
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the special 27 October meeting of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Roundtable.

Tonight's guest speaker, the internationally recognized scholar Peter Hoffmann. His topic is the German Resistance to Hitler..

Dr. Hoffmann's best known work is *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945*. Harold Deutsch reviewed Hoffmann's book in the *Journal of Military History*, saying: "In a study which so fully merits the accolade 'exhaustive,' Hoffman has done full justice to the subject...By his connected story of developments from 1938 to the dramatic denouement in 1944, tracing each rise and fall of the curve, Hoffman succeeds as no other before him in bringing matters into proper focus."

At the end of the Second World War, the pervasive image was that all Germans followed Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich without question. This historical myth has been slow to die, as the recent movie, *Valkyrie*, about the July 1944 assassination attempt of Adolf Hitler, illustrates. What most present day observers fail to recognize is the pervasive culture of fear established by the Third Reich. Open resistance meant imprisonment in a concentration camp or more likely death. Even so, there was resistance, from those who would not allow their children to wear the Hitler Youth uniforms, to those who hid "undesirables" from the Gestapo or SS, and finally, those who conspired to rid Germany of its Führer.

While these can all be categorized as resistance to the Third Reich, historians have a hard time calculating the smaller day to day resistance, although some have tried. The better documented resistance and outright conspiracy to get rid of the Third Reich came from within the German Army. The Army was the most powerful institution in Germany, even during the Weimar years, and certainly the only one with the power and prestige to stand up to Adolf Hitler and then hold the country together in the aftermath.

Historian Harold Deutsch, categorized four rounds of possible military conspiracy with the first coalescing around the year 1938 because of the army leadership's revulsion over the removal of the Minister of War General Werner von Blomberg and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army Werner von Fritsch by less than honorable means. This was closely followed by the growing crisis in over the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. The Army leaders felt the Führer was leading Germany on road to war. The Army Chief of Staff Ludwig Beck considered this foolhardy. He sent out emissaries who made contacts with foreign policy leaders in Great Britain and France and encourage them to take strong stands against German action. However, with the Munich Agreement, which gave Germany the Sudetenland the conspiracy collapsed.

The second round of conspiracies dated from the beginning of the war in September 1939 to May of 1940, and were centered around the *Abwehr*, the German Intelligence service under the direction of Admiral Wilhelm Canaris. Canaris protected Colonel Hans Oster, who had organized an extensive network of oppositionists in the Army and in the intelligence services. The *Abwehr* tried to make contact with the British through the auspices of Pope Pius XII for a negotiated

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settlement to end the war if the Nazis were overthrown. Once again, the British ignored the overtures.

During 1942 and especially after the battle of Stalingrad, the third round of the conspiracies developed within the Army Group Center. Under the command of Field Marshal Fedor von Bock and then Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, Army Group Center had the highest concentration of “oppositionists” in the Army. Lieutenant-Colonel Henning von Tresckow, the senior operations officer, tried to organize several attempts to detonate a bomb near the Führer, but all failed. With the continuing defeats on the Eastern Front, Tresckow realized that their hopes lay with the Home Army command staff.

The final round of the conspiracies, led by Colonel Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg between March and July 1944, was the most successful even if it did not accomplish its goal. When Stauffenberg became the Chief of Staff to Colonel-General Friedrich Fromm, he gained access to the Führer. He carried a bomb in his briefcase to several high command conferences, finally setting off a bomb on July 20 at the Wolf’s Lair. While the bomb killed several officers, Adolf Hitler was only slightly injured. Stauffenberg and his co-conspirators were executed after horrible torture.

The weakness of the military resistance to the Third Reich is that they could not agree on what they wanted; did they want a democracy or a monarchy, did they want to retain the eastern territory they gained during the successful part of the war or not. The strength of the opposition is found in that they did not name names. The resistance had approached a majority of Army officers and most knew of it. Even under torture, the conspirators did not divulge their co-conspirators. For all the power and respect granted to the German military, even they were impotent when it came to the Nazi’s and the Führer.

Further Reading:

Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945*, 3rd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996).
 Peter Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg: A Family History*, 3rd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2008)
 Hans Mommsen, *Alternatives to Hitler: German Resistance under the Third Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003)
 Freya von Moltke, *Memories of Kreisau and the German Resistance* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005)
 Klemens von Klemperer, *German Resistance against Hitler: The Search for Allies Abroad, 1938-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992)
 Harold C. Deutsch, *The Conspiracy Against Hitler in the Twilight War* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1968).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - Nov. 15, 2011 Mary Todd Lincoln
www.tccwrt.com - 612-724-3849
St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - Nov. 28, 2011, Midwestern Slavery, Steve Anderson - 715-386-1268
Rochester WWII History Round Table - 507-280-9970; www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org
Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
Air Show - Eden Prairie - <http://www.airexpo-mn.org/> - 952-746-6100 July, 14-15, 2012
Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717
CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafmn.org or Bill at 952-201-8400
Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-252

Round Table Schedule 2011-2012

Nov 10 Bitter Appeasement — Munich
 Dec 8 The *GI Offensive in Europe*
2012
 Jan 12 The Battle of Leningrad
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