

The july plot failed largely because of popular support for hitler

[People](#), [Adolf Hitler](#)



The German public had met the outbreak of World War II with a general sense of apprehension. Although Hitler had been admired for his achievements thus far, it was becoming increasingly obvious to the German public that the regeneration of their economy would come at a price. Hitler made considerable achievements in political and economic fields. He also addressed military matters and to some extent social policy. The Enabling Bill was passed in March 1933, with opposition coming only from the Socialists.

This was due to the threat posed by the development of the Gestapo and of course, the SS, which had advanced " from improvised terror of the early years to the gigantic concentration-camp system of the extermination era. " (Bracher - 1970) As a result of relentless persecution and the introduction of stringent laws, various groups emerged, with a mutual opposition to Nazi conformity. Unfortunately there was no single, unified resistance movement, which meant that any kind of successful campaign proved difficult to initiate, especially under the close eye of the Gestapo.

Resistance ranged from youth groups such as the Edelweiss Pirates, committing petty crimes, to the Beck-Goerdeler group and the Kreisau Circle who made attempts on Hitler's life. At the same time there was a great deal of support for Hitler and allegiance to him, which made it more difficult still for the resistance groups to take any action. The Edelweiss Pirates were a prime example of youth resistance to Nazi conformity. They consisted of mostly working class youths.

Some had refused to join the Hitler youth because of the lifestyle it would have imposed upon them. Others had simply dropped out from the Hitler Youth presumably because they disagreed with the programme. They daubed graffiti on public walls, disturbed uniformed officials and held pitched battles with the Hitler Youth. On a greater scale, groups such as the Kreisau Circle and the Beck-Goerdeler Group spoke actively about ending the Nazi regime and looked towards a post Nazi Germany.

The founders of the Beck-Goerdeler group, Ludwig Beck and Carl Goerdeler, had both held positions in Hitler's governmental office. Beck was Chief of General Staff and Goerdeler was Commissioner, having remained in office after the government of Heinrich Brüning. Beck particularly objected to Hitler's attempts to take over the army. He sent a messenger to London to seek military aid from Neville Chamberlain to help prevent Germany invading Czechoslovakia. However, Chamberlain's regime was one of appeasement.

Hitler learned of Beck's opposition and he was thrown out of office. From there on in he kept in touch with many others who opposed Hitler's regime. Goerdeler resigned from office in 1934 after disagreement with Hitler's policies, publicly opposed German rearmament and the Nuremberg Laws and was appalled by the Munich Agreement whereby the Sudetenland was taken from Czechoslovakia and given back to Germany. He made contact with Beck and became involved in the July Plot where he agreed to become Chancellor in the proposed office should the plot prove successful.

There were various other key figures within the Beck-Goerdeler group such as Henning von Tresckow, a general staff officer during the Second World War, and Captain Wilhelm Canaris who worked with Himmler and SS intelligence but leaked information to Beck and Goerdeler. However, one figure emerged as an active leader of the Beck-Goerdeler group by the name of Major Claus von Stauffenberg. Appalled by the atrocities of the SS as a member of the general staff, he began to associate with Henning von Tresckow and others. He was soon promoted to major and was badly injured when his car was attacked by enemy aircraft and rolled into a minefield.

While recovering from his injuries he decided to join the Beck-Goerdeler group in the July Plot. It was decided among the group that Hitler and Himmler must be eliminated. Once that was done, it was planned for troops in Berlin to seize key government buildings, telephone and signal centres and radio stations. The Kreisau Circle was a group of German professionals, army officers and academics who were opposed to Nazism. Founded in 1933, it was led by Count Helmuth von Moltke, who was born in Kreisau itself and who worked closely with Wilhelm Canaris and Hans Oster.

In 1939 he became financial adviser to Abwehr, the German military intelligence organization. Many of the members of Abwehr became active in the resistance movement in Germany, including von Moltke, Oster, and Canaris who was head of Abwehr. Members of the Kreisau Circle frequently held their meetings on von Moltke's estate. They saw defeat in the war as inevitable and post war planning and reorganisation as essential. Hitler and the Nazi party were threatened not only by active resistance groups, but also

by various organisations, not least the German Army. In fact, according to Dr.

Klaus Hildebrand in his book "The Third Reich," "Two major political and social forces, namely big business and the army, managed to resist the party's totalitarian demands until 1936 and 1938 respectively, when they were brought under strict control." The extract is taken from "The Third Reich" written by Dr. Klaus Hildebrand, first published in 1984 and translated from German into English. The date of issue causes the matter of bias to be somewhat disregarded. Had the book have been published 30 years earlier, the authors view would have been far more tainted.

