, the conquest of power by the Nazi party was accompanied by the *Reichswehr* “with feelings that ranged from cautiously positive anticipation to enthusiastic approval.”²⁵

Furthermore, Hitler and his paladins exploited the traditional and conservative mindset of the officer corps in order to gain support for their regime. In the tradition of Hans von Seeckt, the first Chief of the Army of the Weimar Republic, the *Reichswehr* was a depoliticized organization. The military was oriented toward an ‘extratemporal idea of the state’ and supposed to stand above politics. The focal point for cohesion within the military became the maintenance of the tradition

²⁴ Kane, 81. Finally, the domestic threat of the Nazi SA organization absorbing the *Reichswehr* was solved on June 30, 1934, in the so called ‘Night of the Long Knives’. Hitler decided in the growing antagonism between the SA and the army in favor for the *Reichswehr*. The leader of the SA, Ernst Röhm, became too powerful for him. Hitler gave orders to Himmler, Heydrich, and subsequently to the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) to kill the leading figures of the SA. The *Reichswehr* became a co-conspirator because Army units of Wehrkreis VII (Munich) issued 12,000 rounds of ammunition and 1,000 rifles to local SS units. Furthermore Army installations were ordered to provide refuge and transport for the SS. See Kane 84–87.

²⁵ Hermann Graml, “Military Resistance,” in Wolfgang Benz, Walter H. Pehle (ed.), *Encyclopedia of German Resistance* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 57–67, 58.

of the German military as the safeguards of the 'true Germany' and the 'old order.'²⁶ This mindset was psychologically used by Nazi propaganda on March 21, 1933.

The first meeting of the newly elected German parliament with a Nazi majority, the so called 'Day of Potsdam,' was held as a state ceremony in Potsdam in the center of gravity of German militarism. Military tradition was unified with the political regime by a performance designed with symbolism, pathos, and the attendance of the old leadership of the *Reich*.²⁷ Even the old retired Field Marshal August von Mackensen was touched by the respectful humbling of the Hitler regime towards the 'old order'. He commented afterwards, "We German officers used to be called representatives of reaction, whereas we were really bearers of tradition. It is in the sense of that tradition that Hitler spoke to us, so wonderfully and so directly from the heart, at Potsdam."²⁸ After the purge of the SA, blinded by the promises of the regime and the psychological exploitation of the traditional mindset of the officer corps, nearly all officers accepted the new regime and gave willingly the new oath directly to Hitler in August 1934. The German military leadership was thereafter occupied with the organization and execution of the rearmament program of the new *Wehrmacht*.²⁹

However, some officers were already aware of the criminal core of the Nazi regime and its ideology. Sporadic opposition activities occurred already in these years. Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Hans Oster, serving in the *Abwehr* (Military Intelligence Department), built a small circle

²⁶ Abenheim, *A Valid Heritage*, 10 -11 and Donald Abenheim, *Reforging The Iron Cross* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 33–35. See also Graml, in Benz and Pehle (ed.), 58.

²⁷ Hitler had decided that for involved military personnel, dress uniform with full sized medals should be worn. Prussian banners and old standards should be displayed. "The official ceremony must look as 'Prussian' as was humanly possible." See Alexander Stahlberg, *Bounden Duty, the Memoirs of a German Officer 1932 – 1945* (London: Brassey's, 1990), 30. A detailed description of the Day of Potsdam is described in Abenheim, *A Valid Heritage*, 13-14.

²⁸ Kane, 81.

²⁹ The scope of the reorganization and rearmament efforts is depicted in tables by Kane, 102 -103. The 100,000 men Army of the Weimar Republic was already increased to 550,000 in 1937. The number of Division HQs was increased from 10 in 1933 to 51 in 1939. The initial planning of Beck has foreseen for wartime as of April 1, 1938 sixty-three Divisions. See Karlauf, 80.

of opposing officers under the protection of his superior officer, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris. He secretly collected information about the ruthless actions of SS and SD for future use.³⁰ But there was no organized military opposition of any substance until 1937.³¹ Most officers naively either neglected or did not recognize the beginning of the intrusion of Nazi ideology into the armed forces and the undermining of the armed forces by the SS Nazi party formation.³²

The second phase during the years 1938 to 1942 was characterized by the development of a recognizable German military resistance in the *Wehrmacht* and the overarching tragedy of the involved officers; caught in the conservative sphere of loyalty and tradition, they had to fight Hitler's war, which the military resistance tried to avoid under all circumstances.

The turning point of Hitler's relationship with the conservative military leadership of the army came on November 5, 1937 in the so-called Hossbach Conference. During a meeting with high ranking officers and the minister of foreign affairs, Hitler revealed his aggressive plans for the next years.³³ He outlined his strategic estimate for Germany and Europe with an estimated

³⁰ *Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführer SS (SD)*, (Security Service of the Reichsführer SS) was the intelligence agency of the SS and the Nazi party. Originated in 1931, after Hitler came to power this organization was considered a sister organization with the Geheime Staatspolizei (Gestapo).

³¹ Kane, 121 and Graml, in Benz and Pehle (ed), 59. LTC Oster developed a "furious hatred for everything Nazi". In the year 1938, Oster became the Chief of the central division of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) Military Intelligence Office. Oster was the central organizer and link in the background to different opposition groups in the civilian and military realm until his arrest as Major General (MG) in 1943 by the Gestapo. Joachim Fest characterizes him as the "indefatigable driving force and go between of the opposition." Tragically, he was dismissed from military service on April 16, 1943 on charges of violating currency laws. He was arrested after the failed coup on July 21, 1944 and hanged in the Flossenbürg concentration camp on April 9, 1945 by the SS. See Fest, 66, 73, 81, 86 and 394.

³² The infamous roles of Field Marshal von Blomberg and Colonel von Reichenau for opening the Reichswehr to Nazi ideology have been addressed by Kane, 82–84 and Graml, 59. Unfortunately, the domestic political suppression of political parties and minorities with murder and humiliation by the Nazi regime was not addressed in the officer corps. The enduring legacy of von Seeckt's depoliticized mindset for the Reichswehr and minor anti-Semitic predispositions precluded any real action and interest by most officers in domestic affairs. However, some officers became ashamed by the regime actions in the infamous *Reichskristallnacht* on November 9, 1938 against the Jewish population. See Kane, 139–140.

³³ The "Hossbach conference" was named after Colonel Hossbach, who was Hitler's military aide de camp since 1934 and produced the passed down minutes of the conference. The participants of the conference were: Hitler, von Blomberg (Minister of War), von Fritsch (Commander in Chief of the Army), Raeder (Commander in Chief of the Navy), Göring (Commander in Chief of the Air Force), von Neurath (Minister of Foreign Affairs). See Kane, 124.

timetable going to war. These plans were not appreciated by the Minister of War, Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg and the Commander in Chief of the Army, Colonel General (COLG) Werner von Fritsch. Due to intrigue performed by the SS and the SD, both officers were dismissed in early 1938 and a reorganization of the chain of command soon followed.³⁴ These events triggered the first large-scale outrage in the officer corps but without any substantial outcome.³⁵

The center of the military resistance, based on their rejection of Hitler's plan for war, now crystallized in the *Abwehr* resistance circle under LTC Oster and the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH). COLG Ludwig Beck as Chief of the General Staff of the Army vigorously condemned Hitler's increasing warmongering strategy in the spring and summer 1938. On May 28, 1938, Hitler announced to the heads of the armed forces that he wanted to destroy Czechoslovakia soon.³⁶ Beck, in different memoranda, clearly stated that an attack toward Czechoslovakia would lead to another world war and to *Finis Germaniae*. The future well-being of the German nation would be at risk by conducting another war.³⁷ COLG Beck internally emphasized the German officer's duty to the German people and the nation, beyond the oath and the obedience to orders. He wrote in a statement towards the new Commander in Chief of the Army, COLG Walther von Brauchitsch, "One's obedience as a soldier has its limit where one's

³⁴ The war ministry was replaced by decree on February 4, 1938 by the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW). OKW was led by General Wilhelm Keitel in the rank of a Minister. General Alfred Jodl became the Chief of the Operations Staff in the OKW. The new High Command of the Armed Forces had nominal oversight over the Army (Heer), Air Force (Luftwaffe), and Navy (Kriegsmarine). However, rivalry especially with the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH) – the Army High Command- prevented the creation of an effective chain of command.

³⁵ Kane, 124-128, describes the sequence of events and the political impacts of the Blomberg - Fritsch crisis in detail. Compare also to Karlauf, 140 – 143 and Graml, in Benz and Pehle (ed.), 60.

³⁶ Karlauf, 144.

³⁷ In Beck's strategic assessment, France and England would immediately take sides with the Czechs against Germany. Therefore, another two-front war was unavoidable. See *Denkschrift des Generaloberst Beck vom 16.07.1938 gegen Hitlers Kriegspolitik* in, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (ed.), 20. Juli 1944 (Dortmund: Gebrüder Lensing Verlaganstalt, 1964), 50 – 53. See also Kane, 132 and Schlabrendorff, 156-157.

knowledge, conscience, and responsibility forbid one from carrying out an order.”³⁸This argument later became important as an underlying rationale for the plot of July 20, 1944.

The Chief of the General Staff’s strategic assessment of the evolving Czechoslovakian crisis was generally shared by all commanding generals of the army. But most of the commanding generals were not willing to act against Hitler and the regime. Finally, the dramatic sequence of events climaxed in a meeting of Hitler and his generals in August 1938, when Hitler extinguished any sparks of opposition from the military and ordered the army to cease interfering in political events and demanded unconditional obedience. Beck was no longer willing to support Hitler’s war plans and realized that he lost Hitler and von Brauchitsch’s confidence. He was the only high-ranking general officer to resign on August 18, 1938.³⁹

The developing conspiracy in 1938 against an upcoming war was hampered by several factors. The military resistance lacked a basis within the force. The great rearmament and extension program had dramatic impacts on the homogeneity of the officer corps. Younger incoming subaltern officers were already influenced by Nazi organizations like the *Hitlerjugend* (HJ) and *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD), as well as propaganda indoctrination. At this point in time, most of the German officers saw no moral crisis. Others acted in their own self-interests, using the career opportunities of an increasing *Wehrmacht* with new equipment and new tactical ideas. The conspiracy in this phase was an elite-based discussion within the circles of the General Staff of the Army, the *Abwehr* and a few generals.⁴⁰

³⁸ Graml, in Benz and Pehle (ed.), 61.

³⁹ Fest, 82; Kane, 132; and Graml, in Benz and Pehle (ed.), 61. The conspirators had only won the support from COLG Erwin von Witzleben, the commanding general in Army Corps area III (Berlin) and from General Count Brockdorff-Ahlefeldt, the commander of the Potsdam Garrison.

⁴⁰ Kane, 141–142.

Furthermore, the acting officers within the General Staff were still impeded by their “notions of tradition, morality, and good upper-class manners.”⁴¹ They dedicated themselves to the old-fashioned feelings of loyalty toward the head of state, not recognizing the cruel and evil ideology behind Hitler’s actions. COLG Beck supported a mass resignation of generals as an attempt to convince Hitler about his flawed strategy. At the same time, the general’s plot of 1938 should save the *Führer* from the bad influence of the party and the SS. The rally cry Beck intended to issue was, “For the Führer, against war, against rule by the bosses, for peace with the church, freedom of speech, and an end to Cheka methods.”⁴²

The existing opposition groups within the German military and the cooperating civilian circles, though were too dispersed and not sufficiently organized. The dramatic political events in 1938 certainly served as a catalyst for the cooperation between civilian and military opposition groups, which played an important role later in 1944. The unofficial leader of the infant German conservative civilian opposition, Dr. Carl Goerdeler, the former Lord Mayor of Leipzig, was approached by Hans Oster as well as opposition circles in the foreign office in order to generate a domestic political arm for the military resistance and to improve the contacts abroad.⁴³ On the one hand, this move expanded the range of the opposition against the Hitler regime, but on the other hand, the actions of the opposition groups became more disorganized with a lack of common goals and objectives. The common denominator was to get rid of Hitler, without having a coordinated action plan for the removal of the Nazi regime.

Even in the military opposition, rifts emerged regarding the actions to be taken against Hitler’s warmongering. Beck’s successor, COLG Halder, also sympathized with the anti-war

⁴¹ Fest, 91.

⁴² Ibid., 69.

⁴³ The link into the Foreign Office was established by Adam von Trott zu Solz, due to his studies in Oxford, this young Hessian aristocrat had excellent connections to British intellectuals and politicians. He worked since 1939 in the Foreign Office. Other members of the opposing circles within the Foreign Office were: Otto Kiep, Eduard Brücklmeier, Hans Bernd von Haeften and the Kordt brothers. See Ibid., 68.

conspiracy; however, he was still constrained in the traditional mindset. First of all, his concern was to justify a military plot before the public in the moral and political domain, with Hitler being brought to a trial in front of a court. In September 1938, Hans Oster and his associates, though, were far more radical and were willing to murder Hitler as a prerequisite for regime change. Joachim Fest described these different layers in the September 1938 plot with the term “conspiracy within the conspiracy.”⁴⁴

Finally, the execution of the plot against Hitler in 1938 was undermined by the appeasement strategy of the Western States. The outcome of the Munich Conference 1938 once proved again Hitler’s infallibility in political –military affairs; it seemed obvious that Hitler’s strategic assessment of the weakness of the western European states was right. The efforts of the military and civilian opposition to convince at least the British government to keep a determined stance in the Czechoslovakia issue were not appreciated and not understood.⁴⁵

The outcome of the Munich Conference left the conspirators without support. Other plots were planned half-heartedly, at the eve of the outbreak of hostilities against Poland in August 1939 and again in November 1939, by the resistance circles around Oster and some officers in the OKH. This resulted in inconsistent and uncoordinated preparations that under war conditions were never executed.⁴⁶ Bitterness and helplessness increased among the central figures of the resistance. Hitler’s popularity rose and the Nazi propaganda machine – praising Hitler - was

⁴⁴ Joachim Fest describes the preparation for the September plot 1938 with all the various action plans of the different groups in detail. See Fest, 81–91. The role of COLG Halder is still under discussion. He has certainly undergone a transformation regarding his support of the Hitler regime. Since March 1938, Halder called Hitler “a criminal” in respective opposition circles. However, the debate over whether he was ever a “full –fledged member” of the German military resistance is still under discussion. See Kane, 133; Fest 84 – 89.

⁴⁵ The intense diplomacy between the German opposition groups and the British government as well as the misunderstandings, is well documented by Fest, 72–80. The crucial role of the British government regarding the actions of the conspirators in 1938 is portrayed in the words of COLG Beck: “Bring me certain proof that England will fight if Czechoslovakia is attacked and I will put an end to this regime.” See Stahlberg, 95.

⁴⁶ For a detailed description and analysis of the planning for a military coup in August and November, 1939, respectively, see Fest 107–112, 120–132.

working. The outcome from Munich also brought the basic flaw of the conspirators' strategy to daylight. The conspirators "had made their actions dependent on events they could neither accurately foresee nor control –first, Hitler's actually ordering an invasion; second, the western powers declaring war."⁴⁷ This basic strategically-flawed paradigm lasted well into the war until shortly before July 20, 1944, keeping the activities of the military resistance dependent on Hitler's victories or defeats on the battlefields.

After the Munich conference, Dr. Goerdeler predicted to an American friend that war was now inevitable and war came in September 1939.⁴⁸ The fundamental moral question for the military resistance was Hitler's war and their execution of it. In addition to Hitler's warmongering and detrimental foreign policy, combined later with his amateurish commanding attitude, the ethical impetus became the important second pillar of the opposition argument against the Nazi regime. The atrocities committed in Poland "of the 'state-sanctioned murder squads' as Henning von Tresckow called them" revealed the true nature of the regime and were a watershed for many officers.⁴⁹ Colonel Helmuth Stieff, the head of the organization department of the OKH and superior officer of von Stauffenberg, like many others, found his way to the military resistance because of the SS crimes in Poland. Stieff cried out in anguish: "I am ashamed to be a German! This minority has defiled the name of Germany with their murder, looting, and

⁴⁷ Fest, 98.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 119. During the attack on Poland, five so-called *Einsatzgruppen* followed the combat units of the Wehrmacht. The personnel of the *Einsatzgruppen* came from Sicherheitspolizei (Sipo) and SD. Sipo was a special unit, consisting of selected members from Gestapo and Kriminalpolizei (Kripo). The 3,000 men strong *Einsatzgruppen* had to defeat all 'elements of the Polish population who had a hostile intent against the Reich or the Germans'. This meant the killing of Jews, Polish intellectuals and Roman Catholic priests in the rear area. See Michael Epkenhans, John Zimmermann, *Die Wehrmacht – Krieg und Verbrechen* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun. Verlag GmbH, 2019), 51.

arson. They will be the doom of the entire German nation unless we manage to stop them soon.”⁵⁰

The leadership of the German *Wehrmacht*, by fighting Hitler’s war, became more and more a part of the Nazi’s regime criminality. At the beginning of the war in Poland and France, the Army leadership at least tried to protest against the atrocities, particularly those of the SS. “The result was a formidable crisis between troops stationed in Poland and their commanders on the one hand, and the SS and the police on the other side.”⁵¹

In the campaign against the Soviet Union, the war had an ideological character from the outset. By executing the commissary and jurisdiction order during Operation Barbarossa, the armed forces became guilty as an organization.⁵² Most of the leadership of the *Wehrmacht* had absolutely no inclination towards Bolshevism and saw the coming campaign against the Bolsheviks as a war between good and evil. Based on this assumption, questionable actions occurred in the Russian campaign from officers linked to the military resistance. Most of the high ranking officers, who refused to carry out the criminal orders, did so because of their impact on the soldiers’ discipline and not because of its ethical flaw. COLG Hoepner, even closely related to the military resistance, is an example for the ambivalent mindset of the officer corps. He

⁵⁰ Schlabrendorff, 185. Alexander Stahlberg, another opposing officer, became aware of SS crimes in Poland and asked himself: “Did this mean we were in the hands of a criminal state? Were we risking our necks for such a regime?” See Kane, 162.

⁵¹ Graml in Benz and Pehle (ed.), 63. General von Reichenau ordered an investigation of the murder of Polish Jews and COLG von Bock court-martialed several SS members for a massacre. COLG Johannes Blaskowitz wrote several memoranda about the atrocities in Poland. However, COLG von Brauchitsch, Chief of the Army, did not want to go into a conflict with Hitler or Himmler. On October 4, 1939 Hitler pardoned all committed war crimes in the Poland campaign anyway. For a detailed analysis of these events see Kane, 161-162, Fest, 114-119, and Epkenhans, Zimmermann, 52-53.

⁵² Hitler already announced the ideological character of the campaign against the Soviet Union during a conference on March 30, 1941 in front of 250 generals and high ranking officers. He made it clear that the war against the Soviet Union would be a war of annihilation. See Karlauf, 202. Commissars and GPU men had been evaluated as criminals and would be treated as such. Subsequently, different orders from the OKW, e.g. the commissary order (June 6, 1941) and the Jurisdiction order (May 14, 1941) served as a justification for war crimes, of which 4000 executions can be proved alone within the framework of the commissary order. See Epkenhans, Zimmermann, 55 – 58. The execution of the commissary order was a huge discussion subject within the military resistance circles. See the conversation between von Tresckow and Stahlberg, in Stahlberg, 159-160.

approved a directive about the forthcoming operations in Russia to his subordinate troops stating: “The war against Russia is an essential part of the struggle for existence of the German nation. It is the old struggle of the Germanic peoples against Slavdom, the defense of European culture against the Muscovite Asiatic flood... Bolshevism is the mortal enemy of the National Socialist German Nation.”⁵³ Nevertheless, the massacres and ordered war crimes in the East harmed the relationship between a vast amount of the officer corps and Hitler. Many officers, even in lower ranks realized that the ethical flaws came directly from Hitler and the Nazi ideology. Furthermore, they realized that the terror and ill-defined policy in the now-occupied areas would intensify hate towards Germany.⁵⁴ However, the military resistance circles did not use this momentum to plot against Hitler until 1943.

