

## ATTEMPTS ON HITLER'S LIFE

### MUNICH

Johann Georg Elser, born January 4, 1903, had served an apprenticeship as cabinetmaker (Schreiner) and from 1929 to 1932 worked in Switzerland at this trade then returned to Germany to assist in his father's lumberyard. He bitterly resented the Nazi stranglehold on labour unions and the growing restrictions on religious freedom. He then decided to kill Hitler by placing a time bomb in one of the columns behind the podium where Hitler was to give a speech in the Burgerbrau Beer Cellar in Munich. The bomb was set to detonate at precisely 9.20pm on Wednesday, November 8, 1939. At 8.10 Hitler enters the beer hall but at 9.12pm he suddenly ends his speech and departs. Eight minutes later the bomb explodes killing eight people and wounding sixty-five including Eva Braun's father. Seven of those killed were Nazi Party members. Elser, who, since 1933, refused to give the Nazi salute, is later arrested as he tried to cross the border into Switzerland at Konstanz. He was held for questioning due to the 'strange content' of his belongings. He was transported to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, and later confined in the concentration camp at Dachau. On the 9th of April, 1945, two weeks before the war ended in Europe, Johann Elser was executed by the SS. In the city of Bremen a street was named in his honour, Georg-Elser Weg. In Berlin a memorial has been erected and a plaque to his memory is sited in his hometown, Koenigsbronn. (In September, 1979, the Burgerbraukeller was demolished. On its site now stands the Munich City Hilton Hotel)

### THE BERGHOF

On March 11, 1944, Cavalry Captain Eberhard von Breitenbuch attended a conference at Hitler's villa the 'Berghof' on the Obersalzberg. Concealed on his person was a small Browning pistol with which he intended to shoot his Führer and at the same time was willing to sacrifice his own life in the attempt. He felt that the war was now at such a stage that the complete destruction of Germany was inevitable and that Hitler had to be stopped. Breitenbuch enters the conference room behind Field Marshal Ernst Busch, who suspects nothing, but as he approaches the door he is stopped by the Duty Sergeant who explains "Sorry, no adjutants beyond this point, Führer's orders". So yet another attempt fails.

### BERLIN

On March 20, 1943, Colonel Rudolf von Gertsdorff, General Kluge's chief of intelligence, tried to kill Hitler in the Zeughaus. The concealed bomb was to be detonated by acid while he stood close to Hitler in the exhibit hall. Unfortunately Hitler left the building before the acid could act and Gertsdorff immediately entered the men's room and flushed the fuse down the toilet.

In February, 1944, Infantry Captain Axel von dem Bussche agrees to blow up Hitler and himself while he demonstrates a new army winter overcoat to the German leader. Fate intervenes the day before when during a British air raid the uniforms were destroyed and Bussche was returned to duty at the front. A few weeks later another 'overcoat' attempt was made. This time the volunteer model was Ewald Heinrich von Kleist, son of one of the original conspirators and included Major General Helmuth Stieff. Again the RAF saved the day with an air-raid just before the demonstration was about to take place forcing its cancellation. Ewald von Kleist survived the war and became a publisher. He died in Munich on March 8, 2012, aged 90.

### THE BERGHOF

On July 11, 1944, Staff Officer Lt. Colonel Count Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg, convinced that he and he alone could assassinate Hitler, attended another conference at the Berghof. Concealed inside his briefcase was a time bomb. Waiting outside in a gateway car was his co-conspirator, Captain Friedrich Klausung. Inside the Berghof, Stauffenberg telephones his colleagues in Berlin to tell them that neither Goering nor Himmler is present. They insist that the attempt be aborted. Stauffenberg then returns to Berlin to plan his next assassination attempt.

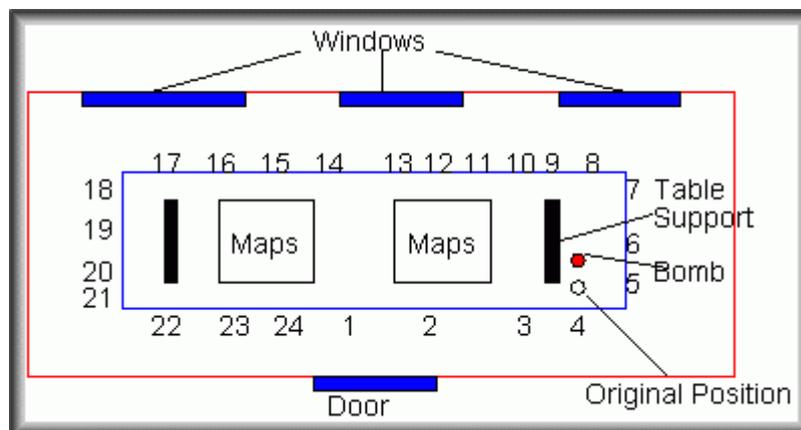
### RASTENBURG

Stauffenberg's second attempt occurs at Hitler's Wolf's Lair headquarters in East Prussia. On July 15, 1944, he attends a Führer's briefing and observes with dismay that Himmler is again absent. The attempt was once again aborted.