Resistance groups such as the Beck-Goerdeler Group and the Kreisau Circle realised that political overthrow of the Nazi government was unrealistic. It was becoming increasingly obvious that in order to seize power, a coup d'etat was the only answer. Based on the above source, one would expect that a military coup wasn't out of the question. However, when approached, the army were uncooperative and, according to Alan Bullock, "The army's illusions had helped to consolidate Nazi rule" The quote is taken from Bullock's "Hitler - A Study in Tyranny," which was first published in 1952.

A well-acclaimed book, translated into 14 languages, and written by a former tutor of modern history who lived through both World Wars, it certainly seems as though this book would prove valuable to any study set in this context. This particular quote contradicts the previous extract from Hildebrand's "The Third Reich" and leads us to believe that the army helped

to reinforce Nazi rule rather than oppose it. Some might jump to the conclusion that the reason for the difference between the two sources lies in the nationality of the authors.

This is unlikely but can be taken into account as Dr. Hildebrand is German and Bullock is British. A more important factor perhaps is the date of publication of both books. Having been published in 1952, only 7 years after the end of the war, Bullock's biography may have been influenced by public opinion, which would certainly have been strong at the time, and also lack of knowledge about the German Army. Additionally, Bullock was probably one of the first authors to write such a well-acclaimed book addressing events of the Second World War.

Therefore, one might feasibly presume that his book left room for improvement as there have been countless books written since, on Hitler and on World War II. Bullock could have used primary sources, eyewitnesses and indeed his own experiences to his advantage. Dr. Klaus Hildebrand, having first published his book in 1984, would have had a wealth of material to help form his opinions and arguments. He could have used primary and secondary sources and views of other historians since the period of study. Bullock would have found this more difficult.

However, Bullock had access to eyewitnesses and primary sources that Hildebrand may not have found quite so easily during the 1980s. Perhaps the reason Bullock saw the army as having 'illusions' lies in the fact that Hitler manipulated the army in order to prevent any threat to his totalitarian rule. It

was important that he had their unconditional support as, without it, he could not maintain a secure state, and due to the severity of his regime, could even risk a military coup. He introduced a system of gradual Nazi infiltration into the army.

Furthermore, with the emergence of the Hitler Youth who were also given admittance, the army were bound to become more sympathetic to Nazi sentiments. Despite Hitler's attempts to promote Nazism within the army, he felt he still had to earn their respects somehow. The Rohm Purge of 1934 proved convenient as it gave Hitler the opportunity to eliminate those whom he felt threatened the Nazi regime whilst at the same time satisfying the Army. He instigated the Rohm Purge or the 'Night of the Longknives' in July of 1934. On July 1st he ordered that the detained Ernst Rohm, leader of the SA, be executed.

This followed a series of executions and arrests of various SA members. The Army regarded the SA as an unruly and threatening group and thus approved of their elimination. In order to ensure he had the army's respect, Hitler enforced their pledge to the following oath: " I swear by God this sacred oath: that I will render unconditional obedience to the Fuhrer of the German Reich and people of Adolf Hitler, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and will be ready as a brave soldier to risk my life at any time for this oath. " (Document 1 - prescribed document pack)

The above oath was a prime example of allegiance to Hitler and it made each soldiers' commitment morally binding. It would suggest, therefore, that

those who would deviate from their duties and dare to oppose Hitler would be committing an act of treachery and abandoning their morals at the same time. The oath was taken on August 2nd 1934, almost immediately after the death of General von Hindenburg. This was significant as the army had great respect for Hindenburg and Hitler had to ensure he had a similar level of respect or risk a military coup.

As a result of this pledge and the army's approval of the Rohm Purge, it was always going to prove difficult to promote anti-Nazi sentiments within their ranks. It must be said that, aside from popular support for Hitler, the July Plot and indeed many other attempts on Hitler's life suffered from severe misfortune. An unlikely series of flukes ensured that Hitler remained unscathed by any of the attempts until the final July Plot. " General Franz Halder and Henning von Tresckow intended to use a bomb to assassinate Hitler but the device failed to detonate...

Field Marshal von Witzhelben intended to shoot Hitler at the Champs Elysees. Sadly Hitler declined his invitation to visit Paris... Colonel von Gersdorff agreed to blow up both himself and Hitler when they shook hands but he failed to get close enough" The above extract and the oath of allegiance are taken from " David Evans and Jane Jenkins Years of Weimar and the Third Reich, 1999. " The oath is useful to an historian as a primary source. It demonstrates why it might have proven difficult to incite resistance against Hitler and thus gain support for the July Plot.