A neutralized, weakened and disorganized military resistance started and continued to fight Hitler’s war. The effect of this ill-defined and twofold approach of separate military resistance circles fighting a war and fulfilling their military duties with professional pride, while committing open treason to conspire against the Nazi regime, became obvious.⁵⁵ Most of the German officers were overwhelmed by the military success of the Blitzkrieg concept and some of them were captivated by Hitler’s charisma. Hitler regime opponents and conspirators, like Hans Oster, Henning von Tresckow, and Rudolph Christoph von Gersdorff, served with dedication in the victorious campaigns. LTC Helmuth Groscurth, engaged in the *Abwehr* resistance circle as the Chief of the Army intelligence liaison group to the OKH, wrote the following comments after the invasion of France in 1940 in his diary: “I am happy that I was able to lead troops in battle

⁵³ Kane, 164.

⁵⁴ Fest, 180; Graml, in Benz and Pehle (ed.), 65.

⁵⁵ Hans Ulrich Thamer described the dialectic of resistance and war, in *Verführung und Gewalt, Deutschland 1933 – 1945, Siedler Deutsche Geschichte Band 3* (München: Bassermann Verlag, 2004), 730. Hans Oster committed open treason as he provided the plans for the western offensive in October to the Dutch military attaché to Berlin, Colonel Gijsbertus Jacobus Sasin. LTC Oster kept his friend informed about the upcoming operations in the west. But the enduring postponements of the invasion only increased the doubts of the western allies about this information. See Fest, 139–141 and Kane, 180-181.

and that won satisfying victories. That makes a soldier proud.”⁵⁶ The once war skeptical Quartermaster-General Eduard Wagner, touched by the amazing victory against France, stated: “And wherein lies the secret of victory? Indeed, in the enormous dynamism of the *Führer*...without his will it would never have come to pass.”⁵⁷ Other high ranking officers like COLG Franz Halder, who hated Hitler und had been involved in the coup planning of 1938/1939, closed themselves off in the war and just did their duty. He was never involved in the new 1943/1944 conspiracy. Most of the generals were co-opted during the war by promotions, decorations and even monetary gifts provided by Hitler himself.⁵⁸

The military resistance weakened over time during the war because of the coincident removal of supporting officers by Hitler. Due to the victorious campaigns, Hitler became more confident and increased his influence over the command of the Army. He took over direct control of tactical operations in the 1941 campaign against the Soviet Union, directly interfered into operational planning, and openly expressed his antipathy toward the General Staff. Hitler never had a high opinion of the General Staff Officers; he called them “old fossils” and “those idiots” with a “total lack of imagination.”⁵⁹ Serious differences had already occurred over the strategic execution of the campaign Barbarossa. However, the demand for officers to follow orders unquestioningly and to adhere to blind obedience became obvious in the 1941 winter crisis. Critical officers, who did not follow the stubborn disastrous tactical orders of Hitler, were

⁵⁶ Kane, 149. Fest found in his research that Groscurth already expressed in the Polish campaign daily his pride: “at the way countless individual orders fit together perfectly to produce a grand, victorious campaign,” Fest, 113.

⁵⁷ Kane 150-151. Even the civilian resistance circles around Goerdeler, Beck, von Hassel and von Moltke were impressed by the military accomplishments of the Third Reich, but at the same time they were increasingly certain that eventually the regime would collapse. See Fest, 144.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 151.

⁵⁹ After the initial success of Army Group Centre, Hitler’s personal order stopped the initial main thrust towards Moscow and redirected the point of main effort to the Ukraine. In the winter crisis in 1941, he led forces with his personal orders down to on Division and Regiment levels. Ibid., 150.

immediately removed.⁶⁰ COLG Erich Hoepner, who had offered his support to the coup planning in 1938, exemplifies the humiliation of the affected officers. Hoepner was relieved from his position as the commander of the 4th Panzer Army in Russia on January 8, 1942 because he ordered one of his subordinate corps to retreat against Hitler's direct orders to avoid the complete destruction of the corps. Beside his removal, COLG Hoepner was then discharged from the Army, had to return in disgrace to Germany, and was not allowed wearing his uniform and decorations in public. Nevertheless, Hoepner still conspired against the regime as a civilian and was arrested and hanged in the aftermath of the July 20, 1944 plot.⁶¹ Eventually, Hitler got rid of insubordinate generals and the replacements of these fired officers were more fearful to disagree with or oppose his orders.⁶²

The last phase, 1943 and 1944, in the chronological framework of the German military resistance reveals the rise of the main narrative figures of Claus Count von Stauffenberg and Henning von Tresckow, the climax of the military resistance, the execution of the *coup d'état*, and its doom. Stalingrad, as the strategic turning point of the war, ended the agony of the military resistance. The complete "loss of confidence between the higher commanding officers and the highest leaders" of the regime seemed to offer a chance to eliminate the integrative power of the still-working Hitler myth.⁶³ The military situation of the German Reich became more and more

⁶⁰ Numerous senior officers became "casualties" of this firing practice. Besides high ranking officers like von Brauchitsch, Guderian, von Leeb, von Bock and Halder, Hitler relieved thirty-five corps and divisional commanders of their duties. Ibid., 153.

⁶¹ General Hoepner tried to defend himself against this humiliating removal from the armed forces, but the Nazi-led German parliament (*Reichstag*) finalized on April 26, 1942 a bill that Adolf Hitler had the right to fire any German citizen in office without any reason. This bill was published in the *Reichsgesetzblatt* on April 27, 1942. See Samuel W. Mitcham Jr, Gene Mueller, "Generaloberst Erich Hoepner," in Gerd R. Ueberschär (ed.), *Hitlers militärische Elite. 68 Lebensläufe* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2011), 364-370.

⁶² Kane, 168.

⁶³ Ibid., 154. Schlabrendorff, 133. It has to be noted that on July 13, 1943, officers captured at Stalingrad formed with German communist exile migrants the *Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland* (National Committee for a Free Germany) in Moscow. Other officers including Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus founded the *Bund Deutscher Offiziere* (BDO, German officer's league) as POW's in Russia on September 11, 1943. The BDO joined the National Committee for a Free Germany, creating their own resistance narrative based on traditional Prussian – Russian relationships in the 19th century against

desperate as German forces everywhere were thrown on the strategic defensive. On the eve of July 20, 1944, after the breakdown of Army Group Center in the East and the Normandy invasion on June 6, 1944, it was clear to every reasonable officer that the war was lost.⁶⁴ The conspiring officers' shame and outcry increased when horrific news was leaked about atrocities in the rear areas in Russia and Jewish extermination camps.⁶⁵

During these developments, different loosely linked centers of opposition arose in the army, firstly around MG Friedrich Olbricht, the commander of the General Army Office, secondly, around General Carl-Heinrich Stülpnagel, commander in occupied France, and thirdly in the HQ of Army Group Center in Russia. The Staff of Army Group Center under the leadership of Colonel Henning von Tresckow became the center of gravity of the military resistance. For the first time during the war, von Tresckow and like-minded officers' took tangible actions to kill Hitler. These officers were bound by professional responsibility and ethical values.⁶⁶

Napoleon. After the war, the East German Government focused primarily on the activities of these groups. The GDR promoted them as the harbingers of the new Germany. See Boris Breyer, "Verräter oder Patrioten?, Unter Sowjet Regie gegründet: Das Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland", accessed December 23, 2019, <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegelspiegelgeschichte/d-70747525>. See also Kane, 156 and Alexander Fischer, "National Committee 'Free Germany,'" in Benz, Pehle (ed.), 204–216, and Lockenour, 473.

⁶⁴ For a comprehensive assessment of the German disastrous military situation on July 20, 1944, see the report of Prof. Dr. Percy Ernst Schramm at the Remer trial in March 1952, *Die militärische Lage am 20.07.1944*, in Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (ed.), 20. Juli 1944, 112–125. The clear assessment of the deteriorating situation by high ranking officers at the front is shown by a documented telephone conversation between Field Marshal Keitel in the OKW and Field Marshal von Rundstedt, Commanding Officer of the Western Front, on June 30, 1944. After Keitel asked about the current military situation at the Western Front, Rundstedt responded, "What you should do? You should put an end to the war, you idiots!" See Kane, 156.

⁶⁵ Fest, 179-180. Atrocities and war crimes are described in more detail in Epkenhans and Zimmermann, 93–114. In July 1942, MG Hoßbach, the former aide de camp of Hitler, returned to Germany from Russia and discussed his experience with COLG (ret.) Beck in Berlin. Beck was shocked about the stories from the Eastern front and cried out in rage: "What has this swine Hitler done to our beautiful country?" See Kane, 183. A conversation between von Tresckow and Stahlberg is documented in the Stahlberg memoirs in November 1942. During this conversation, von Tresckow mentioned "that reliable information had reached Army Group Center that special SD and SS units had been formed for the carefully organized execution of the plan, on a scale that transcended imagination... Then Henning said that he was working towards when all this would be over." See Stahlberg, 202.

⁶⁶ O i.G. von Tresckow, Ia (First General Staff Officer, responsible for operational planning) of Army Group Center since the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, managed to recruit officers in the staff around him who shared his views about Hitler and the Nazi regime. He hired the lawyer and reserve lieutenant Fabian von Schlabrendorff as his aide, Major i.G. Rudolph Christoph von Gersdorff, Major

Henning von Tresckow, a talented General Staff Officer, is known as the most resolute officer in opposition to the Nazi regime and was the most remarkable figure in the military resistance next to von Stauffenberg. As Joachim Fest mentioned, he displayed not only “the mental discipline and passionate moral sense of the other conspirators but also great coolness under pressure, decisiveness, and daring.”⁶⁷ Known by many high ranking officers and sometimes even related to them, von Tresckow tried to influence several German Field Marshalls to support the conspiracy against Hitler. He clearly realized that the key for a successful regime change were field commanders who could support the efforts of the military resistance with combat soldiers. But the approached field commanders, like Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, and Field Marshal Günther von Kluge did not join the conspiracy circles. Beside their differences with Hitler regarding military issues, they still felt bound by their oath, feared the creation of another ‘stab in the back legend’ or like von Kluge would keep their options open depending on the evolving situation.⁶⁸ At least von Tresckow generated a sphere of maneuver space for the conspirators because the informed Field Marshals never made a report about the conspiring circles to the OKW or Hitler himself. Furthermore, he managed to create a wider network of high ranking officers which supported the conspirators and rearranged links with civilian opposition groups around Dr. Goerdeler and COLG (ret.) Beck as well as the so called *Kreisauer Kreis* around Count Helmuth James von Moltke.⁶⁹

Count Carl-Hans von Grafenberg, Major Berndt von Kleist, LTC Georg Schulze-Büttger and LTC Alexander von Voss. See Fest, 175.

⁶⁷ Fest, 174.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 186-191; Schlabrendorff, 187-188.

⁶⁹ According to Schlabrendorff, Colonel von Tresckow convinced MG Erich Fellgiebel, Chief of Communications, General Eduard Wagner, the Quartermaster –General, General Fritz Lindemann, Chief of Ordnance as well as the territorial commanders in France General Karl Heinrich von Stueppnagel and the Commander in Belgium General Alexander von Falkenhausen to support the conspiracy against Hitler. See Schlabrendorff, 185 and 188. For the new arrangement of links between the military and civilian resistance circles, see Thamer, 731-732. Goerdeler visited with false papers even HQ Army Group Center, Fest, 189-190. The *Kreisauer Kreis* (Kreisauer circle) was a group of approximately twenty five persons opposing the Nazi regime on religious and moral reasons. The circle members were composed from a variety of backgrounds, including those of noble descent, Protestants and Catholics, socialists and conservatives. The regular meetings were held at the estate of Count Helmuth James von Moltke in Kreisau, Silesia. The circle

Despite the field commanders' lack of support, Colonel von Tresckow, who was willing to act, was also concerned about the overall strategic situation of the *Reich* and subsequently the window of opportunity for a coup. His patriotic and religious motivations ultimately helped him to overcome his aversion to murder. Finally, in his mindset, Hitler was not only the “destroyer of his own country but the source of all evil.” He had to be killed! He, together with his colleagues from HQ Army Group Center, launched several attempts to assassinate Hitler by explosive devices during the spring 1943. Coincidentally, Hitler always survived because the device either malfunctioned or Hitler left the scene before the device could be put in place.⁷⁰

Despite these setbacks, eventually, Henning von Tresckow and Count Claus von Stauffenberg, developed the idea for a *coup d'état*. In July 1943, von Tresckow was assigned to the leader reserve, expecting a command position of a regiment on the Eastern front. During this time, he met the talented and intellectually gifted LTC von Stauffenberg in Berlin. Von Tresckow knew von Stauffenberg, and his critical perspective towards the regime and Hitler, already from previous assignments. Stauffenberg had recently recovered from heavy injuries received in the Africa campaign; he had lost his left eye, right hand, and, two fingers of his left hand but not his sharp mind. He was in line to become the Chief of Staff of the General Army Office under MG Friedrich Olbricht, who was an active supporter of the military resistance and Deputy to COLG Friedrich Fromm, the Commander of the *Ersatzheer* (German Army Reserve).⁷¹ After his heavy injuries the decision matured that he had to take on the moral responsibility to act, like Henning von Tresckow.

did not promote violent actions. However, they discussed the political reorganization of Germany after the war was lost. See Hermann Weiss, “Kreisau Circle,” in Benz, Pehle (ed.), 195–198.

⁷⁰ Fest, 191. For details about the unsuccessful assassination attempts in spring 1943 see Schlabrendorf, 229–239 and Thamer, 738 as well as Hermann Weiss, “Assassination Attempts Against Hitler,” in. Benz, Pehle (ed.), 120–122.

⁷¹ Karlauf, 244-245.

All plans that had been made for a coup were now dedicated towards the capital in Berlin and the use of the Army Reserve in Germany. The use of an old plan against internal unrest for the Army Reserve, Operation Valkyrie, was now secretly changed by von Tresckow and von Stauffenberg in order to sweep the Nazi regime from power in the event of Hitler's death. At the codeword Valkyrie, the military plan was to occupy the power centers in Berlin as well as in the occupied territories by designated *Wehrmacht* units. Hitler's paladins would be arrested under the pretext that SS and Nazi party 'fat cats' would like to take over the power. However, Valkyrie was not just a military plot under a deceiving umbrella of legitimate emergency planning, but a *coup d'état* with the involvement of the conservative political civilian resistance circle around Dr. Goerdeler. A new shadow government was secretly formed. Declarations of the new administration under the leadership of Dr. Goerdeler as the new chancellor were already prepared in combination with the release of Valkyrie.⁷²

Count von Stauffenberg assumed the leading role in the conspiracy and Henning von Tresckow left, as assigned, to the Eastern theatre in fall 1943. As Fabian von Schlabrendorff noticed about von Stauffenberg, "The brilliant, dashing, handsome young staff officer became the resistance movement's 'general manager'."⁷³ It was clear to von Stauffenberg that it would be necessary for the coup to kill Hitler. The central formula for Valkyrie was: The *Führer* Adolf

⁷² The plan was to be issued to all district commands and had an effect on 1.7 million soldiers. See Karlauf, 260; Thamer, 738; and Schlie, 150. The original plan Valkyrie I as of May 26, 1942 was the basis for the new rewritten version by von Tresckow and von Stauffenberg as of July 31, 1943. The secretly rewritten executive order of Valkyrie is documented in Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (ed.), 20. Juli 1944, 90 – 96. See also the detailed time schedule for the coup after the assassination of Hitler, 'Zeitplan der Bendlergruppe mitvorbereiteteten Befehlen für den Umsturz', Ibid, 152–156. For the prepared radio address of Goerdeler, see Ibid 179-183. See also a prepared order by Field Marshal (ret.) von Witzleben. The beginning of the order read as follows: "The *Führer* Adolf Hitler is dead. An unscrupulous clique of Party leaders, who have no feeling for the fighting front, have tried to exploit the situation and to stab the struggling army in the back," Schlabrendorff, 254.

⁷³ Schlabrendorff, 246. Henning von Tresckow took over command of "Grenadierregiment 442" in October 1943, but only one month later, he was assigned as the new Chief of Staff of the 2nd Army (Army Group Center). On June 1, 1944 he was promoted to Major General. After the failed coup, he committed suicide on July 21, 1944 on the Eastern front. The SD reports (so called *Kaltenbrunner Berichte* cited him as the "driving force" and the "evil spirit" behind the coup. See Schlabrendorff, 294-295 and Fest, 398.

Hitler is dead!⁷⁴ After endless discussions within the conspiracy circles, von Stauffenberg reserved the central task to carry out Hitler's assassination of Hitler for himself.

However, the military situation, especially in the West, was catastrophic. It seemed that the conspirators missed already the window of opportunity for the planned coup. Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, Commander in Chief in the West, and Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, Commander of Army Group B, stated that the front against the Allies in the West could be held only two or three weeks at best.⁷⁵ Furthermore, pressure on the civilian opposition groups by the regime increased. Due to the unfavorable war situation, the domestic Nazi intelligence services increased their efforts to bring down any unrest from the beginning. Meetings and traveling of the civilian members of the conspiracy did not remain hidden to the SD and Gestapo. Therefore, several members of civilian opposition groups were arrested as a preemptive measure in July 1944, without knowing about the planned coup. On July 17, 1944 the rumor spread that even a warrant for Dr. Goerdeler was issued by the Gestapo.⁷⁶ Count von Stauffenberg's chance for the assassination of Hitler came in July 1944, after he had been promoted to Colonel as the Chief of Staff of the HQ Army Reserve Command. This assignment provided him access to the situation update briefings personally attended by Hitler. After two preliminary attempts, von Stauffenberg succeeded in placing a bomb in Hitler's HQ in Rastenburg on July 20, 1944.⁷⁷ The stage was set for the final act of the drama around the military resistance.

⁷⁴ Fest, 244; Schlie, 150.

⁷⁵ This assessment was based on a report by Rommel concerning the casualties of the German Army in the Western theater to the Commander in Chief West and directly to Hitler. The Army had lost 97,000 men and 225 tanks since the allied invasion on June 6, 1944. In the same timeframe, only 6,000 personnel replacements and seventeen tanks had arrived in the theatre. Rommel stated: „*Unter diesen Umständen muß damit gerechnet werden, daß es dem Feind in absehbarer Zeit – vierzehn Tage bis drei Wochen- gelingt, die eigene dünne Front, vor allem bei 7. Armee, zu durchbrechen und in die Weite des französischen Raums durchzubrechen.*“ See Raymond Cartier, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg, Band 2* (München: R. Piper & Co Verlag, 1965), 780. However, the position of Rommel and von Kluge towards a coup were still ambivalent, see Fest, 245.

⁷⁶ Karlauf, 307.

⁷⁷ The two preliminary assassination attempts happened on July 11 and 15, 1944. Fest describes dramatically the events in the weeks of July 1944 and the wavering discussions amongst the conspirators, 243–247. These discussions highlighted the military resistance flaw: “There is no doubting the moral

The *coup d'état* of July 20, 1944 failed the same day, because of bad luck, as well as insufficient planning and poor coordination among the conspirators which led to a delay in executing Valkyrie. The bomb which von Stauffenberg had placed under the table of the briefing room in Hitler's HQ in Rastenburg went off between 1240 and 1250 hours. Von Stauffenberg was certain that nobody could have survived the explosion and flew back to Berlin. The waiting conspirators in Berlin knew about the explosion in Rastenburg, and the provisional government around, COLG (ret) Beck, von Hassell and Field Marshal (ret) von Witzleben assembled in Berlin, but the orders for Valkyrie were not released.⁷⁸ The planning's flaw -von Stauffenberg placing the bomb and at the same time being the main organizer of the execution of Valkyrie- became obvious. Colonel Count von Stauffenberg arrived with his plane in Berlin-Rangsdorf at 1545 hours and reported immediately to MG Olbricht via a telephone call: Hitler is dead! Finally ten minutes before he arrived in the HQ in the *Bendlerstraße*, the orders for Valkyrie were issued by Colonel Merz von Quirnheim. In late afternoon, the first units started to move and occupied the power centers in Berlin, Vienna, Prague and Paris in accordance with the plan.⁷⁹

However, the coup was crushed in the early morning hours of July 21, 1944. News of the Hitler's survival trickled down various military levels and countered the efforts of the conspirators. At 1845 hours, the German news agency broadcasted an official communiqué about the unsuccessful assassination attempt and around midnight Hitler personally addressed the

integrity of the conspirators, their hatred of the Nazi regime, and their horror at the atrocities committed in Germany's name. But the distance between outrage and action is great," 247.