As a direct translation it should not suffer from any form of bias. The above extract, in summarising the various attempts on Hitler's life, is useful in its portrayal of the desperate measures taken by resistance groups. David Evans and Jane Jenkins are specialised historians in this subject area and will have used both primary sources, secondary sources and other historians' views as well as their own knowledge. The date of publication of the sources would ensure that they were free from censorship. Additionally, any bias that might have been brought about during the post-war era will have been discounted by this time.

By the end of 1943, The Gestapo and Himmler's SD had succeeded in dispersing most anti-Nazi resistance within Germany. Key figures of resistance had been arrested or invalidated in some way. Hans Oster, one of the heads of German military intelligence, who had maintained active resistance against Hitler, was placed under close surveillance. In January 1944 Moltke, a leading figure in the Kreisau Circle, had also been arrested after it was discovered that he was warning conspirators that they were about to be arrested. Around the same time Beck of the Beck-Goerdeler group underwent a serious cancer operation and his health was unstable.

Resistance was effectively in disarray. Again in 1944, Canaris had been dismissed as head of Abwehr on grounds of incompetence and thus the resistance suffered from a lack of information on Hitler's movements.

Thankfully Stauffenberg was appointed as Chief of Staff to General Fromm, head of the Home Army. From there he would have ample information on Hitler's whereabouts. In the summer of 1944 Rommel was approached about

joining the July Plot. He refused, criticising their tactics and claiming that assassination would turn Hitler into a martyr. Instead he suggested that Hitler should be arrested and brought to trial.

However, on 17th July Rommel was injured when a British fighter aircraft attacked his car in Northern France. Furthermore, and on the same day, Goerdeler was arrested with lists for the provisional government. German resistance had suffered a terrible run of bad luck. Nevertheless, plans to assassinate Hitler and seize Berlin were put into action. On July 20th, Stauffenberg's presence was requested at a conference to report on the state of the Home Army. It was intended that Stauffenberg would assassinate Hitler using a time bomb in a briefcase.

At the same time, it was proposed that resistance troops in Berlin would seize governmental buildings, telephone and signal centres and radio stations after arresting SS troops who might put a stop to the plan, known as 'Operation Valkyrie.' The conference had been put forward by half an hour from 1pm because Hitler had a meeting in the early afternoon with Mussolini. When it came to the conference, Stauffenberg arrived late having activated the time bomb in his briefcase. He placed it about 12 feet from where Hitler was stood and made a prompt exit.

The bomb exploded and the plot almost proved successful; although the bomb had exploded in Hitler's vicinity, his good fortune remained a prevalent factor in his survival. " Hitler had been protected, partly by the table-top over which he was leaning at the time, and partly by the heavy wooden support

on which the table rested and against which Stauffenberg's brief-case had been pushed before the bomb exploded" In spite of the fact that Hitler had sustained minor injuries and was fairly shaken, he delivered a speech to the public on the same day.

The extract above is a fitting example of Hitler's uncanny good fortune and is taken from " Hitler A study in Tyranny," written by Alan Bullock. The conspiracy fell apart quickly; General Fromm had Stauffenberg shot at midnight in the courtyard of the War Ministry and in the following months of vengeance, Hitler was sure to seek out all those involved and have them tortured and executed. In fact, many of those killed thereafter had no connection with the July Plot but were merely among a large group of people whom Hitler was wary of for one reason or another.

Aside from Hitler's persistent fortuity and the loss key figures in German resistance, there were other factors that led to the failure of the July Plot. It could be said that the various assassination attempts including the July Plot failed due to lack of competence. The mere fact that so many assassination attempts were implemented would suggest that there was a sense of desperation in the hope of removing Hitler. The following extract quotes Henning von Tresckow when voicing his opinion to Stauffenberg: " The assassination must be attempted at all costs.

If it should fail, action must still be taken in Berlin. For it is no longer a question of the practical aim: it must be demonstrated to the world and to history that the German resistance has decided on a supreme throw. Nothing

matters in comparison with this. " The quote is again taken from " The Third Reich" written by Dr. Klaus Hildebrand. I believe it to be useful in its portrayal of the sheer desperation of the Beck-Goerdeler group in their attempt to remove Hitler. When looking at the failure of the July Plot one might ask what would have happened if the initial assassination attempt had succeeded.

Different historians have different views as to what post Hitler Germany would have held in store. Some say the Beck-Goerdeler group's provisional government would have failed, some say they would have succeeded. Heinz Guderian was commander of the General Staff. As a result of the July Plot Guderian demanded the resignation of any officer who did not fully support the ideals of the Nazi Party. Over the next few months Guderian played a role in the Army Court of Honour that expelled hundreds of officers suspected of being opposed to Hitler's policies.

Although willing to carry out a purge of the Army, Guderian disagreed with Hitler over strategy and he was dismissed from office on 28th March 1945. According to his book 'Panzer Leader,' He believed that the resistance hadn't enough troops to defend their position. He believed essentially that Operation Valkyrie was a disaster and that even if Hitler had been assassinated, Germany would have been no worse or better off. Guderian joined the army in 1908 thus he had considerable military experience.

He led the attack on Poland in September 1939 and his rapid success sent shockwaves throughout the world. One would assume that Guderian's view would therefore be one of value. Guderian stated that: " The officers and

men assembled for Operation Valkyrie had not the slightest idea of what was going on. " However, having been published in 1953, there is likelihood that Guderian's book may have been influenced by public opinion. Furthermore Guderian served under Hitler and was witness to much propaganda that would have shamed and discredited the resistance movements.

It is quite possible that Guderian could have taken on board some of Hitler's views on resistance movements such as the Beck-Goerdeler Group, which might explain his unenthusiastic view of their strategy. Albert Speer agrees with the fundamental idea that the coup was doomed from the start. He believed that the plot failed because of the extent of loyalty to Hitler. Speer first met Hitler in July 1933 as a member of the SS and was given the task of organising the Nuremberg Rally. He became Minister of Armaments and was a good administrator.

He considerably raised production levels of armaments. He must have been familiar with Hitler and the degree of loyalty that he commanded. One might expect, then, that his claim might have been justified. However, it may once again be worthwhile to consider Speer's possible acceptance of Hitler's ideas as his own. If this was the case then Speer may have been misled as to how much loyalty to Hitler actually existed. Others believe that the plan would have succeeded. Certainly Bullock makes reference to the fact that in Paris, the plan actually worked.

Conspirators in Paris, Vienna, Prague, Kassel, and Frankfurt continued to implement their plans even after the reported failure of the coup in Berlin.

The plans made considerable achievements in Paris where some 1, 200 SS and SD troops were arrested. It collapsed, however, simply because the assassination attempt on Hitler had failed. Added to this was the fact that the Navy and SS quickly began their counter measures. Bullock also looked upon the support of Rommel as a positive factor, claiming that: " His popularity would have been a considerable asset. "

As already established, Bullock was a tutor in modern history at the same time as he was writing 'Hitler a Study in Tyranny. ' He was also Vice Chancellor of Oxford University from 1969-73. He had a wealth of experience in the field of modern History and this particular book is hailed to be: 'Acclaimed all over the world as an outstanding biography. ' David G. Williamson looks upon the failure of the July Plot somewhat sympathetically. He believes that, had the generals in Berlin have acted more decisively without waiting to hear whether or not Hitler was dead, they could have overthrown the SS and the SD as they did in Paris.

Williamson is an expert in this field and has written several books on German Modern History including 'The Third Reich,' which is quoted in document 11 of the prescribed document pack. This particular book was published in 1982. Williamson would therefore have had a great deal of material at his disposal. He will have used a range of primary and secondary sources as well as taking into consideration views of other historians. Some of his other titles include 'Bismarck and Germany 1862-1890,' published in 1986, 'Germany from Defeat to Partition, 1945-1963,' and 'The Age of the Dictators,' not yet published.

The views of Heinz Guderian and David G. Williamson differ greatly. We might again attribute this to their difference in nationality, though there are once more additional factors to be considered. Guderian's view might have been tainted greatly by a very influential Hitler whereas Williamson's view should have been free from any form of bias. The dates of publication also differ greatly. Guderian's book, 'Panzer Leader' was published in 1953, probably written almost immediately after the war when the general consensus was certainly a biased one.

Williamson's 'The Third Reich' was published in 1982 when there was more material available, less propaganda and less influenced public opinion. I feel that support for Hitler was widespread, and where there wasn't support there was loyalty through fear. I believe that Himmler posed as much of a threat as Hitler as a Nazi aggressor and as head of the army from 1944, he could have overthrown any kind of provisional government set up by the Beck-Goerdeler Group upon assassination of Hitler.

It would be wrong to say that the plot failed entirely due to popular support for Hitler and more feasible to propose that, as the essay title suggests, the plot failed largely due to popular support for Hitler. He gained the support of the army and had the support of the SA and later the SS. He also had a largely dedicated governmental cabinet. Any form of opposition was promptly eliminated. Of course, the July Plot also failed because of a succession of mishaps and poor organisation as previously mentioned.