⁷⁸ It has to be mentioned that von Stauffenberg left the update briefing with Hitler under the smokescreen of a telephone call. For a more detailed description of the dramatic events on July 20, 1944 in Rastenburg as well as in Berlin, see Schlie 26–53 or Fest, 255–287. Reports of eye witnesses of the actions within the HQ of the Army Reserve Command in the Bentlerstraße are available; see the report of the secretary of MG Olbricht, Mrs. Delia Ziegler, in *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (ed.), 20. July 1944, 147.

⁷⁹ See the different outgoing telex on July 20, 1944 in *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (ed), 20. July 1944, 141–150. Most successful was the plot in Paris where all high ranking SS and SD members were arrested on order as planned.

population.⁸⁰ In the meantime, Major Otto Remer, Commander of the Guard Battalion *Großdeutschland* received a personal order by Hitler via a telephone call in Dr. Goebbels office to defeat the ongoing conspiracy against the regime in Berlin. Remer took immediate action against the core of the conspiracy in the *Bendlerstraße*.⁸¹ After a short fight in the building, the main actors around Count von Stauffenberg were arrested and, after a court martial trial under the chairmanship of COLG Fromm, were executed in the court yard of the of the Army Reserve Command HQ.⁸²

The coup's failure also meant the physical and ideological destruction of the military resistance, including the involved civilian resistance circles. Hitler took horrific revenge in the aftermath of the coup d'état. A special 'commission July 20' of 400 Gestapo agents' investigated the wide spread circles of conspirators.⁸³ Hitler himself provided guidance for those involved in the conspiracy when he stated, "there will be no mercy. No long speeches from the defendants. The people's court will act with lightning speed, and two hours after sentencing. It will be carried out. By hanging – without mercy."⁸⁴ Thousands of people were arrested. Anyone, even remotely, linked to the events was prosecuted, fifty-five military conspirators were removed from the Wehrmacht and twenty-nine retirements were enforced in August and September 1944 by the so-

⁸⁰ Ibid., 174, 195-196.

⁸¹ Initially the guard battalion *Großdeutschland* received orders as part of the Valkyrie plan. But soon Remer became suspicious. During his conversations with Propaganda Minister Dr. Goebbels, who was to be arrested, he was informed that Hitler survived the explosion in Rastenburg. Goebbels connected him with Hitler personally. See the so called Remer report as of July 22, 1944, in *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (ed.), July 20, 1944, 156–162.

⁸² COLG Fromm was not willing to support the conspirators in the afternoon. He was arrested and locked up in a separate room. Fromm took over command again after the tide had turned in the late evening hours. He immediately formed the court martial committee against the main figures of the conspiracy but this did not save him from Hitler's revenge. He was later arrested and court-martialed for cowardice and his knowledge of the conspiracy. He was shot on March 19, 1945. See Schlie, 36-37; Kane, 190.

⁸³ According to the research of Fest, the Gestapo initially had difficulties determining the breadth of the conspiracy. MG Stief, who procured the ordnance for the assassination and MG Fellgiebel, the Chief of Communication at the *Führerhauptquartier* in Rastenburg, held out for at least six days under torture without revealing anything, See Fest, 295.

⁸⁴ Kane, 189.

called *Ehrenhof des Heeres* before the main ‘show trials’ could happen in front of the infamous *Volksgerichtshof* (people’s court).⁸⁵ The following interrogations and the trials were accompanied by torture and humiliation. A press report of the English Admiralty in 1947 released the total number of 4,980 executions and enforced suicides in the aftermath of the July 20, 1944, including 700 officers.⁸⁶ However, the prosecution and execution of the involved personnel was just the beginning; soon collective punishment for the families and relatives was also enforced. The pregnant wife of Colonel Count von Stauffenberg, Countess Nina von Stauffenberg, was arrested and, for example, finally shipped to the concentration camp Ravensbrück. The children were taken and put into a Nazi orphanage in Bad Sachsa under a different name.⁸⁷

Beside the physical destruction, the regime then started to destroy the ideological background of the conspirators. Hitler and the heads of the services within the Wehrmacht portrayed the involved officers as just ambitious, criminal and unscrupulous persons. In Hitler’s speech on all German radio channels on the night July 20/21, 1944 he said: “A tiny clique of ambitious, ruthless officers who were also criminal lunatics forged a plot to get rid of me...” The direct link to a new ‘stab in the back’ legend, like that in 1918, was established soon.⁸⁸ Hitler

⁸⁵ The *Ehrenhof des Heeres* (Honor court of the Army) was built by *Führererlaß* (executive order) of Hitler as of August 2, 1944 in order to establish the prerequisites for civilian trials of former military personnel in front of the people’s court. The composition of this committee was as follows: Field Marshal von Rundstedt (Chair), Field Marshal Keitel, COLG Guderian, General Schroth and LTG Specht. Additionally, two deputies had been nominated: General Kriebel and LTG Kirchheim. The removal of respective officers from the Wehrmacht happened without a hearing of the defendants. See *Führererlass "Bildung eines Ehrenhofes zur Überprüfung der Beteiligten am Attentat vom 20.07.1944, Adolf Hitler, 2. August 1944* in Martin Moll, *Führererlasse 1939 – 1945* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997). See also Kane, 190 and the detailed list of removed officers by date, in *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (ed.), 20. July 1944, 212–214. The sequences of the trials at the people’s court are depicted in detail by Fest, 297–320.

⁸⁶ See Introduction to Chapter V, “*Verfolgung, Prozeß, Hinrichtung*,” in *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (ed.), July 20, 1944, 198. Fabian von Schlabrendorff is an impressive witness regarding the inhuman conditions of the interrogations and the trials. See Schlabrendorff, 310–313; Fest, 295–296.

⁸⁷ Bechtolsheim, 69–71. Forty-six children of members of the resistance, taken away from their parents, lived in the orphanage of Bad Sachsa. The oldest child was fifteen years, the youngest child, still a baby, one month old. The wife and the children of Colonel von Stauffenberg survived. Nina von Stauffenberg passed away at the age of 92 in 2006.

⁸⁸ Stahlberg, 363. See also the speeches of, Göring and Dönitz as of July 21, 1944. *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (ed.), July 20, 1944, 195–197.

kept his “psychological hold over the people.” The ominous propaganda and the fear of the advancing Red Army drove the population further still into the arms of the *Führer*.⁸⁹ The Nazi narrative of the treacherous conspiracy around von Stauffenberg was even working after the war, as will be seen later.

Finally, the *Wehrmacht* became in the fall of 1944 more or less a party-controlled organization. According to Alexander Stahlberg, a surviving member of the military resistance, “the process of inner dissolution had begun.”⁹⁰ The spirit of the Prussian officer was deliberately destroyed. The Nazi salute was forced into the army by Field Marshal Keitel and COLG Jodl.⁹¹ Himmler was appointed as the new Commander of the Army Reserve, and the *Waffen SS* became a separate and coequal military service within the *Wehrmacht*.⁹² The few non-identified resisters in the German military were cowed into silence and were waiting for the allied victory.

Motivations and intentions of Colonel Count von Stauffenberg.

The engagement of Colonel Count von Stauffenberg within the resistance circles mirrors to a certain degree the evolution of the military resistance, is based on his personal development, and not on a specific event of inspiration. The analysis of his development regarding his specific motivations and intentions to join the military resistance and finally becoming the main driver and “general manager” of the plot in 1944 can be divided into three linked spheres of his biography, including: the noble, conservative, and religious family background, the close ties to

⁸⁹ Fest, 321.

⁹⁰ Stahlberg, 364.

⁹¹ Both high ranking officers were well known for their plotting character. Their military colleagues mocked them as Hitler’s ‘yes-men’. Field Marshal Keitel had the nickname ‘Lakaitel’ from the German word Lakai, which has the meaning ‘footman.’ As Chief of the OKW, Keitel signed different orders which led to war crimes and unprecedented brutality conducting war.

⁹² Kane, 191.

the poet Stefan George and his poetry, and finally the dedication towards his profession as an officer and soldier.⁹³

Firstly, Claus Count von Stauffenberg's deep rooted convictions and beliefs were shaped by his family background, nobility, intellectual interest for politics, and, last but not least, religion. He was born into an old Swabian - Franconian aristocratic family in the southwestern part of Germany. Despite the fact that the family roots were not in Prussia, the extended family tree had connections to the famous Prussian General Neidhardt von Gneissenu.⁹⁴

Nobility and links to the well-known families of the 'old order' had a meaning in Germany, even after the breakdown of the German monarchy in 1918. For many nobles, and this is also true for the von Stauffenberg family, nobility meant the rule of the elite, which sometimes also led to arrogance and social snobbish behavior.⁹⁵The traditional form of a noble life served as an ascertainment of inherited rights, as well as a specific personal obligation towards the common good of the state. Therefore, joining the military elite of the cavalry in 1926 as an officer cadet was just a logical step for Claus von Stauffenberg.

Born in November 1907, Claus von Stauffenberg grew up as the youngest child with two brothers in a conservative, cultural, and intellectual atmosphere. The von Stauffenberg family was open-minded and tolerant. Claus von Stauffenberg attended the *Gymnasium*, played the cello, and read the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* in Greek.⁹⁶ Raised in politically disturbing times in the Weimar Republic, Claus von Stauffenberg was interested in politics from a young age and loved to discuss political issues all his life. His political beliefs were patriotic and shaped by his beliefs in

⁹³ Karlauf, 32.

⁹⁴ For a detailed background of the old aristocratic 'von Stauffenberg' family, see Schlie 56-57; Karlauf, 114.

⁹⁵ Karlauf, 37, 52-53. The social snobbery of Claus von Stauffenberg is documented with a letter at the beginning of his military career by Thomas Karlauf, 42.

⁹⁶ Kane, 183. Regarding the siblings of von Stauffenberg, Caroline Countess von Stauffenberg gave birth to twins in 1905 (Berthold and Alexander). Twins were born again in 1907. But the twin brother of Claus, Konrad, died as a baby. See Karlauf, 115.

classical values and historical idols. In a school essay in 1921, Claus von Stauffenberg wrote that an uncompromising commitment for the fatherland and the sacrifice for the people was a necessary virtue.⁹⁷

Finally, Claus von Stauffenberg was raised in the Roman Catholic faith; his parents were not regular ‘churchgoers’; but, religion played a crucial role in his education. The Roman Catholic faith influence for the ethical education of all children should be not underestimated, as his link to the Roman Catholic belief had a decisive impact during his whole life. The ethical outrage of Colonel Count von Stauffenberg concerning the deliberate atrocities and war crimes of the regime during the war is based on deep-rooted Christian values and the final source of his ethical strength was certainly the Christian belief.

It is documented that later on Claus and Nina von Stauffenberg with their children attended Roman Catholic services on a regular basis. He always attended the services in uniform as a public confession of his religion as an officer.⁹⁸ He believed that his Catholic faith attested to the validity of his oath. During a discussion in 1944 with an officer regarding the oath and being a conspirator at the same time, he stated as a Roman Catholic believer, that his actions were analogous to that of conscientious objection against the regime, and it was his ethical obligation to act against his oath. Even on the eve of the assassination attempt in July 1944, his driver brought von Stauffenberg to the Roman Catholic Rosary Basilica in Berlin - Steglitz. Before the decisive day, he attended a final service in order to gain spiritual strength.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Original quote: “*Des Vaterlandes und des Kampfes fürs Vaterland würdig zu werden und dann sich dem erhabenen Kampf für das Volk zu opfern; ein wirklichkeits- und kampfbewusstes Leben zu führen*, see Schlie, 62. The passion to discuss politics by von Stauffenberg is described by Karlauf. His fellow officers allowed him only to sit down for lunch, if he promised not to touch political issues during the conversation. See Karlauf, 106.

⁹⁸ Bechtolsheim, 64–66.

⁹⁹ Schlie, 59; Karlauf, 308. Nina von Stauffenberg was a Protestant all her life. However, she decided together with her husband that the common children should be educated in the Roman Catholic faith.

Secondly, von Stauffenberg's passion and dedication to the poetry of Stefan George (1868 – 1933) influenced his world view and intellectual thinking.¹⁰⁰ The brothers, Berthold and Claus von Stauffenberg, eighteen and fifteen years old, were introduced to the well-known poet Stefan George in May 1923 by Albrecht von Blumenthal, a member of the classic philological faculty at the University of Jena.¹⁰¹ George used to assemble a small circle of young followers for regular meetings, most of them being pair of brothers. The special relationship between the von Stauffenberg brothers was built on the foundation of common admiration towards Stefan George. For the rest of his life, Claus von Stauffenberg looked to his older brother for the advice, even in the framework of the conspiracy in 1944.¹⁰²

Stefan George, with his poetry was, for the discreet small circle of followers, the 'true teacher', who educated the elite foreseen to 'lead the German nation and the Reich'.¹⁰³ His poetry was overloaded with pathos and symbolism. For many after WW I, it gave order to the special German relationship towards power and cultural spirit. Stefan George's poetry told the story of the coming German youth carrying the fate not only for Germany but also for the whole European continent. The small circle of followers was attracted by this pathos and the symbolic romanticized language of classic values and idols. The framework of the small circle around the poet and the content of the poetry reinforced a patriotically based sense of elitism. Furthermore, Claus von Stauffenberg believed in the given eschatological task for the German youth.¹⁰⁴ Linked

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Karlauf claims that the 'spiritual rector' of the assassination attempt is Stefan George. On the other side, Sophie von Bechtolsheim argues the influence of George was not overwhelming as stated by Karlauf. Ulrich Schlie describes the relationship between von Stauffenberg and George with the terms gratitude and pride. See Karlauf, 293; von Bechtolsheim, 62-63; Schlie, 64.

¹⁰¹ Karlauf, 117.

¹⁰² Ibid., 110. A close friend of the family Marion Countess Yorck stated, "Claus did nothing what his brother Berthold did not know or did not approve."

¹⁰³ Ibid., 118.

¹⁰⁴ The followers used to call George "master" (Meister) and the 'bible' of the George followers was the poem complex 'Federal Star' (*Stern des Bundes*). The topic of the 'small elite' is portrayed in one of the documented poems of the young Claus von Stauffenberg. See Karlauf, 118–121.

to this special world view was the ‘ethos of the act’, in terms of the value of the act itself, and conspiracy and turmoil for the better good were natural ingredients of the Stefan George’ poetry.

The interpretation of Stefan George’s world view became important for the von Stauffenberg brothers in a twofold way: On the one hand the significance of the George poetry seemed to become evident for the new political situation in 1933. The brothers discovered some parallels in the announcements and prophecies of the poetry of the ‘master’ and the introduction of the Nazi regime. They initially welcomed the change.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, the cosmos of Stefan George with its eschatological character became even more important for the personal reassessment of the Nazi regime and the involvement in the conspiracy. The poem ‘Anti-Christ’ from George became more and more a revelation for the brothers: Hitler was the Anti-Christ and action was necessary. Looking at the depressing reality of the Third Reich, the brothers started to integrate the core ideas of George’s ethic into their consideration for an order after the war.¹⁰⁶ Claus von Stauffenberg nurtured his decisiveness regarding the coup on George’s ‘ethos of the act’. Nevertheless, the absolute will to act and his inspiring engagement were linked to hopes for the future of the German nation, after the act was committed. In the perspective of von Stauffenberg, the assassination of Hitler was not a purpose in itself but the necessary condition for the execution of the coup. The ethical reason for the coup was the provision of a future for the German nation. The Germans themselves had to get rid of Hitler.¹⁰⁷

Finally, the brothers tried to link a justification for regime change, as well as for a new political order, to their adapted view of George’s poetry. The outcome was a secret document, the so called ‘oath’ in July 1944. This ‘oath’ is the political testament of the von Stauffenberg brothers and the postulations referred especially to the fate of the Germans and the German nation. The brothers asked for the rule of law and justice but they disdained the ‘lie of equality’.

¹⁰⁵ Karlauf, 125.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 294.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 291.

Instead they asked for a natural hierarchy which meant the rule of the elite. This fits in Claus von Stauffenberg's elitist thinking, since for him, the highest form of leadership was self-evident lordship, which never had to enforce guidance because nobody could deny its superiority anyway. Furthermore the 'oath' expressed the specific value of the German nation. The brothers believed in the future of a German nation and emphasized, based on the rich German cultural heritage, Germany's responsibility to lead the occidental people to a better life.¹⁰⁸ In this regard, the 'oath' differed significantly from the official prepared declarations of the Valkyrie coup. The political testament of Claus von Stauffenberg breathes the eschatological spirit of Stefan George.

Thirdly, his interpretation of the military profession as German General Staff Officer became the core of his motivation to join the military resistance and shaped his intentions. However, it was a development within his specific interpretation of the profession that finally led him to July 20, 1944. Colonel Count von Stauffenberg's professional attitude can be described in terms of elitism, responsibility, obedience, and conscience. However, one must recognize that these terms got an ambivalent meaning during his personal development.

Claus Count von Stauffenberg joined the cavalry at the age of eighteen years as a patriotic young man who never had hidden his enthusiasm for the German national movement. Becoming an officer in the cavalry of the *Reichswehr* was a statement in itself, demonstrating that he was now a selected member of small elite group.¹⁰⁹ In October 1936, at twenty-nine years old, von Stauffenberg was assigned further to the next small elite inside the German officer corps. He was selected for the first General Staff Course at the *Kriegsakademie* after this famous institution

¹⁰⁸ For the content of the 'oath', see Karlauf 297-298; Schlie, 158-159. The first postulation in the original: "*Wir wollen eine Neue Ordnung die alle Deutschen zu Trägern des Staates macht und ihnen Recht und Gerechtigkeit verbürgt, verachten aber die Gleichheitslüge und beugen uns vor den naturgegebenen Rängen.*" For Claus von Stauffenberg's remarks on leadership, see Karlauf, 255. "*Die höchste Form der Führerschaft lag für ihn in einem ,selbstverständlichen Herrentum, das niemals zum Befehl greifen muss... weil sich ihm ohnehin niemand entziehen kann.*" Regarding the style in the original German texts, Sophie von Bechtolsheim admits that George had even a significant influence at the writing style of her grandfather, see von Bechtolsheim, 64.

¹⁰⁹ Schlie, 68. Cavalry was the most distinguished branch within the *Reichswehr*. The noble class was disproportionally represented in the cavalry; see Karlauf, 40-41.

reopened and was a General Staff Officer for the rest of his extraordinary military career.¹¹⁰ The strong cohesion and the nationally oriented mind set of these elite readily connected to the terms *Reich, Volk, Vaterland* and *Staat*— they became the order of his life. Therefore, Count von Stauffenberg initially appreciated the new regime’s plan towards the resolution of the Versailles treaty. Furthermore, the interpretation of leadership in the Nazi ideology was linked to a natural hierarchy of the society based on the community of the German people (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and the expressed will for a new German-directed rule of law echoed the George poetry; to him it was the right way to a good future for the German people.¹¹¹

As a member of the General Staff, Count von Stauffenberg was part of the executive elite of the *Wehrmacht* and was responsible for the execution of Hitler’s foreign policy in terms of organizing the German armed forces’ rearmament program, and the planning and execution of the war. He was a General Staff Officer with his heart and his soul and he had no doubts about the German General Staff’s superior military planning skills and that the war could be won.¹¹²

However, over time, his duties as General Staff Officer distanced him from the regime. He realized during the course of the war that Hitler’s poor leadership wasted the *Wehrmacht’s* military resources; and, he struggled with the military strategic decisions of the regime even before he realized the evil spirit of the regime.¹¹³ Von Stauffenberg came to the conclusion that only the elite of the General Staff Officers could stop the unbearable losses to the German military, and therefore they had to stop Hitler and the Nazi regime using their specific skills. In the hospital 1943, recovering from injuries, he declared to his uncle Nikolaus von Uxküll: “The

¹¹⁰ Karlauf, 73 and 104. Claus von Stauffenberg joined the first hundred students who have been selected for the General Staff Course. He was at the top of his class. One of his classmates was the American exchange student Captain Albert Wedemeyer, who described von Stauffenberg as “a very handsome man – a fine military bearing, courteous, considerate and sensitive. See Schlie, 85–87.

¹¹¹ This perspective is documented by interrogations of Berthold von Stauffenberg after he had been arrested on July 21, 1944. See Karlauf, 5; Schlie, 79.

¹¹² Karlauf, 192, 194 and 198. In the year 1938, *Rittmeister* (Captain of the Cavalry) von Stauffenberg was not initiated in the planning for the coup at the eve of the Munich Conference.

¹¹³ Schlie, 101.

generals have achieved nothing; now the colonels have to act.”¹¹⁴ Feeling the wider responsibility of a General Staff Officer, he dedicated all his intellectual and organizational skills from that point on towards the accomplishment of a *coup d'état*.

Claus von Stauffenberg placed responsibility as a General Staff Officer into a broader political framework. This was crucial for the development of his political aversion to the Nazi regime, as well as for the preparations of the *coup d'état* in 1944 and the design of a post war order. As previously described, the *Reichswehr* was supposed to be a depoliticized organization. However, the German General Staff had clearly a tradition of political influence and the General Staff of the Army was willing to use this influence with the Nazi Regime. The Chief of the General Staff of the Army, COLG Beck made this very clear in the crisis of 1938. He pointed out in his memoranda that the decision about going to war was based on military reasoning and therefore not an issue for the political administration. Additionally, he stated that it was the responsibility of the military leadership at the strategic level to make an overall assessment of the situation, taking into account the framework of foreign and military policy. This statement defined the political responsibility of the General Staff. For the General Staff, the interests of the armed forces were synonymous with the interest of the nation.¹¹⁵ German General Staff Officers were educated as generalists and trained to recognize the political complexity of military issues. Generally speaking, Claus Count von Stauffenberg shared the convictions of the political responsibility of the General Staff with COLG Ludwig Beck and his interest for politics benefited him in this regard. In a letter to MG Georg von Sodenstern in 1939, at this time Chief of Staff of Group Command 2, he emphasized his personal perspective regarding this specific political responsibility. He pointed out that “to be an officer means, to be a servant of the state and at the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 144.

¹¹⁵ Karlauf, 143 and 146. Compare also “Denkschrift des Generalobersten Beck vom 16.07.1938,” in *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (ed.), July 20, 1944, 53.

same time to be a part of the state with all the broad responsibility which is embraced by the state.”¹¹⁶

For him, this meant that the fate of the nation rested on the shoulders of the military. By 1939 the war had become the framework for the fate of the German nation. The General Staff Officers like von Stauffenberg had the professional responsibility to win this war and from 1939 to 1942 von Stauffenberg put all his energy and skills into this aim. When his cousin Hans-Christoph von Stauffenberg tried to convince him to join the *Kreisauer Kreis* in early 1942, he replied: “We have to win first the war. We cannot oppose now during the war especially if we are in a war against the Bolsheviks. But when we are coming home, then we will clean up Germany from the brown plague.”¹¹⁷ However, the looming defeat of the ‘Reich’ based on the culmination of the military resources and the defective leadership of Hitler, combined with the inactivity of the generals, convinced him by the end of 1942 that the General Staff Officers had the responsibility to redirect policy. He was now willing to do his part to change the ultimate fate of the apparently doomed nation. This change in von Stauffenberg’s mindset revealed his dialectic approach towards responsibility. If the war could not be won, then the Armed Forces had the political responsibility to end the madness in order to ensure a future for the *Reich* and the German people.¹¹⁸ However, to enforce the primacy of the military in political affairs from this perspective meant that he would commit treason against his political master and the majority of his fellow officers, who continued to support Hitler.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 100. The mentioned letter was a to the editor. MG Sodenstern published an essay in the ‘*Militärwissenschaftliche Rundschau*’ about the nature of the military profession (*Vom Wesen des Soldatentum*). Regarding the primacy of the military, he argued in the letter as well in the tradition of his famous ancestor Neidhardt von Gneissenu. See Karlauf, 100 and 102.

¹¹⁷ Schlie, 119.

¹¹⁸ The dialectic approach is documented in a conversation of OTL i.G. von Stauffenberg with Major Kuhn. See Karlauf, 208-209.

¹¹⁹ Karlauf, 103.

In the fall of 1943, as “general manager” of the coup and as part of his dialectic approach, von Stauffenberg became directly involved in the discussions with the political opposition circles.¹²⁰ He agreed that the coup could only become politically successful if the conspirators in the *Bendlerstraße* had a close cooperation with influential civilian opposition circles in Berlin.¹²¹ Based on his personal interests and his philosophy as a General Staff Officer, he thought also in political terms and tried to overcome the distinction between military and civilian resistance groups. However, many leaders of the civilian opposition groups had different ideas about the execution of the coup and the political order after the war. Some members of the national conservative circles, including Beck and Dr. Goerdeler, rejected the plan to kill Hitler due to Christian convictions until June 1944. The *Kreisauer Kreis* around Count Helmuth von Moltke had fundamentalist visions about a new German civil society in a post national Europe.¹²² As a pragmatic and dynamic officer, Claus von Stauffenberg tried to mediate and pushed for decisions in order to come to terms with the separate groups. However, for him, the survival of the *Reich* and the German nation was still the main driver and a basic assumption for all his considerations regarding a post war order. The unconditional surrender of a German post-Hitler government was not an option for him and he was still confident that a new government could step into negotiations with the Allies.¹²³ He strategized about the best way to come to terms, either with the Allies in the West or the Soviets in the East, but an agreement with the Soviet Union was not the preferred option. Based on the 1919 communist uprisings, the fear of the communism

¹²⁰ Thomas Karlauf and Ulrich Schlie analyzed the engagement of von Stauffenberg with the different civilian opposition members in detail. See Karlauf, 252-253, 256, and 266, as well as Schlie, 123-124. For the relationship between the different civilian opposition circles, see also Thamer, 732-733.

¹²¹ Schlabrendorff, 257.

¹²² The Kreisauer circle had discussions since summer 1940 about a new European order after the war under the aspects of social justice, cooperation between the nations and other ethical topics. The cooperation between Goerdeler, von Moltke and von Stauffenberg was additionally hampered by deep antipathy. See Karlauf, 267-268; Schlie, 145-146. See also Hermann Weiss, “Kreisau Circle,” in Benz, Pehle (ed.), 195-198.

¹²³ Fest, 339.

spreading into Germany was still vivid in conspiracy circles. Therefore, von Stauffenberg tried to reach out to the Western Allies via his contacts to Adam von Trott zu Solz, who conspired in the foreign office and had useful links and relations to Western Allies.¹²⁴ The disastrous military situation increased the political pressure for the execution of the coup and the definition of the appropriate negotiation strategies with the Allies. In a paper written by Stauffenberg himself on July 20, 1944, he expressed his hope that “Germany would remain a ‘significant factor in the constellation of powers’ and that the Wehrmacht would be an ‘effective instrument’ in bringing about negotiations ‘on an equal footing’ with the Allies.”¹²⁵

The idealistic picture of the military profession embodied von Stauffenberg’s continued obedience. His personal soldier image and perspective on the military profession encompassed the obedient fighter and warrior inspired by chivalry, dedicated to the German nation.¹²⁶ Obedience in a broader sense was for von Stauffenberg the obligation to serve the state as a professional officer and at the same time the pursuit of excellence in fulfilling one’s duties. “Service is duty” was one of von Stauffenberg’s often-used statements.¹²⁷

In August 1929, he graduated as the best cavalry officer in his class and was an excellent cavalryman. His evaluation reports and his education at the *Kriegsakademie* promised an extraordinary career; in all of his assignment during peace and war, von Stauffenberg exceeded the expectations of his superior officers. His promotion to LTC at the age of thirty-five and subsequent promotion to Colonel the following year is evidence of his outstanding expertise and skills as a General Staff Officer.¹²⁸ His perspective of service, duty and, obedience was soon challenged by the conduct of the war especially in the East. As a desk officer in the OKH, von

¹²⁴ Schlie, 120–122 and 134.

¹²⁵ Fest, 339.

¹²⁶ Karlauf, 43; Schlie, 88.

¹²⁷ Bechtolsheim, 95.

¹²⁸ Schlie, 77-78.

Stauffenberg received relatively early knowledge about the outrageous contents of the commissary and jurisdiction order and the amount of involved terror. In May 1942, after having received a personal report from an officer coming from the front about mass shootings in the Ukraine, he realized that the committed crimes and atrocities, as well as the catastrophic war policy, were essential features of the Nazi regime and not just excesses in conducting a war.¹²⁹ Obedience, loyalty, and chivalry as central features of his dedication to the profession as an officer and soldier became blurry in 1942.

Eventually, Colonel Count von Stauffenberg realized the burden and limitation of obedience as well as the call of his conscience. Conscience became even more important when von Stauffenberg became actively involved in the conspiracy in 1943. Based on his religious beliefs and his ethical responsibility towards the higher good, Stauffenberg saw no moral conflict between his personal oath to Hitler and his preparation for tyrannicide.

Officially, he had given his personal oath to the formal Head of State and he was dedicated to the state and the nation indirectly by his duties as an officer of the *Wehrmacht*. The act of killing the head of state in the midst of a war touched the basic structure and principles of military service. However, von Stauffenberg did not accept Nazi propaganda that this oath meant unconditioned obedience to the *Führer*; from his perspective this view did not match the traditional Prussian-German military tradition. If the king did not follow the rule of law, he lost the claim of obedience, and there were therefore ethical borders of obedience towards Hitler.¹³⁰ Additionally, Colonel Count von Stauffenberg found peace with himself that if necessary, he

¹²⁹ Karlauf, 205; von Bechtolsheim, 94. Claus von Stauffenberg worked in the Organization Department of the OKH. His superior officer, Colonel Hellmuth Stieff, was in steadfast opposition to Hitler. He called Hitler “the devil in human form.” One can assume that von Stauffenberg had the first contact to the opposing military circles via Stieff.

¹³⁰ For this argumentation, see Karlauf, 32; Schlie, 147-148. The protestant church of the old Prussian Union had already confirmed this perspective in March 1935: “*Jeder Eid ist vor Gottes Angesicht geleistet und stellt die in ihm genommene Verpflichtung unter die Verantwortung vor Gott. Der Eid findet seine Grenze darin, dass allein Gottes Wort unbedingt bindet,*” Schlie, 148. Compare also the discussion regarding the oath with Axel von dem Busche, Karlauf, 274.

would make the ultimate sacrifice. As the Ia (First General Staff Officer responsible for operational planning) of the tenth PzDiv, his direct contact with the hell of war in Africa and his severe injuries clarified his ethical mind set. His idea of the ethical value of a human being was conceived and now, an ethical being, was willing to sacrifice his life for others.¹³¹ Based on this thinking, the ethical background of the evolving conspiracy became more and more important for von Stauffenberg. In a conversation with COLG (ret) Beck in 1944 he expressed his concern, “how the German people, who had followed deliberately a criminal regime, could purify themselves.”¹³² The ‘ethos of the act’ evolved around his mind. Purification because of the coup and sacrifice for the German nation became the drivers for his motivation to be involved at the frontline of the conspiracy against Hitler. Shortly before July, 20, 1944 he made this revealing statement: “He who decides to act must know that he will go down in history as traitor to his country, but if he fails to act, he will be a traitor to his own conscience.”¹³³

Despite his physical disabilities, this mind set reinforced his self-confidence and spiritual power which was noticed by others. He declared frankly and openly to a young First Lieutenant in June 1944: “I am pursuing high treason with all the capabilities I have on hand.”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Schlie, 111.

¹³² Karlauf, 291.

¹³³ Rüdiger von Voss, *Aufstand des Gewissens – 70 Jahre 20. July 1944*, Rede von Rüdiger von Voss am 20. July 2014 im Mahnmal St. Nicolai, 22, accessed January 14, 2020, https://www.nationalstiftung.de/pdf/Doku_Aufstand_des_Gewissens.pdf. The original quote: “*Es ist die Zeit, dass jetzt etwas getan wird. Derjenige allerdings, der etwas zu tun wagt, muss sich bewusst sein, dass er wohl als Verräter in die deutsche Geschichte eingehen wird. Unterlässt er jedoch die Tat, dann wäre er ein Verräter an seinem eigenen Gewissen*“. For the English translation, see Suzanne J. Swartz, “Obstacles and Stepping Stones to the Hero’s Pedestal: Reunified Germany’s Selective Commemoration of Resisters to National Socialism,” Honors Theses, paper 277 (2007), 8, accessed December 28, 2019, <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses/277>.

¹³⁴ Schlie, 154. Even COLG (ret) Beck recognized the dynamic and nearly metaphysical decisiveness of von Stauffenberg. See Karlauf, 291.

Summary

Regarding the military resistance, Joachim Fest stated “the stunning events of July 20 overshadowed the movement as a whole.”¹³⁵ Therefore it is important to summarize the designing elements of the German military resistance, in order to get to its core. The endurance of the small circle of opposing officers was striking. Despite multiple setbacks and isolation from the main part of the German population, the military resistance continued to plot tenaciously against Hitler from 1938 to 1944, in order to bring an end to the Nazi regime. The core of the conspirators, organized in different circles, stayed more or less stable, even over the war. However, the circles of the conspiracy were extremely diverse. The institutional connection among the conspirators was the *Wehrmacht*. Though the Nazis portrayed the coup of July 1944 as purely military, the conspiracy “included many civilians, ranging from conservative parliamentarians and diplomats, to Social Democrats, to the ‘aristocratic radicals’ in the *Kreisauer Kreis*.”¹³⁶

The conspirators’ mindset was influenced by the traditional nationalistic spirit of the German officer corps; they took their dedication to their oath and the German nation very seriously. Most of the officers were attracted by the regime’s policy during the years 1933 to 1937, but the early enthusiasm later turned into disappointment, moral outrage and steadfast opposition. However, the conflict between the professional obligation of a German officer being obedient and fighting the nation’s war to his best abilities and the personal conscience remained a constant worrying topic for the conspirators. Ulrich von Hassell summarized these conflicted feelings of October 1940 in the following statement: “If this system emerges victorious, Germany and Europe are headed for terrible times. But if Germany is defeated, the consequences are simply unimaginable”. Additionally Joachim Fest came to the following assessment regarding the

¹³⁵ Fest, 324.

¹³⁶ Lockenour, 472.

central figures of the military resistance: “None of the leading participants felt at ease with the role of conspirator.”¹³⁷

Despite the common mindset as German officers, the military resistance was not a monolithic bloc. The opposition in the military consisted of a bunch of colorful people with different origins, habits of thought, political mind sets, and individual strength of character as well as different paradigms of action against the regime. The different motives were either reinforced by moral, religious or patriotic convictions. This diversity of views and the lack of a unifying resistance ideology led to the characteristic indecision during all these years.¹³⁸ The common denominator was to get rid of Hitler and the Nazi regime, but the questions about when, under which circumstances in the war, to what specific end, and finally how, often produced rifts and long lasting discussion between the opposing officers and the involved civilian circles.

Despite of all these discussions, some common designing elements of the military resistance movement can be analyzed. The conspiring officers saw themselves as a social elite and interpreted their service as a political responsibility in order to provide leadership in difficult times for the nation. They agreed that the Wehrmacht was the only tool which was able to bring down Hitler and his regime, and that there was no other capable domestic force or asset available. The involved officers also agreed that the military was just the organized and armed vanguard of a political operation. When the prerequisites for the regime change had been established, the military would retreat into the background and then politicians would take over.¹³⁹ Therefore, the conspirators’ close link with different civilian opposition circles was important for the execution of the coup as well as for the credibility of the endeavor. The natural allies’ for the conspiring officers were the national conservative opposition around Dr. Goerdeler and the opposing circles in the foreign office and the nobles in the *Kreisauer Kreis*. However, these connections and

¹³⁷ Fest, 327 and 329.

¹³⁸ Fest, 328.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 326.

relationships made it even more difficult to agree on certain actions. The number of involved players increased the complexity and decision-making needed during the planning for the *coup d'état*. Finally the conspirators had a clear sense of conscience and morality, a strong sense of right and wrong, and the conviction that they had served as officers for a ruthless false master with a morally-false cause.

The different phases and the common designing elements of the military resistance are mirrored in Colonel Count von Stauffenberg. Supporting the regime's policy in the early days of his career, he became an active member of the military resistance relatively late in 1943. However, there is no doubt that he made the difference and became the spark plug of the July 20, 1944 conspiracy due to his specific personal characteristics. He became literally the 'general manager' of the *coup d'état* in July 1944. Colonel Count von Stauffenberg had already fascinated his contemporaries with his skills and character, and was an authentic person in the different areas of his life.¹⁴⁰ If you had to deal with the scion of a noble family, the follower of Stefan George or a skilled and gifted General Staff Officer, he was always the same person inspired by the same ideals. In accordance with Thomas Karlauf, the brace around the officer Count von Stauffenberg was his specific sense of elite and the 'ethos of the act'.¹⁴¹ In his mindset, as member of the elite, he had the skills and the responsibility to act. Based on his specific interpretation of responsibility he developed a rousing decisiveness to act in a political sense within the conspiracy against Hitler. His aversion to Hitler was first based on military strategic reasons and an attitude towards the ethics of responsibility.¹⁴² His main motivation was to save Germany and the German nation from a doomed fate under the Hitler regime. His thinking and his actions were determined by conservative patriotism and his dedication to the military profession. Colonel Count von

¹⁴⁰ Karlauf, 275.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 109.

¹⁴² Karlauf, 226; Schlie 110.

Stauffenberg political considerations for a post war order followed military thinking.¹⁴³ This most likely led to his strategic misconception to come to terms with the Allies after a coup.

Nevertheless, Colonel Count von Stauffenberg had a clear ethical compass based on his religious faith. The Roman Catholic faith gave him the spiritual strength for his decisiveness to act and the ethical reasoning to overcome his inner conflicts between duty and obedience on the one side and his conscience on the other side. Finally, in terms of the military's atonement for supporting an evil regime for such a long time, the ethical aspect for him was the defining part of the decision to execute the coup, meaning the possible sacrifice of one's life in pursuit of higher ideals.

Perception of the Military Resistance in Postwar Germany

The Nazi propaganda that portrayed the conspirators of July 20, 1944 as a 'clique of ambitious and ruthless officers' echoed long after the end of WW II. There was little or no information available to reestablish the reputation of the involved officers and civilians. According to Joachim Fest, the main reasons for this development were "Allied policy and Germany's postwar psychological climate of mass repression, born of guilt and a desire to forget."¹⁴⁴

Former *Wehrmacht* officers were the spearhead of the detractors after the war. The defendants at the Nuremberg trials in 1945, COLG Jodl and Field Marshall von Rundstedt, articulated that the July 20, 1944 conspiracy was "a cowardly and devious act of high treason."¹⁴⁵ Other *Wehrmacht* generals had previously and indirectly criticized the involved July 20 conspirators for their unpatriotic attitude in a memorandum for the Nuremberg international

¹⁴³ Schlie, 144.

¹⁴⁴ Fest, 324.

¹⁴⁵ David Clay Large, "A Gift to the German Future? The Anti-Nazi Resistance Movement and West German Rearmament," *German Studies Review*, Vol. 7, No 3. 3 (October, 1994), 499–529; quote from 507.

military tribunal. They claimed that in order to exculpate themselves, it was not the task of high-ranking officers to break the backbone of the fighting army. This argument lasted into the foundation years of the FRG. Former General Hasso von Manteuffel became a member of parliament for liberal democrats and, in 1952 mirrored the opinion of many former soldiers when he noticed, “One cannot betray your comrades at the front by conducting mutiny in the rear.”¹⁴⁶

The arguments of betrayal and destruction of the *Wehrmacht's* unity were widespread and most of the German population saw the conspirators as failed traitors.¹⁴⁷ Eventually, the famous 1952 ‘Braunschweig trial’ against former MG Otto Ernst Remer, who had publicly denigrated the conspirators of July 20, changed the perception to a certain degree. The court made the important legal statement that the conspiracy was not high treason because the Nazi regime was not considered a constitutional state that followed the rule of law.¹⁴⁸

However, Allied policy in occupied Germany did not support the reputation of the conspirators. Directly after the war, collective biases against all Germans shaped the perspective of the western allies. David C. Large describes the anecdote when one of the survivors of the military resistance denied the allied offer to work for the prosecution in the Nuremberg trials, he was told: “You Twentieth of July people are just as much pigs as the others.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Epkenhans, Zimmermann, 141.

¹⁴⁷ The authors of the Nuremberg memorandum have been, amongst others, the former Field Marshal von Manstein, Field Marshal von Brauchitsch and COLG Halder, Karlauf, 28. For the postwar public perception, see also von Bechtolsheim, 121; Large, 507.

¹⁴⁸ Karlauf, 29. Otto Ernst Remer was the former Commander of the Guard Battalion *Großdeutschland*, who finally smashed the plot of July 20. He was afterwards promoted up to Major General. After the war, he still kept a firm believer in Nazi ideology. For his insulting remarks about the officers of the July 20, he was sentenced to go to jail for three months. See also Jan Molitor, *Die Schatten der Toten vom 20. Juli*, in *Die Zeit*, 11/1952 as of March 13, 1952, accessed January 05, 2020, <https://www.zeit.de/1952/11/die-schatten-der-toten-vom-20-juli>. The debate about some legal issues, e.g. the meaning of the oath in the Third Reich and the legitimacy of tyrannicide is still ongoing in academic circles. Wolfgang Count the meaning of the oath in the Third Reich and the legitimacy of tyrannicide is still ongoing in academic circles. Wolfgang Count Vitzthum, a well-known German professor for international law, made a detailed research on this issue in 2011. His conclusion is in line with the mentioned verdict: One could not commit high treason against the Nazi State. See von Voss, *Aufstand des Gewissens*, 15.

¹⁴⁹ Large, 502.

Despite the fact that Winston Churchill found words of praise for the men of July 20, 1944 in the House of Commons in 1946, the speech was banned by the Allied governors of the western zones of Germany as part of a general prohibition against publishing military affairs. The German population's reeducation and denazification did not include talking about the military resistance circles inside Germany. This policy prevented the individual German from being able to have a moral encounter with the facts and the background of the plot against Hitler.¹⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the small group of surviving members of the conspiracy of July 20, 1944 promoted their own legacy directly after the war. They generated their own narrative, based on their memories, experiences and internal personal conflicts. This is important because these stories became the public narrative in West Germany and were utilized by the West German Government.

In 1946, Fabian von Schlabrendorff, the former aide of Henning von Tresckow, provided the most paradigmatic approach for the development of a new narrative in his vivid historical book, *Offiziere gegen Hitler*.¹⁵¹ In the following text, the main themes of this narrative will be analyzed, because they played a crucial role during the conservation and utilization phase.

Generating the narrative

The Fabian von Schlabrendorff narrative mainly consists of two elements, the inclusion and the pathos element, and, in addition, the narrative serves different purposes. First of all, the

¹⁵⁰ Winston Churchill is quoted with the following statement: "These men fought without help from within or without, driven only by the restlessness of their conscience. As long as they lived they were invisible and unrecognizable to us... but in their death, the resistance became visible....their deeds and sacrifices are the foundation of the reconstruction." See Schlabrendorff, xiii and Abenheim, A valid Heritage, 121. For the German translation see Erklärung Churchills über den Deutschen Widerstand, in Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (ed.), 20. Juli 1944, 70. The initial assessment of the plot within the public sphere of the Allies was not complaisant. *The New York Times*, for example, instantly fell in with the assumption that it was a 'general's plot'. Later on, the same newspaper reported about the story of the August 8, 1944 show trial against eight leading conspirators with an opening statement that the "details of the plot suggested more the atmosphere of gangsters lurid underworld than the normal atmosphere one would expect within officers' corps." See introduction to von Schlabrendorff, xvi and Kane, 192.

¹⁵¹ The English version of this book was published in 1959 under the title *The Secret War Against Hitler*. This monograph is using the English edition from 1994 for further analysis of the narrative.

narrative creates a line of defense for the conspirators against external critique. Furthermore, the narrative defines the borders towards the communist resistance circles and finally establishes a personal legacy for the survivors.

The inclusion element of the narrative tells a story by a series of vignettes of the main participants; of a wide spread conspiracy across the whole spectrum of German society. The description of the combined philosophies of the conspirators and the tale of their common struggles are part of this element of inclusion as well. The coup of July 20, 1944 is portrayed as a combined effort of various national conservative resistance circles in the military and civilian realm. The coup was not just the affair of a ‘small clique of ambitious and ruthless officers’, as the Nazis had presented in their narrative. Von Schlabrendorff emphasizes and explains that the various social, professional and even family relationships between the military and civilian resistance in preparation for the plot, serving as evidence for a common mindset, close cooperation and the common acknowledgment of the different roles of the resistance circles during the preparation and execution of the plot.¹⁵² Subsequently, an impression of a united resistance is promoted, led by the officers as the vanguard of resistance against Hitler and his regime. The narrative facilitates the perspective that military and national conservative opposition acted like a monolithic block in order to get rid of Hitler and his regime.

The interpretation of the combined philosophy and common inner struggles of the conspirators reinforce this point of view. Firstly, there is the lively commitment of the conspirators to the Christian faith and the German nation. Von Schlabrendorff states vibrantly, “We had become involved in a bitter struggle whose growing dangers we realized only too well, but to which we as Christians and German patriots were unconditionally committed.”¹⁵³ The emphasis of the conspirator’s faith created the story that the conspiracy’s approach was purely

¹⁵² Schlabrendorff, 257.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 49.

value-based and, thus contradicted Nazi ideology. This bold approach for the narrative is expressed by von Schlabrendorff in the following metaphoric sentence: “The swastika represented a fight to the finish against every law of God and humanity. On the banner of the German resistance were inscribed the words: ‘For God-Country-Humanity’.”¹⁵⁴ In accordance with von Schlabrendorff, this spirit is also key to understand the decisiveness and actions of Colonel Count von Stauffenberg who, together with von Tresckow, is displayed as the main driver behind the preparation and execution of the events of July 20, 1944. Fabian von Schlabrendorff claims that von Stauffenberg’s objection to Hitler was fundamentally a spiritual one and not based on the fear of an inescapable military defeat. He further elaborates that “moral conviction and the acknowledgment of Christian truths turned Stauffenberg into an uncompromising fighter against the German dictator.”¹⁵⁵

Secondly von Schlabrendorff states the common element among the conspirators was a central theme of inner conflict. This was portrayed in the daily personal struggle between dedication to the professional duties of an officer serving the nation in a war and the belief that the Nazi regime must be removed. As an example, he describes obediently working in the gray zone to execute the inhumane, unlawful Commissary Order and the impact of living a conspirator’s double life. He stresses that everyday military duties had to be fulfilled before the involved officers could even think about the political task of the conspiracy. The responsibility for the lives of German soldiers in an ongoing war asked for its tribute every day. Von Schlabrendorff indicates that the meticulous fulfillment of duties was the indispensable cover to carry out the dual role of officer and active resistance member.¹⁵⁶

The second element of von Schlabrendorff’s narrative for the July 20, 1944 coup is far more important for subsequent political usage. The pathos element of the narrative includes the

¹⁵⁴ Schlabrendorff, 70.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 245.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 135–139.

theme of a dichotomy of good against evil and the theme of the ultimate sacrifice, which is also linked to the theme of purification. The pathos element is mostly based on the “aura of failure” which surrounded the *coup d’etat* of July 1944.¹⁵⁷ Actually, none of the intended political results were achieved in July 1944. Hitler was still alive and the Nazi regime ruled after the coup with even harsher political acts domestically and in the occupied areas. The war was still ongoing. The number of German casualties during the last nine months of the war exceeded the total number of casualties of all the previous five years of war.¹⁵⁸ Last but not least, most of the members of the involved resistance circles were either killed or imprisoned by the regime, the bitter aftermath of the coup became the basis for the foundation of “the pathos of futility” as Thomas Karlauf called it.¹⁵⁹

The theme ‘good against evil’ was already touched upon in the element of Christian faith, but this theme develops more momentum under the pathos element. Von Schlabrendorff refers to the great German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who claimed that the history of mankind is forever the story of the battle between God and the devil. In accordance with von Schlabrendorff, Hitler was the devil for the conspirators and “there can be no doubt that the German resistance against Hitler had a mission, through which the battle against him turned into a crusade –a crusade against the swastika and everything it had to come to stand for.”¹⁶⁰ The conspirators had to fight the personified evil. In addition, they had to fight against all odds. As von Schlabrendorff elaborates, the conspirators had no support from abroad, no support from the commanders in the field and they had to overcome the frustration of failed assassination attempts as well as frictions inside the resistance circles. However, the officers of the military resistance stayed committed to the higher purpose.

¹⁵⁷ Fest, 341.

¹⁵⁸ Bechtolsheim, 121.

¹⁵⁹ Karlauf, 224; Fest, 342.

¹⁶⁰ Schlabrendorff, 69.

Subsequently, the sacrifice theme can be seen as a consistent continuation of the good against evil theme. If Hitler was the devil, the conspirators had to fight him at all cost, even if the war was lost. The circumstances of the disastrous German military situation and other political frictions did not matter anymore; the obvious public act of resistance did matter even when the ultimate sacrifice was required. Claus Count von Stauffenberg and Henning von Tresckow, the master minds behind the coup, were willing to pay this price. This whole theme is embraced by Henning von Tresckow's famous quote regarding an argument with von Stauffenberg if the coup's execution in the dire situation of June 1944 still made sense. Von Schlabrendorff quotes von Tresckow with the following statement: "The assassination must be attempted at all costs. Even if it should not succeed, an attempt to seize power in Berlin must be undertaken. What matters now is no longer the practical purpose of the coup, but to prove to the world and for the records of history that the men of the resistance movement dared to take the decisive step. Compared to this objective, nothing else is of consequence."¹⁶¹ The overall message of this part of the narrative is: The German officers in the military resistance took on the responsibility to act at all costs in a desperate situation! The assassination attempt, to be followed by a coup, achieved value by themselves, and therefore these acts promote a long-lasting ethical legacy.

During an interrogation after the coup attempt, MG Helmuth Stieff was asked what had driven him to participate in the conspiracy against Hitler. His answer was, "we were purifying ourselves."¹⁶² The purification topic can be seen as a bridge within the pathos element of the narrative. It was obvious for the conspirators that the German nation, as well as each individual,

¹⁶¹ Schlabrendorff, 277. Fabian von Schlabrendorff provides the following framework of the conversation: On June 6, 1944, Count Lehndorff, a liaison officer inside the conspiring military circles came back from a meeting with von Stauffenberg in Berlin with instructions to ask von Tresckow whether now after the invasion, there was any point to continue with the plans for a *coup d'état*. The famous quote has been under scrutiny regarding the authenticity. Beside the quote of von Schlabrendorff, who was the aide of von Tresckow and wrote it down from his memory, there is no written evidence that von Tresckow made this statement. However, Alexander Stahlberg provided some hints in his book that he had conversations with von Tresckow containing similar statements. See Karlauf, 224 and Stahlberg, 349.

¹⁶² Fest, 340.

was guilty under the vicious Nazi regime and the sentiment of guilt echoed the perspective of the spiritual leaders of the German resistance. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a protestant pastor and active member of the resistance, made the statement in 1940, “We have become guilty of the lives of the poorest and weakest brothers in Christ.”¹⁶³ The military, as the executive tool of the regime’s ill-defined policies, came into focus; the officer corps had served its evil master for a long time. Therefore, the military resistance’s final attempt to overthrow the regime became a kind of inner purification. This characteristic approach of the narrative is comprehensively captured in von Schlabrendorff’s book by Henning von Tresckow’s almost Biblical and memorable quote before he committed suicide on July 21, 1944.

Now they will all fall upon us....and cover us with abuse. But I am convinced, now as much as ever, that we have done the right thing. I believe Hitler to be the archenemy, not only of Germany, but indeed of the entire world. In a few hours’ time, I shall stand before God and answer for both my actions and the things I neglected to do. I think I can with a clear conscience stand by all I have done in the battle against Hitler. Just as God promised Abraham that He would spare Sodom if only ten just men could be found in the city, I have also reason to hope that, for our sake, he will not destroy Germany. No one among us can complain about his death, for whoever joined our ranks put on the poisoned shirt of Nessus. A man’s moral worth is established only at the point where he is prepared to give his life for his convictions.¹⁶⁴

Eventually, the pathos element of the narrative provided sense and meaning to the military resistance’s actions and the failed conspiracy. As in an ancient tragedy, the ‘pathos of futility’ describes the drama of failure of committed human beings. Therefore, the outcome of the failed coup was nothing more than a symbolic act, but it cast the actions of the conspirators in a purer light. The ethics of attitude became the most important feature of the conspiracy. This attitude made the conspirators martyrs to the German nation. The martyrdom became even more evident within the narrative when von Schlabrendorff described the humiliation and torture in the

¹⁶³ Voss, 19. The quote in German reads as follows: “*Wir sind schuldig geworden am Leben der schwächsten und wehrlosesten Brüder Jesu Christi.*”

¹⁶⁴ Schlabrendorff, 294-295.

aftermath of the coup.¹⁶⁵ The ultimate martyr in the narrative became Claus von Stauffenberg, who died under the bullets of a firing squad with the outcry, “Long live our sacred Germany.”¹⁶⁶

Naturally, the whole narrative served specific purposes, which have already been addressed. The mark of traitor and the accusations of former Wehrmacht officers had an impact on the reputation and public perception of the events on July 20, 1944.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, the published narrative should generate not only a defense against the obviously still working Nazi propaganda, but also to launch an ethical counteroffensive in favor of the surviving members of the military resistance. The narrative submits the message that the conspirators were true unwavering German patriots, guided by their faith and conscience.

Nevertheless, von Schlabrendorff’s narrative also drew a clear line between the conspirators of July 20, 1944 and the German communist resistance circles.¹⁶⁸ The communist resistance groups, who had cells in various administrations and in the *Wehrmacht*, were also engaged in high treason and wanted to overthrow the Hitler regime. However, von Schlabrendorff points out that the communist resistance was just a rival political ideology to the Nazis, their intent being to replace one totalitarian regime with another. In contradiction to the communists, the sponsors of the July 1944 plot “reached over and above politics to religion and moral values.”¹⁶⁹ Also the communist resistance acted on behalf of a foreign power, got their orders

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 303–329.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 291.

¹⁶⁷ A new challenge regarding the reputation of the German military resistance appeared by the publication of comprehensive Anglo - Saxon literature about the German army under the Nazi regime. John Wheeler-Benett published his book the *Nemesis of Power* in 1953. This book documented the German’s Army involvement in Nazi politics and reiterated his hostile perspectives on the German military resistance. Overall Wheeler-Benett concluded that the military resistance had done too little and too late. Referring to Wheeler-Benett, von Schlabrendorff addresses especially these arguments in the English version of his book, published in 1959. See Schlabrendorff, 85, 154–155, and 184–185.

¹⁶⁸ Schlabrendorff refers to these resistance circles as “Red Chapel.” This term goes back to a Gestapo file. The Gestapo had already created a file about the catholic resistance circles and the Vatican under the code name “Black Chapel.” When the Gestapo later on gained evidence about a communist conspiracy, they promptly named it “Red Chapel.” See Schlabrendorff, 195.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 202.

from Moscow and used instruments which did harm “to the common German soldier and other helpless and innocent individuals who were not responsible for the policies and crimes of the regime.”¹⁷⁰ The clear demarcation of the narrative of the communist resistance movement paid off with the official recognition of the legacy of the men of July 20, 1944 and their narrative by the West German Government a couple of years later.

Peter Count Yorck von Wartenburg, a prominent member of the *Kreisauer Kreis*, wrote in a farewell letter to his mother before his execution in August 1944: “Perhaps there will be a time when there is a different appreciation to our stance, a time when one is not considered as a rogue but as an admonitory and patriot.”¹⁷¹ The narrative ensured the establishment and conservation of such a legacy for the national conservative resistance in the new West German state. The prerequisite for this development was the cohesion between the surviving members and loyalty to their dead companions and their families. For the moment, the legacy of the conspirators was an issue of survival in a difficult postwar environment; later on, however, the legacy of the survivors became an issue of influence in the young FRG. The former conspirators created their own network in order to tell their stories in new elite circles and to support each other. The aid agency July 20, 1944 was founded in 1945 by survivors and in 1949 the agency was transformed into a foundation. Both organizations supported the survivors, as well as

¹⁷⁰ Schlabrendorff, 203. For an overview about the cross national framework and activities of the communist resistance movement (‘Red Chapel’) see also Hans Coppi, “Red Orchestra,” in Benz and Pehle (ed.), 223–226. It has to be noticed that the term ‘Red Chapel’ caused some confusion in the English literature. In German, the term *Kapelle* can have the meaning orchestra or rather ‘band’. Therefore *RoteKapelle* has been translated in various books into ‘Red Orchestra’. The above mentioned essay ‘Red Orchestra’ deals with the communist resistance movement called ‘Red Chapel’. Compare also Schlabrendorff, 195.

¹⁷¹ Voss, 24. The original quote reads in German as follows: “*Vielleicht kommt doch einmal die Zeit, wo man eine andere Würdigung für unsere Haltung findet, wo man nicht als Lump, sondern als Mahnender und Patriot gewertet wird.*” Peter Count Yorck von Wartenburg was a member of the old famous Prussian noble family Yorck von Wartenburg. He was an educated lawyer and in opposition against the Nazi regime from the beginning. During the war, he worked in the Ministry for Armament. He came in contact to the conspirators via Helmuth James Count von Moltke and attended meetings of the *Kreisauer Kreis*. Contrary to von Moltke, Peter Count Yorck von Wartenburg appreciated the assault on Hitler and reinforced von Stauffenberg in his idea. After the coup, he was foreseen in the shadow government, in the Vice Chancellor office as Secretary of State. See Günther, Brakelmann, “Peter Graf Yorck von Wartenburg,” in, Sebastian, Sigler (ed), *Corpsstudenten im Widerstand gegen Hitler* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 2014), 65–87.

families of killed members, of the resistance with material and mental support. Additionally, the foundation accomplished the central task of transferring the narrative and the legacy of July 20, 1944 to a public audience.¹⁷² Over time, most of the survivors became integrated into the new elite of West Germany and into influential positions, which provided a boost to the narrative and subsequently to the legacy of July 20, 1944. Fabian von Schlabrendorff for example, became a judge of the Supreme Court of the FRG (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*). Otto John, whose channels to the British intelligence service as *Lufthansa* representative in Madrid were used by the conspirators, became President of the West German domestic intelligence service (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*),¹⁷³ Johann Adolf Count Kielmansegg and Hans Speidel, both officers connected to the conspiracy, became generals in the Bw, and others like Eugen Gerstenmaier, who was a member of the *Kreisauer Kreis*, or Jakob Kaiser, who cooperated closely with Dr. Goerdeler, managed to make a political career. Beside the surviving members, more and more people recognized the advantage in positioning themselves in a positive way towards the narrative of the former resistance against Hitler. The first chancellor of the FRG, Konrad Adenauer, cynically noticed that obviously more people were involved in July 20, 1944 than Germany had inhabitants.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the formation of a legacy of the events of July 20, 1944 facilitated the deliberate exploitation of the narrative on the strategic level by the political elite in the FRG.

¹⁷² *Stiftung 20. July 1944*, accessed January 10, 2020, <https://stiftung-20-juli-1944/geschichte>. Rüdiger von Voss points to the isolation and dire economic situation of many relatives of resistance members, 24.

¹⁷³ The John brothers were both involved in the plot of July 20, 1944. Hans John was arrested and executed on April 23, 1945. Otto John managed to escape to England with the help of the British intelligence service. After the foundation of the FRG, John was appointed, with British support, on December 4, 1950 as the first President of the West German domestic intelligence service. Ironically, on July 20, 1954, after a ceremony remembering the victims of the July 20, 1944 plot, he defected to East Germany and criticized Adenauer's policies of remilitarization and Germany's integration into the Western bloc. For the impacts of this move, see Lockenour, 478.

¹⁷⁴ Karlauf, 26.

Application of the narrative in context - Foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Bundeswehr

The provided resistance narrative was exploited as a function of the specific German postwar environment. West Germany's new strategic narrative was influenced by an evolving international system towards the Cold War and domestic challenges in order to find a new identity for a separated German nation to cope with the past.

After the war, the four Allied powers divided and occupied Germany. The Allies' initial aim was to change Germany radically; a British memo in 1943 clearly stated the aim of this change, "stamping out the whole tradition on which the German nation has been built."¹⁷⁵ The purpose of the policy was to ensure that Germany will never again be a threat to world peace. The utilized tools were Punishment, Denazification, Demilitarization, Deindustrialization and Democratization and affected severely the political, economic and social domain of postwar West Germany.¹⁷⁶ Eventually, the strained relationship with the Soviet Union escalated and finally progressed to a climax in the 1948 Berlin crisis, which resulted in the realization that European prosperity and stability depended on the reconstruction of a strong German economy and promoted the idea of a West German state. Eventually, two German states were formed in 1949 and underpinned the super powers' commitment to their respective sphere of influence and was the basis for the Cold War order in the center of Europe.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Kielmansegg, 80.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 82-83. The ideas of Lord Vanissart and Henry Morgenthau were still shaping the policy in the US, British and French zones. Regarding punishment, beside the tribunal against the main war criminals in Nuremberg, the allies prosecuted in twelve further trials the thugs of the Nazi regime. Regarding the development in the Soviet occupied zone, it should be mentioned that Stalin in the long run wanted a communist Germany and had seen the Soviet zone as a jumping board for his strategic efforts. For the Soviet approach, see James J. Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone, The Transformation of Modern Europe* (Boston, New York: First Mariner Books, 2009), 154.

¹⁷⁷ Kielmansegg, 38; Sheehan, 155; Voss, 25.

Nevertheless, West Germany, as the ‘heir of the Third Reich’, remained for the time being the ‘pariah’ in Europe. Its neighbors watched the political developments in West Germany with concern and caution. Based on previous experiences with Nazi Germany, the rifts and biases against the Germans were still vivid. Therefore, FRG’s reconciliation and the integration into the camp of democratic Western states was not self-evident.¹⁷⁸

The strategic decision by the first Chancellor of the FRG, Konrad Adenauer, to achieve Western integration was made in light of overarching national interest to regain national sovereignty through international western integration as soon as possible.¹⁷⁹ The cataclysmic defeat in WWII and the experience of the so-called ‘zero hour’ in the political, economic and ethical domain on May 8, 1945 guided conservative West German politicians towards Western integration and towards a commitment “to promote world peace as an equal partner in a united Europe”.¹⁸⁰ Actually, political parties in the western zones offered no serious counter argument against a separate West German state.

However, based on the ideological rivalry between West and East Germany, the strategic direction of the FRG to the West triggered controversial political discussions. Economic recovery and Western integration would necessarily mean a long-lasting manifestation of East German separation and threatened the goal of a united Germany, which was emphasized in the preamble

¹⁷⁸ France especially formulated national interests for a weak and isolated Germany. The French foreign minister stated in December 1947: “Our position is governed by the will that Germany becomes never again the threat and the scourge which it has been for generations of French people,” as quoted in Kielmansegg, 39. See also Sheehan, 157.

¹⁷⁹ Peter J. Katzenstein, “United Germany in an integrating Europe”, *Current History*, Volume 96, Issue 608 (March 1997), 116–123.

¹⁸⁰ The Federal Government, “White Paper 2016, on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr” (Berlin 2016), 22.

of the West German Basic Law.¹⁸¹ The opponents of Western integration argued that firstly Germany as a whole had to regain its full independence and unity before it could be integrated with equal status into the concert of European states. The head of this opposition movement, Kurt Schumacher, the chairman of the SPD, was in favor of a status of armed neutrality and argued for a thorough consideration of the ‘Stalin note’ in March 1952.¹⁸² Eventually membership in NATO and Germany’s significant contribution to the defense of Western Europe brought the sovereignty for West Germany in 1955 and confirmed integration into the Western camp.¹⁸³

The postwar design of the international system and the intended strategic direction of West Germany required a narrative in order to define the new ‘different postwar Germany.’ This new narrative coped seriously with the past and made West Germany more acceptable to the Western Allies and neighbors. The new narrative dispelled the doubts of the European neighbors regarding the German integration efforts and, at the same time, defined the (West) German’s national values. It showed how different it was from the East German autocratic socialist system

¹⁸¹ Kielmansegg, 73; Sheehan, 158. The Basic Law of the FRG as of May 23, 1949 stated in the preamble that the basic law is a new order for political life for a transitional period and reinforced the goal of a unified Germany: “The entire German people is called upon to accomplish, by free self-determination, the unity and freedom of Germany.” See Basic Law of The Federal Republic of Germany (23 May 1949), accessed January 17, 2020, https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/7fa618bb-604e-4980-b667-76bf0cd0dd9b/publishable_en.pdf.

¹⁸² Helga Haftendorn, *Coming of Age, German Foreign Policy since 1945* (Lanham: Rowman & Littfield, 2006), 33–41. The ‘Stalin Note’ was a note from the Soviet Union in March 1952, offering a peace treaty for a unified Germany under the prerequisite that Germany would not join any coalitions or military alliances. The purpose was to undermine the West’s integration of the FRG. Chancellor Adenauer rejected this offer categorically because of his concern that the four Allied powers come to terms on the expense of the security of Germany. His approach was that just a position of strength on the West German side could lead to unification. See also Sheehan, 158.

¹⁸³ Sheehan, 160–161. NATO membership was based on the Bonn – Paris conventions from May 1952 and came into force after the 1955 ratification. The delay between the signing and the ratification was due to the failed treaty of a European Defense Community (EDC). After the withdrawal of the French national assembly from the EDC, the revised treaty was signed in Paris on October 23, 1954. Ten years after the surrender of Germany, the three western Allies ended their occupation and granted the FRG “the full power of a sovereign state over its domestic and foreign policy.” However, West Germany did not have full sovereignty. The Allied powers still retained specific rights in Germany and the West Germans placed restrictions on themselves by promising not to manufacture nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

and served as an incentive for the East Germans to participate in this free, economic successful, and democratic endeavor.

In a statement to newspaper editors in April 1950, Dean Acheson said, “there is no longer any difference between foreign questions and domestic questions. They are all part of the same question,” the evidence for the discussion of FRG’s rearmament in the 1950s. External as well as domestic developments embraced the foundation phase of the *Bundeswehr* (Bw) as the new armed forces of West Germany.¹⁸⁴

After the war, the Allied Control Commission (ACC) forbade the existence of any German military organization. However, despite the fact that the Western Allies were committed to Demilitarization and suppressed Prussian-German militarism, they also recognized the combat effectiveness of the *Wehrmacht*. Furthermore, former *Wehrmacht* officers were the only ones who could offer some combat experiences to the Western powers regarding the Red Army.¹⁸⁵ Finally, the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 promoted the rearmament of West Germany. The fight against communist North Korean forces signaled a turn in global conflict of the superpowers.

The credible defense of Europe, including a considerable West German contribution, against possible Soviet aggression became an important topic on the European political

¹⁸⁴ As quoted in Sheehan, 156. For the thesis of the embracement of external and domestic factors for the foundation phase of the *Bundeswehr*, see also Georg Meyer, “Innenpolitische Voraussetzungen der westdeutschen Wiederbewaffnung,” in Alexander Fischer (ed.), *Wiederbewaffnung in Deutschland nach 1945, Schriftenreihe der Gesellschaft für Deutschlandforschung, Bd. 12* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt GmbH, 1986), 31–44. Abenheim defines the duration of the foundation phase of the *Bundeswehr* between the outbreak of hostilities in the Korean War in 1950 and the commissioning of the first officers and the induction of the first volunteers at the turn of the year 1955–56. See Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 26.

¹⁸⁵ Klaus Naumann, “The Battle over ‘Innere Führung,’” in James C. Corum (ed.), *Rearming Germany* (Leiden, Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2011), 205 – 220. The American effort to learn from the *Wehrmacht* had important consequences. The US Army employed hundreds of former *Wehrmacht* officers, up to the rank of Field Marshal, in the European Theater Historical Division (German Section). As the Cold War escalated, it became important to get an understanding about the German experience fighting the Soviets. The involved *Wehrmacht* officers gained a high reputation and had an influence on the political level about the decision for the German rearmament program.

agenda.¹⁸⁶ After the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, Konrad Adenauer followed his strategic goal of sovereignty and Western integration, and pledged a West German military contribution for a European Army. In 1952, after further political discussions, the so-called ‘Pleven Plan’, named after the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, foresaw a West German military contingent within the framework of The European Defense Community (EDC). However, EDC failed the ratification process at the French National Assembly on August 30, 1954, and West German planners, therefore, shifted their efforts towards West German national armed forces within NATO.¹⁸⁷

Although it was necessary to include West Germany in the defense of Europe, West Germany’s rearmament still generated international concerns. Donald Abenheim noticed, “for the third time in a single generation, after the creation of the *Reichswehr* in 1921 and of the *Wehrmacht* in 1935, a new army was to be raised on German soil, an event that shocked both West Germany and the world.”¹⁸⁸ Just a couple of years after the war, public opinion in neighboring countries did not support German rearmament. A contemporary and widely-reprinted cartoon portrays the French feelings about this issue: “A disconsolate ‘Marianne’, obviously pregnant with *l’armée allemande*, blamed her condition on a departing hussar with a strong resemblance to John Foster Dulles.”¹⁸⁹ The logical consequence was external diplomatic pressure regarding the design and mindset of the new West German armed forces.

The French High Commissioner for Germany, Andre Francois Poncet, for example, suggested in a conversation with Federal President Theodor Heuss in September 1950, that West

¹⁸⁶ Lockenour, 469; Naumann, in James C. Corum (ed.), 208. At a conference of western foreign ministers in New York in September 1950, the decision was made that the rearmament of Germany was necessary.

¹⁸⁷ Sheehan, 159–160; Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 20 and 26. Details about the so called Pleven Plan and the sequence of events regarding the failure of the EDC are described by Jonathan M. House, “The European Defense Community,” in James C. Corum (ed.), *Rearming Germany*, 73–92.

¹⁸⁸ Quote Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 21.

¹⁸⁹ Gordon A. Craig describes this cartoon in the Foreword for Abenheim’s book *Reforging the Iron Cross*, xv.

German generals not get any domestic political influence like in the *Reichswehr*. Chancellor Adenauer had similar conversations with American High Commissioner John J. McCloy, who recommended that officers from the resistance be accepted in the new West German forces and that former *Waffen SS* officers not be able to join the forces.¹⁹⁰ Thus, NATO became a tool of control for the German Armed Forces. Lord Ismay, a British diplomat, concisely stated that the purpose of the Alliance was to “keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.”¹⁹¹

In addition, the new foreign and security policy caused domestic controversies that aggravated the foundation of new West German forces. Personnel recruitment for West German forces had to rely on veterans of the *Wehrmacht*. However, the veteran organizations under the umbrella organization of the *Verband Deutscher Soldaten* (VdS) were “fighting a crusade for social and legal rehabilitation and for an end to the defamation of the *Wehrmacht* at home and abroad.”¹⁹² The majority of West Germany’s veterans agreed to join the Bw dependent on the termination of the defamation of former *Wehrmacht* and insisted on the “immediate restoration of German soldiers ‘stolen honor.’”¹⁹³ Veterans organized and spread a narrative of the misused *Wehrmacht* as the Nazi regime’s apolitical victim. This trend was further promoted by a vast

¹⁹⁰ Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 21–22; Naumann, in James C. Corum (ed.), 209.

¹⁹¹ Sheehan, 160.

¹⁹² Large, 510. Veteran organizations were forbidden under the Allied occupation in the western zones. Following the repeal of an Allied administrative order regarding the prohibition of professional soldiers’ associations in 1949, a large number of veterans’ organizations were founded and merged under the VdS in September 1951, see Large, 509/510. After the war, the situation of former career soldiers was desperate. Due to Allied demilitarization efforts, they found themselves for months and years in prisoner of war camps, “lost their pensions due to the dissolution of the *Wehrmacht*, suffered under union and civil service boycotts, and experienced problems in enrolling in universities”. See Lockenour, 480. At the end of the war the numbers of German soldiers were 7.8 million soldiers. Based on this number, one can imagine that *Wehrmacht* Veterans became an influential lobby in the FRG. See Mark, Harrison, “Armeestärken in WW II nach Ländern in den Jahren 1939 bis 1945,” accessed January 20, 2020, <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/252298/umfrage/armeestaerken-im-zweiten-weltkrieg-nach-laendern/>.

¹⁹³ Large, 505. In 1950, as the rearmament debate started, some 3657 former soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* were still serving their sentence in western allied military prisons, Large, 504.

majority of the postwar soldier's memoirs and numerous comprehensive histories of the *Wehrmacht*, which were published with an apologetic and uncritical undertone. Eventually, the German administration tried to influence discussions within the veterans associations around moderate leaders, however, the ongoing discussions caused unrest regarding rearmament plans. For many veterans, the postwar "glorification of the resistance implied yet another 'defamation' of those soldiers who had simply done their duty and fought on to the bitter end."¹⁹⁴

After two lost world wars, with millions of German casualties, the domestic controversy regarding rearmament was West German society's deep rooted rejection of any postwar military issues. In 1946, Carlo Schmidt, an influential Social Democrat, summed up popular German sentiment towards the military, by stating "Never again do we want to send our sons to the barracks. And if again somewhere this insanity of war should break out, and if fate should want it that our land becomes a battlefield, then we shall simply perish and at least take with us the knowledge that we neither encouraged nor committed the crime."¹⁹⁵ This sentiment was completely in line with the policy of the Western Allied Powers until 1950. The Allied occupation statute for the FRG as of September 1949 declared, "in order to ensure the accomplishment of the basic purposes of the occupation" the Allied powers reserve for them "disarmament and demilitarization, including related fields of scientific research, prohibitions and restrictions on industry, and civil aviation."¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, allied re-education and demilitarization efforts told the average German that the German virtues of professional soldiers "were in reality camouflaged immorality" and furthermore that all German history was "a tale of betrayal and human culpability."¹⁹⁷ The history of a German state was a complete disaster and

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 508.

¹⁹⁵ Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 21.

¹⁹⁶ Meyer, 34. The Allies already enforced a law in 1946 that administered the liberation of Germany from Nazism and Militarism. "Gesetz zur Befreiung von Nationalsozialismus und Militarismus" vom 5. März 1946.

¹⁹⁷ Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 19

the military as the personification of this state had their specific share in this disaster. This narrative influenced members of the parliament, trade unions and the churches in West Germany. Huge parts of West German society expressed their pacifism and rejection of West German rearmament with the slogans ‘*Ohne mich*’ (Without me) and ‘*Nie wieder*’ (Never again).¹⁹⁸ The first controversial political discussion in the young FRG had the potential to split West German society, and even the West German government recognized the impacts of the highly emotional argument. The Minister of Interior, Gustav Heinemann, promptly resigned in protest when in 1950 Chancellor Konrad Adenauer published his memorandum offering a West German contribution to the defense of Europe against the Soviet Union.¹⁹⁹

Based on external and domestic pressure, Adenauer and his advisors realized at the end of 1950 that the ethical–political foundation of the West German armed forces was more troublesome than expected; it became obvious that a new start was needed. Despite ongoing discussions with the ‘traditionalists’ and veterans, it was clear that the Bw would have to be positioned within a democratic state and an open society. The officers of the Bw had to be selected “on the basis of their democratic attitude as well as their technical expertise.”²⁰⁰ The widespread distrust of military institutions had to be overcome and new armed forces had to be attractive to West German people. The resistance narrative with the prominent figures of von Stauffenberg and von Tresckow seemed to offer exactly the necessary ethical–political foundation. As David C. Large emphasized, “one small but important dimension of this complex

¹⁹⁸ For the Allied re-education narrative see *Ibid.*, *Valid Heritage*, 18–19. For the controversial discussion in West Germany regarding the West German rearmament, see Meyer, 38–39; Kielmansegg, 320–321; Large, 503.

¹⁹⁹ Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 19. Gustav Heinemann was a formative politician in the FRG. He left the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in 1950 and founded his own party. However, he dissolved this party in 1957 and joined the SPD. From 1966 to 1969 he was Minister of Justice in the ‘Grand Coalition’ government. In March 1969, Gustav Heinemann was elected as Federal President of the FRG. Due to his age and his fragile health, he did not run for a second term as President. He left office in 1974 and passed away in 1976.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, *Valid Heritage*, 22; Large, 503.

had to do with the legacy of the military resistance, especially as it culminated in the Twentieth of July, 1944: here, perhaps was a source of moral and spiritual renewal for Germany's shattered military class; but here also, as it turned out, was a source of agony, confusion, and bitter recrimination."²⁰¹

Utilization and conservation of the narrative

The postwar narrative of July 20, 1944 was ethically and politically exploited by the new political elite during the foundation years of the FRG. This exploitation had the purpose to establish identity and position the new state in the camp of western civilized nations, to generate a new ethically-based political culture in the West German Republic and to institutionalize a culture of remembrance as an expression of this new political culture. Furthermore, the narrative was exploited in a practical dimension: to support the creation of armed forces for the new German Western Republic.

The first President of the FRG, Theodor Heuss, made the prophetic comment that the July 20 attempt to kill Hitler was "the gift to Germany's future."²⁰² The new political elite saw the ethical legacy of the assassination attempt by von Stauffenberg as a liberating act in the darkest hour of German history. Von Stauffenberg and the men of July 20, 1944 provided historical evidence that there was an 'other Germany.' Therefore, the conspiracy provided a political chance that the presumed equating of Germany with National Socialism could fade away.²⁰³ The narrative's political interpretation received strategic significance.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Large, 504.

²⁰² Schlabrendorff, 3.

²⁰³ Large, 499–500. A periodical entitled '*Das andere Deutschland*' (The Other Germany) appeared briefly in the late 1940s. One of its contributors was Count Kielmansegg, a surviving member of the military resistance, who later on played an important role in West Germany's rearmament efforts.

²⁰⁴ Schlie, 14.

At the same time, the narrative promoted the unpleasant topic of coping with the past because the actors of the coup did not try to whitewash their cooperation with the regime. They had confessed their involvement and misconduct under the Nazi regime and tried to purify the German nation by the coup. Therefore, the appeal to an ‘other Germany’ included the requirement to take responsibility for the Holocaust and all the atrocities committed in the German name.²⁰⁵ The new narrative triggered the politically desired debate about liability, responsibility, and atonement in German postwar society. From this perspective, Henning von Tresckow’s statements, regarding the value of the coup, were recognized as ‘bridges’ in the troubled postwar environment.²⁰⁶

Eventually, the new political elite labeled July 20, 1944 as the ‘revolt of the conscience’ against the vicious Nazi regime.²⁰⁷ This label was generated by the interpretation that the consciences of the conspirators could not stand the unlawful actions of the Nazi regime. Therefore, the political legacy of the conspiracy was treated as equivalent to a revolt for the rule of law and freedom in Germany. The conspirators’ actions were embedded in the German fight for democratic freedom within the sequence of historical events, starting in the nineteenth century.²⁰⁸ In troubled political times, the narrative seemed to provide political answers to vital questions in postwar Germany. Firstly, how should German society deal with the dark past, and secondly, for what values should the new German state should stand? Karl Dietrich Bracher, a German political scientist, summarized the idea about the link between the coup of 1944 and the

²⁰⁵ For the equation Germany = Nazi System, see Hans Rothenfels, “Der Deutsche Widerstand: Seine Motive und Seine Geschichtliche Bedeutung,” in *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (ed.), 20. Juli 1944, 9–15, 10. See also von Voss, 8, 15 and 20.

²⁰⁶ Karlauf, 225; Voss, 20.

²⁰⁷ ‘Revolt of the conscience’ was also the name of an exhibition about the German military resistance which opened in 1994 in the Ministry of Defense in Berlin, accessed January 25, 2020, [https://www. Stiftung-20-juli-1944.de/reden/aufstand-des-gewissens-volker-ruhe-19071994](https://www.Stiftung-20-juli-1944.de/reden/aufstand-des-gewissens-volker-ruhe-19071994).

²⁰⁸ See the introductory remarks of the Chairman of the German national foundation, Dirk Reimers, to the speech of Rüdiger von Voss on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of July 20, 1944, see Voss, *Aufstand des Gewissens*, 4.

FRG's constitutional framework by stating, "It's about the political and ethical meaning that lies in the visualization of July 20. It commits us to a state that insists on the protection of human dignity and the realization of human rights."²⁰⁹

The politically-driven interpretation of the narrative became the myth of the FRG. The ethical legacy of the July 20, 1944 conspiracy enabled West Germany to return to the "community of civilized nations."²¹⁰ Furthermore, the demarcation of the narrative from socialism and communism made it even easier to anchor ties with Western States in the new Cold War order. The political legacy of the rule of law and freedom reinforced the mandate to integrate into the western camp and discredited the idea to get involved in any socialist experiments. The government of the FRG used the narrative of the conspiracy more and more as a political tool, "whatever message they get out of the meaning of the assassination attempt and applying it to their own political context."²¹¹

Subsequently, the meaning of July 20, 1944 became a historical event which the government and the academic world could adjust towards current relevant events and political concerns. The legacy of the conspirators became 'ammunition in the war of words' against the GDR. After the bloody defeat of the worker's revolts on June 17, 1953 in East Berlin, Hans Rothfels, one of the first German historians who researched the opposition efforts against Hitler in a lecture commemorating the coup of 1944, called July 20 and June 17 "particularly linked dates." Ernst Lemmer, the minister of 'Greater German Questions' in the FRG, stated a couple of years later that "sixteen million of our countrymen are still living under an oppressive fate that the men and women of the twentieth of July tried to cast off forever."²¹²

²⁰⁹ Voss, 28. The original quote of Bracher: "*Es geht um die politische und moralische Bedeutung, die in der Vergegenwärtigung des 20. Juli liegt: sie verpflichtet uns zu einem Staat, der auf dem Schutz der Menschenwürde und der Verwirklichung der Menschenrechte besteht.*"

²¹⁰ Large, 501; Schlie, 14.

²¹¹ Swartz, 61.

²¹² Lockenour, 475; Rothfels, in *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (ed.), 20. July 1944, 15.

Over time, due to its strategic relevance, the political interpretation of the July 20, 1944 narrative became a multi-partisan approach. In order to create and preserve a public narrative, the political elite from different parties provided ground breaking speeches about the role and importance of July 20, 1944.²¹³ The most important speech was given by the first Federal President, Theodor Heuss, on July 19, 1954 on the tenth anniversary of the *coup d'état* at the Free University in Berlin. The speech had the programmatic title 'gratitude and confession', and comprehensively echoed, for the first time after the war, the resistance narrative to the German population. The declarations of the young FRG's head of state freed the national conservative military resistance movement from the twilight of high treason and marked them as patriots. He made the sweeping claim: "The blood of the martyred resisters has cleansed our German name of shame which Hitler cast upon it. Their sacrifice was truly a gift to the German future."²¹⁴ Furthermore, Heuss declared the conspirators' ethical motivations as a commitment to the West German Republic's political culture, based on the understanding that Germans had to face the truth about the Nazi regime's evil character with all related consequences, in order to regain credibility and trust as a nation.²¹⁵ The head of state's speech provided official acceptance and legitimacy for the German resistance. Regardless of the political party, other Federal Presidents used iterations of the same messages for their speeches about July 20, 1944.²¹⁶ The common

²¹³ The archive of the foundation July 20, 1944 keeps all the speeches given by politicians during the anniversary. They are vivid evidence for the interpretation efforts of the heritage of German resistance. See Voss, 26 and <https://www.stiftung-20-juli-1944.de/reden>. The political system of the FRG promoted the narrative in many ways. Every year speeches were given by prominent politicians and the parliament (Bundestag) issued a statement in 1953 lauding the services done for the German people by those who resisted Hitler. See Lockenour, 474-75.

²¹⁴ Large, 500.

²¹⁵ Theodor Heuss, "Der 20. Juli 1944," accessed October 23, 2019, <https://www.stiftung-20-juli-1944.de/redden/der-20-juli-1944>. See also von Voss, 28-29 and Portal Liberal, Vor 60 Jahren -Theodor Heussrehabilitiert den Widerstand, accessed October 23, 2019, <https://www.liberales.de/content/vor-60-jahren-theodor-heuss-rehabilitiert-den-widerstand>.

²¹⁶ Voss, 29. Sometimes the approach of utilization used propagandistic methods to enforce the particular view of the July 20 narrative. A speech about the conspiracy, by the Minister for Refugees in the FRG, Dr. Hans Lukaschek, who had been a member of the *KreisauerKreis*, was published by the official Press and Information Office of the FRG under the headline 'Twentieth of July 1944 Shows Way for the German People'. The speech of President Theodor Heuss on behalf of the tenth anniversary of the coup

denominator of the strategic narrative was the importance of the ethical and political legacy of July 20, 1944 for the political culture in (West) Germany.

However, the political interpretation of the narrative had no direct effect on the *Grundgesetz* (German Basic Law) or the constitutional structure of the FRG in 1949. Nevertheless, the right to resist or even the obligation to do so in an unconstitutional state was an ongoing issue for debates in legal circles in West Germany. Well known lawyers generated expert reports on this topic.²¹⁷ Based on political discussions regarding emergency legislation in case of internal or external threats and the implementation of specific executive powers for the federal administration, Article 20, of the Basic Law was amended in 1968. The new paragraph now reads as follows: “All Germans shall have the right to resist any person seeking to abolish this constitutional order if no other remedy is available.”²¹⁸ But, in accordance with the current legal interpretation of this amendment, the right of resistance can only be applied in a narrow framework. Due to the fact that the FRG is a constitutional state with the rule of law, and dedicated to the principles of human rights, resistance is only allowed against revolutionary forces who try to overthrow the existing order. Nevertheless, demonstrators and protesters in West Germany against the NATO double track decision in 1979 referred to their constitutional right of resistance and tried to justify civil obedience by this constitutional right.²¹⁹

was printed as a brochure and distributed to teachers and students in all states of the Republic. See Lockenour, 476.

²¹⁷ See Hermann Weinkauff, “Die Militäropposition gegen Hitler und das Widerstandsrecht,” in *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (ed.), 20. Juli 1944, 275–288. Hermann Weinkauff was a judge at the Federal Court of Justice in the FRG.

²¹⁸ German Basic Law, accessed January 29, 2020, https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_gg/englisch_gg.html#p0111.

²¹⁹ Das Recht auf Widerstand, accessed January 29, 2020, <https://www.br.de/radio/bayern2/sendungen/radiowissen/ethik-und-philosophie/widerstand-wehren-grundgesetz-100.html>. See also Large, 528. The attempt of the leftist demonstrators prompted the son of a conspirator to protest against misuse and debasing the ideal of resistance “by people who claim a moral stature they do not deserve.”

Along with the ethical exploitation in the political realm, the narrative became institutionalized in the development of a culture of remembrance. Firstly politicians, academics and media created a “pantheon of heroes” around July 20, 1944.²²⁰ The chair in this ‘pantheon’ was, of course, von Stauffenberg and some other well-known officers like Henning von Tresckow, Erwin von Witzleben and Ludwig Beck. Count von Stauffenberg, as the driving factor behind the coup and the executor of the assassination attempt, became the front man and the “symbol of the military resistance.”²²¹ He became the model for civic courage and the conscience of Germany, “providing that much that was good and noble had managed to survive in Germany despite the Third Reich.”²²² Subsequently, Count von Stauffenberg and the German resistance became nearly synonymous subjects in the young FRG.

Portrayed as “good democrats”, the conspirators around von Stauffenberg were associated with ethical values, the Christian faith, and antifascism as well as anti-communism. As Thomas Karlauf argued, cumulative construction of memories reinforced the trend to provide early evidence of von Stauffenberg’s steadfast opposition to the Nazi regime.²²³ Contemporary historians supported this particular view, emphasizing the democratic and ethical nature of the plot, and drew conclusions to current policy. Wilhelm Ritter von Schramm, a contemporary journalist and historian claimed in 1954 that “it was a clear political program that these men of the twentieth of July had, completely in the spirit of reconciliation, in the spirit of a unified Europe, as one hopes for today. Therefore, these men were not ‘traitors’ but pioneers of our times, whose program is a testament which we must fulfill.”²²⁴

²²⁰ Lockenour, 472.

²²¹ Swatz, 31.

²²² Lockenour, 474; Karlauf, 27.

²²³ Karlauf, 26.

²²⁴ Lockenour, 476.

Additionally, in the 1950s, movies about von Stauffenberg reinforced the ‘conspirator-as-hero legend’. *Es geschah am 20 Juli* (It happened on July 20) appeared in 1955 in German theaters and dealt directly with the coup. The popular film emphasized the tragedy of the coup’s failure, the nobility of the actors and embraced the positive political spin of the narrative by the media. The movie clearly had a public message, the last sentence in the movie is; “now it is on us if this sacrifice was in vain!”²²⁵

Secondly, locations and institutions operationalized the culture of remembrance and made the narrative more tangible for the public. Since 1952, in memory of July 20, 1944, official yearly memorial services have been organized in Bonn and Berlin (West). In July of the same year, Eva Olbricht, widow of the executed conspirator MG Friedrich Olbricht, and Ernst Reuter, mayor of Berlin (West), laid the foundation stone for a memorial site for the victims of the July 1944 conspiracy in the court yard of the *Bendlerblock*, the former seat of the Army Reserve Command of the *Wehrmacht*. For the eleventh anniversary of the plot against Hitler in July 1955, the former *Bendlerstraße* in front of the *Bendlerblock* was renamed *Stauffenbergstraße*. By an initiative of resistance members, the senate of Berlin decided in 1967 to extend the memorial site into a memorial and educational center to inform the public about the wide range of resistance to National Socialism.²²⁶ After the reunification, the German government made other deliberate symbolic decisions to honor the men of July 20, 1944. The second office of the Ministry of Defense was established in the *Bendlerblock* in 1994. Furthermore, since 1999, every year on

²²⁵ The movie *Es geschah am 20. Juli* started in Germany on June 19, 1955 and was the first film portraying the events of the coup. Georg Wilhelm Pabst, a well-known German director, directed this movie and Bernhard Wicki starred as Colonel Count von Stauffenberg. Original quote at the end of the movie. “*Nun liegt es an uns, ob das Opfer umsonst war!*” See movie *Es geschah am 20. Juli*, accessed January 26, 2020, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0048040> and https://www.filmportal.de/fil/es-geschah-am-20-juli_b0b06bfa405147aaa32fcc618e485b3. See also Lockenour, 476-477.

²²⁶ Voss, 26. German Resistance Memorial Center, accessed January 31, 2020, <https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/memorial/history/>. Since 1989, the German Resistance Memorial Center’s permanent exhibition has been a central site of remembrance in Germany, providing extensive documentation of the motives, aims and forms of the fight against the Nazi regime.

July 20, the Bundeswehr holds public pledges of young recruits in Berlin, sometimes even in the courtyard of the *Bendlerblock* at the memorial site.²²⁷

The memorial site and the yearly anniversaries breathe the spirit of the narrative of July 20, 1944. The theme of the ‘other Germany’, personalized in the main figures of the conspiracy, filled with shame, willing to sacrifice and purify themselves for democratic changes, is well addressed at the memorial site. The official plaque in the center of the courtyard at the memorial site states, “You could not endure the shame; you resisted; you gave the great eternal sign of change, sacrificing your lives for freedom, justice, and honor.”²²⁸ The memorial site became a special place for the preservation and interpretation of the July 20, 1944 narrative. During the July 20 memorial inauguration ceremony, which happened just a few weeks after the workers revolt in the GDR in 1953, Ernst Reuter expressed with his intense rhetoric skills, his firm desire that “once the whole German nation will assemble in Berlin and will take over this memorial site as a national sanctuary.”²²⁹

The July 20 Foundation, as previously mentioned, organizes the yearly anniversaries in close cooperation with the German Government. July 20 is an officially recognized date within the culture of remembrance in Germany and follows a specific choreography. Public pledges of the military, speeches and visits to the memorial sites address the past and the future of Germany. As Sophie von Bechtolsheim noticed, the anniversary is still an event for the relatives of the

²²⁷ Klaus Naumann, “Stauffenberg gehört in die Mitte der Gesellschaft“, *if – Zeitschrift für Innere Führung*, no. 3 (May 2019), 54–60.

²²⁸ Swartz, 1. A second plaque in the courtyard lists the officers who died in the courtyard after the failed plot. The actual monument in the courtyard, the bronze figure of a young man with his hands bound, was created by Professor Richard Scheibe and unveiled on July 20, 1953. In 1980 the commemorative courtyard was remodeled according to a design by Professor Erich Reusch. The following inscription was additionally engraved in the wall of the entrance to the commemorative courtyard: “Here in the former Army High Command, Germans organized the attempt to overthrow the lawless National Socialist regime on July 20, 1944. For this they sacrificed their lives.” See German Resistance Memorial Center, accessed January 31, 2020, <https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/memorial/history/>.

²²⁹ Voss, 27. Original quote of Ernst Reuter: “*Einmal wird hier in Berlin ganz Deutschland versammelt sein, und das ganze Deutschland wird diese Stätte als nationales Heiligtum von uns übernehmen.*“

victims. However, the circle of contemporary witnesses is getting smaller. Far more important is the public and political purpose, as the speeches given during the anniversary are used as self-assurance that Germany is still committed to the heritage of the July 20 narrative. The narrative is preserved and the meaning is interpreted for future generations; however, the cruelty of the Nazi past is still an integral part of the anniversary. The visit to the penitentiary in *Berlin-Plötzensee*, where the cruel and humiliating hanging of the conspirators were executed, is a vivid expression of what the conspirators stood against and an important segment of the sequence of events.²³⁰

Finally, the utilization of the narrative had a practical dimension for the rearmament of the young FRG. The development of the strategic environment in the Cold War brought the rearmament of West Germany on the agenda in Europe. The debate about the German contribution to the defense of Europe against Soviet aggression had many structural, technical and strategic facets. However, the discussion regarding the ethical foundation and tradition for a gravely compromised military profession in postwar Germany became a focal point for the military planners in Bonn as well. The solution to this specific question was the recourse to the surviving personnel of the coup and the July 20, 1944 narrative.

The core of the ethical foundation debate was the question of which organizational principles, philosophy, and tradition, should guide the inner structure of the new West German armed forces. The concerns of the Western Allies, and especially from France, regarding the resurrection of German militarism in the new force have been already addressed, but as a reaction to these notions, Theodor Blank, the later first Minister of Defense, assured in a public statement that “the traditional type of ‘Prussian Wehrmacht’ would not be reborn.”²³¹

²³⁰ Bechtolsheim, 109-110.

²³¹ Naumann, 209. German military planners approached especially U.S advisers in the Military Assisting Advisory Group (MAAG) regarding the design of an ‘Army under democracy’. But there had been no special advice. An American reply noted that, “the essential goal of the training program for the army of a democratic nation is not fundamentally different from the training program of any other nation-it is victory in battle.” Beside the supervision of the Americans regarding the given framework for the West German armed forces, “American policy was less concerned about whether the proposed German army

The first discussions regarding the internal design of the new West German Forces emerged already at a secret meeting of military experts at the Himmerod Abbey in the Eifel Mountains in October 1950. The former armor General, Gerhard Count von Schwerin, who had remote ties to the military resistance during the war, called together fifteen former *Wehrmacht* officers in order to draft a comprehensive planning document for the new West German armed forces, to be used as a start for the negotiations with the Western allies. The outcome of the conference was the so called Himmerod Memorandum (*Himmeroder Denkschrift*), which discussed the “principal political, operational and ethical issues facing the future West German soldier.” Count Schwerin later called the Memorandum “The Magna Charta of the Bundeswehr.”²³²

Many of the attending former officers had connections and ties to the military resistance circles during the war. However, the majority of the officers wanted to retain the old military customs of the *Wehrmacht* and their arguments can be largely summed up as “basically nothing new.” Others, like former Major Wolf Count von Baudissin, pushed for a different argument and looked more to the future development of the force than relying on the dubious past. From their perspective, the *Wehrmacht* as such could not provide a proper ethical foundation and tradition for new armed forces. The ethical foundation, tradition, and principles for the internal design

would be ‘democratic’ than about whether the new force would attain the military efficiency of the earlier *Wehrmacht*,” Naumann, 209-210.

²³² Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 30; Large, 517. Chancellor Adenauer tasked Count Schwerin with the planning for domestic security and the creation of a federal police force in late summer 1950. He worked with a small staff in the so called *Zentrale für Heimatdienst* or *Amt Schwerin*. However, Adenauer’s memorandum for a German contribution to the defense of Europe generated a certain dynamic which required immediate action. The outcome was the Himmerod conference in October 1950. Count Kielmannsegg, a surviving member of the resistance and later general in the *Bundeswehr*, served as the secretary for the assembly of former officers. After the meetings of the various subcommittees, he consolidated the different protocols on political, operational, logistical and territorial aspects into a single paper. See Hans- Jürgen Rautenberg and Norbert Wiggershaus, *Die ‘Himmeroder Denkschrift’ vom Oktober 1950, Politische und militärische Überlegungen für einen Beitrag der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zur westeuropäischen Verteidigung* (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1977), 12–22.

could be best found in the military resistance against Hitler. The ethical principles of the resistance could be further developed for the needs of an army in a democratic state.²³³

Finally, due to political support, the reformers around Count von Baudissin prevailed in their efforts to create a new approach as founding principles for the *Bundeswehr*. The resistance narrative inspired the concept of *Innere Führung* and the July 20, 1944 became one of the significant tradition pillars for the Bundeswehr.²³⁴ Subsequently, the attitude towards the narrative was used as a personnel selection tool for the new West German armed forces.

The political support of the Adenauer government for the reformers emerged firstly because of the destructive policy of the VdS, in its effort to rehabilitate the *Wehrmacht*, and secondly because of the available pool of reformers, nurtured by former members of the military resistance. In contradiction to the reformer fraction, the veterans of the Wehrmacht had the primary concern that the coup of July 1944 had an impact “on the image and the values of the German *Soldatentum*.” A steadfast opposition against the advisors of the government articulated the harsh request that people of the July 20, 1944 conspiracy should not “show their face in the new Wehrmacht.”²³⁵ The first chairman of the VdS, COLG (ret.) Hans Frießner, insisted in 1951 that the end of the ‘glorification’ of the July 20 plotters is a prerequisite for the support of Adenauer’s commitment to a West German rearmament. During a press conference in September 1951, he even debased the conspirators against Hitler as he declared, “the soldier cannot allow his

²³³ Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 29–34; Naumann, 212. Regarding the founding principles, the Himmerod memorandum still embodied obviously contradictions and was a compromise between traditionalists and the reformers but it contained already the major issues that divided the supporters of major reform and their critics during the built up and consolidation phase of the Bundeswehr. See Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 34.

²³⁴ As Klaus Naumann stated, *Innere Führung* “is one of those German terms that encompasses a broad spectrum of ideas and is exceptionally hard to render into English.” The term *Innere Führung* has been introduced in a degree by Amt Blank in 1953. Literally translated, the term means ‘inner leadership.’ But this translation captures only a part of the meaning. Other translations like ‘code of military service’ or ‘internal moral compass’ embrace more the content of this concept. However, this monograph follows the approach of Naumann and is using the German term. The explanation of the linkage between the narrative and the concept will provide some more inside understanding what the term *Innere Führung* really means. See Naumann, 205 and 214.

²³⁵ Lockenour, 481-482.

supreme warlord to be murdered behind his back.”²³⁶ This perspective fused an emotional argument inside the veteran organizations and the German population which the political leadership could barely control. Nevertheless, this discussion disqualified the traditionalists from further cooperation.

Adenauer trusted the ‘old boy’s resistance network’ around Count von Schwerin. From a political perspective, members of the former military resistance seemed to gain more domestic and external trust and acceptance for the rearmament program. Schwerin assembled Johann Adolf Count von Kielmansegg, Axel von dem Bussche, and Achim Oster, all of them surviving members of the conspiracy, in his small staff.²³⁷ This deliberate choice of key personnel set the tone inside Schwerin’s staff and symbolized to the public audience a new beginning. After the replacement of Count von Schwerin, Theodor Blank continued this approach and hired for the new *Dienststelle/Amt Blank* even more former officers who had links to the military resistance.²³⁸ Blank hired Hans Speidel, Rommel’s former Chief of Staff, who had been involved in the July 20, 1944 conspiracy and Adolf Heusinger, the former Chief of Operations in the OKH, who had been injured in the bomb explosion on July 20, 1944, and was not a member of the inner circle of

²³⁶ Large, 513. Finally, the storm in the media forced Frießner to step down as chairman of the VdS. Frießner attributed his resignation to pressure from the Adenauer government. David Clay Large portrays this intense public debate regarding the position of the veteran organizations towards the July 20 conspiracy in his essay, 513–516.

²³⁷ Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 30. Johann Adolf Count von Kielmannsegg, a nephew of the former Chief of the Army COLG Werner von Fritsch, served, privy to the conspiracy, 1944 as Colonel in the OKW, was arrested in 1944. After a couple of weeks, he was released because the Gestapo could not find sufficient evidence for his involvement in the plot. After the foundation of the *Bundeswehr*, he became one of the first four-star *Bundeswehr* Generals receiving a command in NATO (Commander in Chief Allied Forces Central Europe) in 1967. Axel von dem Busche was involved in the mentioned assassination attempts of Army Group Center in 1943. Unfortunately, he was severely injured in Russia in January, 1944 and lost one of his legs. Achim Oster, the son of the famous MG Hans Oster, served in the *Wehrmacht* as field grade officer and belonged to the sphere of the July 20 conspiracy.

²³⁸ The replacement of General (ret.) Gerhardt Count von Schwerin is another example of the highly sensitive issue dealing with right wing veteran organizations. Count Schwerin took up secret contacts to rightist veteran organizations like the *Windhunde*. He tried to win these organizations over to Adenauer’s rearmament efforts. Eventually these efforts engendered unfavorable publicity in the national and foreign press. Adenauer, who tried to avoid such public controversy related to government officials, decided to replace Schwerin with Theodor Blank, a Catholic trade union leader and Member of Parliament. Blank had fought in the war but has not been a professional officer. See Large, 517-518.

the military resistance. However, his name “had appeared on the conspirators’ list of officers earmarked for important positions in the post-Hitler regime and he had been interrogated by the Gestapo and removed from the General Staff.” This recruitment pattern was reinforced by the attitude that surviving resistance members suggested friends and acquaintances for the duties in Amt Blank. Jay Lockenour stated, “It appeared as if the *Dienststelle Blank* was a bastion of pro-Resistance sentiment.”²³⁹

These deliberate personnel choices underlined again the strategic aim of “preventing criticism of rearmament from domestic and foreign quarters and building trust at home and abroad.”²⁴⁰ Furthermore, the ‘bastion of pro resistance’ left its footprint on the design of the new armed forces. Under the leadership of Count von Baudissin, many former military resistance members were responsible for the concept of *Innere Führung*. As Jay Lockenour noticed, “the Twentieth of July became strongly associated with the Bundeswehr’s notion of *Innere Führung*.”²⁴¹

Wolf Count von Baudissin was a comrade of Axel von dem Busche from Infantry Regiment 9 (Potsdam) and joined *Amt Blank*, after he had received a reputation during the Himmerod meeting, in May 1951. He became the head of the staff section that dealt with the inner structure of the new West German armed forces.²⁴² Based on his ideas for the Himmerod memorandum, Count Baudissin developed the concept of *Innere Führung* as designing internal principles for the *Bundeswehr*. His concept dealt with the ethical foundation and tradition of the armed forces, as well as with the future status of the soldier in the West German society.

²³⁹ Large, 518-519.

²⁴⁰ Abenheim, 47. Despite the recruitment efforts the chronic shortage of personnel became a serious issue in the *Amt Blank*. As of September 1952, 174 former professional officers worked as military planners in this office. As Abenheim noticed, “the first military planners of the *Amt Blank* seem to have fit the stereotype of the north German, Lutheran officer reared in the tradition of the Prussian general staff. “See Abenheim, 49-50.

²⁴¹ Lockenour, 483.

²⁴² Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 51.

Inspired by the ethical motivations of the July 20 conspiracy and their understanding of obedience and oath, Baudissin and his fellows developed the ideal of the politically-conscious and engaged ‘citizen in uniform’. The concept was “grounded in the Kantian-Protestant understanding of freedom and was not to be confused with volunteerism or party membership; it was a personal value established in education, acceptance of responsibility, and an interest in furthering the common good.”²⁴³ Count Baudissin’s concept addressed the human being in armed forces in a fundamental unity as soldier and citizen. The soldier became an integral member of the pluralistic society, grounded in the rule of law. Recognizing the specific political situation of a separate German nation in two different opposing camps, *Innere Führung* should also serve as well as a ‘spiritual armament’ of the West German soldier against socialist propaganda.²⁴⁴ In accordance with von Baudissin, the ultimate goal of the new doctrine was to develop the greatest fighting power for the new West German armed forces. However, the times of inhuman drills, unconditional obedience, and ‘martinet leadership’ were over.

The reformers designed their own model of the ‘responsible citizen’, “who accepted a ‘willing discipline’ and was led by a functioning hierarchy that followed clear lines of behavior codified in law.”²⁴⁵ The climate in the forces would be driven by respect and officers who would serve as models of democratic soldiery. At this point another important tie to the military resistance was established with the “example of the conspirators was meant to provide. . . not prescriptions for action, but models for bearing.”²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Naumann, 212.

²⁴⁴ Lockenour 483-484; Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 57-59.

²⁴⁵ Naumann, 213. The first years of the Bundeswehr saw a series of core laws and policies enacted that are closely related to *Innere Führung*: The soldier’s law (1956), the establishment of a school for *Innere Führung* (1956) and the creation of the advisory office for *Innere Führung* (1958). See Naumann, 216. The first official document comprising the principles of *Innere Führung* was published in 1957. The Handbook of *Innere Führung* provided readers with an overview of the whole concept. Many of the principles of *Innere Führung* were codified in law when the German Basic Law was amended with the defense legislation in the 1950s. See Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 156.

²⁴⁶ Lockenour, 484.

The incorporation of a new ideological profile for West German armed forces in a democratic state was accompanied with a bitter debate about tradition and the *Bundeswehr's* relationship to the *Wehrmacht*, which lasted into recent years. Count Baudissin argued for radical break with the past and chose July 20, 1944 and the Prussian reformers of the nineteenth century as focal points for the formation of tradition in the *Bundeswehr*. This fundamental effort should exclude a direct connection with traditions and conventions of the *Reichswehr* and *Wehrmacht*.²⁴⁷ In contradiction, he described the traditional values that should be obtained in the *Bundeswehr* as: “a desire for peace, humanity, a chivalrous attitude, loyalty, and above all, a sense of moral responsibility for one’s fellow man.”²⁴⁸ However, conservative officers of the young *Bundeswehr* had different ideas and perspectives regarding a practical tradition for the new West German armed forces. Along with the questions of guilt and responsibility of the *Wehrmacht* for war crimes and atrocities, there were still the issues of honor and recognition of the professional military success of the *Wehrmacht*. Eventually, after troublesome quarrel, this discussion ended with the decree for the handling of tradition in the *Bundeswehr* as of March 28, 2018. This specific decree states that the *Wehrmacht* cannot be used as any source of tradition for the *Bundeswehr*.²⁴⁹

Despite the established policy by Count von Baudissin in the 1950s, the *Bundeswehr* leadership paid official tribute to the resistance narrative in 1959. General Adolf Heusinger, the first Chief of Defense (*Generalinspekteur*) of the *Bundeswehr*, published an ‘order of the day’ for the fifteenth anniversary of the coup and declared, “The act of 20 July 1944 – an act directed

²⁴⁷ Abenheim, *Valid Heritage*, 111. Baudissin’s choice was the de facto policy of the *Bundeswehr* on military tradition in the foundation years 1955 – 1957. This policy resonated his believe that the old forgotten and buried Prussian tradition of moral choice should be newly introduced. Baudissin noticed, “Since Prussian military history certainly knows more conspirators of conscience (*Frondeure aus Gewissenszwang*) than any other,” 81.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, *Valid Heritage*, 117-118.

²⁴⁹ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Traditionserlaß der Bundeswehr, Die Tradition der Bundeswehr, Richtlinien zum Traditionsverständnis und zur Traditionspflege*, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/der-neue-traditionserlass-23232>, 6. See also Naumann, 214.

against wrong and unfreedom- is a shining light in Germany's darkest hour."²⁵⁰ His successor, General Friedrich Foertsch, stated in a clearer reference to the narrative, one year later by stating, "The men of July 20 were in the true German military tradition. They understood obedience, loyalty and duty as they should be understood and as we too wish to understand them: as obligations whose meaning rests only on moral and religious ties...they have taught us to think deeply."²⁵¹ Finally, this statement made the narrative of July 20, 1944 an important pillar of the tradition of the *Bundeswehr* and at the same time linked the narrative to the principles of *Innere Führung*.

Eventually, the selection of the first officers for the *Bundeswehr* crystallized as one of the key issues for the rearmament program for West Germany. Political reliability and professional quality were the primary criteria for the future officers. Once again, the resistance narrative played a vital role in the composition of the Personnel Screening Board, as well as for the organization of the work of this entity.

The idea of a selection board for the recruitment of high-ranking officers emerged already during the Himmerod meeting in 1950. War criminals and *Waffen SS* members would be not acceptable for the Western Allies. Along with the ongoing political discussions, *Amt Blank* elaborated this idea and by the end of 1952, Theodor Blank briefed the security committee of the West German parliament (*Bundestag*) on the proposed policy for the selection of officers for the new West German armed forces. The representatives of a proposed Personnel Screening Board (*Personalgutachterausschuß* or PGA) would consist out of respected civilian and military

²⁵⁰ Large, 523. The original order of the day reads as follows, "*Die Tat des 20. Juli 1944 – eine Tat gegen das Unrecht und gegen die Unfreiheit- ist ein Lichtpunkt in der dunkelsten Zeit Deutschlands... Wir Soldaten der Bundeswehr stehen in Ehrfurcht vor den Opfern jener Männer, deren Gewissen durch ihr Wissen aufgerufen war. Sie sind die vornehmsten Zeugen gegen die Kollektivschuld des deutschen Volkes, ihr Geist und ihre Haltung sind uns Vorbild.*" See Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, Heusingers Tagesbefehl, Nach 15 Jahren : Die Offiziere vom 20. Juli sollen Vorbild sein, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://www.zeit.de/1959/29/heusingers-tagesbefehl>.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 523.

members of West German society with no interest in a commission in the new military.²⁵² The PGA would be tasked to examine all the applicants for commissions of field grade officers and above. Based on the recommendation of the PGA, applications for colonels and generals would be decided by the federal cabinet. The security committee supported this approach and Fritz Erler, member of the security committee from the rearmament critical fraction of the SPD, told the parliament in 1954 that the PGA would assure: “that the future force would not become the army of a single political party or coalition; rather, it would assure that the future personnel would be chosen not merely for their technical expertise but also according to their qualities of character as well as their unconditional reliability and loyalty to the democratic system.” Finally, a special law set up the PGA and confirmed its members.²⁵³

Men and women who portrayed the ‘other Germany’ became of course natural candidates of the PGA. Therefore, surviving members of the conspiracy like Fabian von Schlabrendorff and Philipp von Boeselager, who were involved in an assassination attempt of Hitler in March 1943, and Annedore Leber, the widow of the executed SPD leader Julius Leber, were the most prominent and credible representatives of the PGA. The examination guidelines for the senior ranks applicants demanded “a view of the valid values of tradition and a sober realization of the outdated.” Eventually, this rather abstract formulation regarding a historical reflection was clarified by a specific palpable demand. Every applicant for a high-ranking position in the *Bundeswehr* had to make a statement on his position towards the events on July 20, 1944. In front of the PGA, the attitude towards the conspiracy became a key feature for the assessment and

²⁵² Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross*, 137. First, the body of the selection board should be composed only from former officers, but this idea was dropped because this board would appear much more like a military tribunal.

²⁵³ Ibid., 138. The law has been published as Gesetz über den Personalgutachterausschuß für die Streitkräfte (Personalgutachterausschußgesetz) vom 23. Juli 1955, accessed February 08, 2020, https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav#_bgbl_%2F%2F*%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bgbl155s0451.pdf%27%5D_1581196528935. Due to the flood of applications the given task was split between two organizations. The PGA and the *Annahmeorganisation*. The PGA took care about the ranks of colonels and generals (553 applications), while the *Annahmeorganisation* took care of the rest.

recruitment of the applicant. As Donald Abenheim noticed, “before the committee, the applicant had to show the examiners an understanding for the motives of the conspirators, without necessarily proclaiming his own support for them. The members of the board would ask of the future officers: ‘How would you explain the Twentieth of July to your men?’ or ‘Can you understand the motives of the men of the Twentieth of July?’ and the answer to the question would help the committee to judge the applicant’s attitude to the new forces.”²⁵⁴ Finally, knowledge about the military resistance understanding of the new strategic narrative of the young FRG became critical criteria for the recruitment of the leadership of the *Bundeswehr*.

Conclusion and assessment of the narrative

“Every nation needs a usable past with which it can validate its present and inspire faith in its future.”²⁵⁵ This general statement by David C. Large summarizes the need of a strategic narrative for the young FRG and at the same time provides the framework for the purpose of the July 20, 1944 narrative. After the catastrophic defeat of the Third Reich, West Germany suffered from severe problems of identity after its foundation and was looking for a ‘usable past’. Kurt Tauber, an American historian, emphasized that July 20, 1944 became “the moral justification for the political reconstruction of West Germany, the moral claim for the readmission of the Bonn Republic to the community of civilized nations.”²⁵⁶ The story of the national conservative resistance, led by a few steadfast officers, conspiring, filled with guilt, personal struggle, and national pathos, climaxed in the coup on July 20, 1944 and transformed into a politically-inspired narrative. The positive narrative of the 1944 conspiracy against Hitler became an integral part of

²⁵⁴ Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross*, 144-145. David Clay Large points out that the PGA was also responsible for the guidelines of the *Annahmeorganisation*. These recruiting offices took care of the applicants for officer ranks below colonel. The formulation of the passage in the guidelines regarding July 20, 1944 “was considerably watered –down from an earlier version which demanded a clear affirmation of the military resistance.” The demand of a confession for the conspiracy inspired some cynical jokes such as “Screening committee’s question – ‘How do you feel about the Twentieth of July?’ Officer Candidate’s answer – ‘Oh, I guess I could just as well come on the nineteenth,’” 522.

²⁵⁵ Large, 499.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 500-501.

the self-image of the ‘other Germany’ and therefore a major element of the external and internal legitimacy of the nascent West German state in the 1950s. Colonel Count von Stauffenberg and the ‘heroes of July 20’ served as valuable tools for the conservative government in the FRG under chancellor Konrad Adenauer to establish its internal democratic credentials in deliberate contradiction to the socialist GDR but also to pursue the rearmament of West Germany in the face of stiff public opposition.²⁵⁷ Based on the specific situation as a separated German nation in the Cold War, the concept of freedom and its defense has been used as the cornerstone within the West German utilization of the narrative. The conspirators of 1944 stood for the ethical principles of free societies and drew the line to the socialist regime in the GDR.²⁵⁸

Additionally, the *Bundeswehr*, as the new West German armed forces, received their ethical foundation and essential tradition from the July 20 1944 narrative. The concept of *Innere Führung*, with the meaning to accept the soldier as ‘citizen in uniform’, is directly linked to the narrative.²⁵⁹ The July 1944 conspiracy continued to constitute a major theme for the *Bundeswehr* and its tradition. The adaptation and incorporation of a new West German force into a democratic state and a war weary and pacifist society just ten years after the war would have been not conceivable without the use of this narrative. Over time, the narrative contributed to the achievement of the strategic goal of broad public acceptance for West German forces in a separate nation.

Donald Abenheim argued that the advocacy of the military resistance against the Nazi regime by the founders of the *Bundeswehr* was “clearly ahead of the West German public of the 1950s, which only slowly accepted the moral and political example of the anti-Nazi

²⁵⁷ Lockenour, 473. Frank Stern pointed out cynically that the conspirators helped German postwar conservative politicians “to dream of an untainted German conservatism, without Hitler.”

²⁵⁸ Swartz, 30.

²⁵⁹ Voss, 22.

conspirators.”²⁶⁰ Despite the positive political spin, the postwar German society was ambivalent at best about the July 20 conspiracy. Firstly, the Nazi propaganda about the assassination attempt still resonated in large parts of the German public opinion in the 1950s. Charges of cowardice and treason would remain constant features in public discussions around the conspiracy.²⁶¹ Secondly, the heritage of conspirators questioned the idea of the ‘zero-hour.’ The narrative of the conspiracy provided evidence that resistance had been possible. As Jay Lockenour stated, “the conspirators pointed a silent, accusing finger at all Germans who had not acted to overthrow the Nazi regime.”²⁶²

Based on academic research, some deficiencies of the narrative must be shortly addressed. These deficiencies did some harm to the initial coherence and consistency of the narrative. Starting in the 1970s, the ‘revisionist view’ of the resistance included more facets of resistance in Nazi Germany and attempted to show the resisting people as they truly were.²⁶³ This ‘revisionist view’ generated impacts to the conspiracy narrative. As already discussed in the chronological framework of the military resistance, the conspirators were not a monolithic bloc and most of them were not ‘good democrats.’ Recent historical research emphasizes the diversity of the conspiracy groups and the difficulties to portray the men of July 20, 1944 as the ‘straight precursors’ of the Bundeswehr, the guides to parliamentary democracy, and harbingers of the primacy of politics.²⁶⁴ Beside their undoubted ethically-based motivations, the national conservative resistance dedicated their efforts first of all to the German nation within the framework of the *Reich* and the *Wehrmacht*. The von Stauffenberg brothers expressed in their ‘oath’ in July 1944 some autocratic elitist thoughts, which had nothing to do with the western

²⁶⁰ Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross*, 147.

²⁶¹ Lockenour, 480

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 478.

²⁶³ Swartz, 16.

²⁶⁴ Naumann, *Stauffenberg gehört in die Mitte der Gesellschaft*, 54.

contemporary view of democracy. Most of the conspiring officers, and especially Colonel Count von Stauffenberg, based their arguments on their national conservative convictions as officers. They dedicated honor and personal responsibility over obedience. They did not accept the primacy of politics when the fate of the German nation was at stake. Eventually, due to military professional insights, the conspiracy of 1944 was the last resort and an act of responsibility towards the German nation.²⁶⁵ However, the official narrative stresses the ethics of attitude, the value and pathos of the pure futile act of the conspiracy. Thomas Karlauf noticed, that it was easier to convey this message within a strongly pacifist society by the ethos of attitude than by the ethos of responsibility.²⁶⁶

Nevertheless, the stains on the coherence and consistency could not destroy the strong and important narrative. Despite the mentioned critical topics, the story of the conspiracy belongs into the center of the German society even when the conspirators are not the guiding lights as initially displayed. The society has to withstand the biographical rifts and contemporary perspectives of the acting figures.²⁶⁷ Subsequently, the deficiencies of the narrative could trigger important overdue discussions about civil-military relationships in the FRG, the evolution of primacy of politics within the concept of *Innere Führung*, and the ethics of attitude versus the ethics of responsibility in the *Bundeswehr* employed in combat operations.

Finally, the narrative of the ‘other Germany’ persisted over the shadows of Adolf Hitler which loomed over postwar West Germany. The narrative provided a ‘usable past’ for the future of the young state and its armed forces. Postwar German authorities and elites used the myth of the failed plot deliberately in order to generate a new perspective for the Western allies and the own population. Today, the conspirators of July 20, 1944 are widely perceived as ‘heroes’ and dominate the culture of remembrance and the tradition of the *Bundeswehr*. Colonel Count von

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 56-58.

²⁶⁶ Karlauf, 227.

²⁶⁷ Naumann, *Stauffenberg gehört in die Mitte der Gesellschaft*, 54.

Stauffenberg is the person most Germans associate with this specific date.²⁶⁸ The conspirators reassure people that even in dark times there are possibilities to resist. The confession to the tradition of the national conservative resistance against Hitler still shapes the self-image of the Federal Republic and the *Bundeswehr*. Despite some stains, the founding narrative of the FRG still exerts its effects and fulfills its purpose.

²⁶⁸ Swartz, 30.

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