### RASTENBURG

Thirty six year-old Stauffenberg's final attempt occurred on July 20, 1944. Four days earlier, the attempt was decided upon during a meeting at his residence at No. 8 Tristanstrasse, Wansee. Himmler or no Himmler, the attempt must go ahead, come what may. If the attempt was successful, Hitler's replacement was to be Karl Friedrich Goerdeler, former Lord Mayor of Leipzig and a diehard opponent of Hitler. At 12.00pm Stauffenberg and General Fromm report to Field Marshal Keitel's office for a briefing before entering the conference room. At 12.37pm, Stauffenberg places his briefcase, containing 2,000 grams of Plastik-W explosives, under the map table, then leaves the room on the pretext of making a telephone call. The officer Colonel Brandt, No.4 who took his place noticed the briefcase and with his foot pushed it further under the table. The heavy oak table support protected Hitler from the full force of the explosion. At 12.42pm, the bomb explodes. By this time Stauffenberg is on his way back to Berlin. At 6.28pm a radio broadcast from Wolf's Lair reports that Hitler is alive but only slightly wounded. Later that night, at 12.30am, Stauffenberg and his co-conspirators, Haeften, Olbricht and Mertz, are arrested and executed by firing squad in the inner courtyard of the Bendlerstrasse Headquarters in the glare of a trucks head-lights.

(Immediately after Colonel Stauffenberg's assassination attempt, his wife and four children were arrested and imprisoned. Freed by the Allies at the end of the war and pregnant at the time of her arrest, she gave birth to her fifth child while in prison. One of her brothers, Berthold, was also arrested and executed after the failed plot.)



THE BOMB PLOT AT HITLER'S HQ. The situation as at 12.30pm on July 20, 1944. (See the following list.)

1. Adolf Hitler
2. General Heusinger
3. Luftwaffe General Korten (Died of wounds)
4. Colonel Brandt (Died of wounds)
5. Luftwaffe General Bodenschatz (Severely wounded)
6. General Schnunt (Died of wounds)
7. Lt. Colonel Borgman (Severely wounded)
8. Rear Admiral Von Puttkamer
9. Stenographer Berger (Killed on the spot)
10. Naval Captain Assmann
11. General Scherff
12. General Buhle
13. Rear Admiral Voss
14. SS Group Leader Fegelein
15. Colonel Von Bellow
16. SS Hauptsturmfuhrer Gunsche
17. Stenographer Hagen
18. Lt. Colonel Von John (Adjutant to Keitel)
19. Major Buchs (Adjutant to Jodl)
20. Lt. Colonel Weizenegger
21. Min. Counsellor Von Sonnleithner
22. General Warlimont (Concussion)
23. General Jodl (Lightly wounded)
24. Field Marshal Keitel



The house of Count von Stauffenberg at Wannsee, Berlin.



Stauffenberg's execution site.



Courtyard where the executions took place.

Between August 8, 1944 and April 9, 1945, Ninety persons were executed in Plötzensee prison for their part in the attempted coup of July 20.

#### PARIS

Another attempt to assassinate Hitler was planned for July 27, 1940, in Paris, where Count Fritz-Dietlof von der Schulenberg planned to shoot Hitler from the reviewing stand during a military parade in Hitler's honour. Hitler however secretly visited Paris in the early hours of July 23, visiting all the city's famed buildings. He began his tour at 6am and by 9am he ended his tour and departed the city. A few days later Schulenberg received word that his hoped for July 27 military parade had been cancelled.

#### PARIS

Despite Schulenberg's failure to lure Hitler to Paris for the special parade, Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben had plans of his own to assassinate Hitler. In May, 1941, he attempted to lure Hitler to Paris under a similar pretext. The visit was scheduled for May 21st but was abruptly called off at the last minute.

#### SIEGFRIED LINE

In 1939, prior to the outbreak of WWII, German General Kurt von Hammerstein repeatedly attempted to lure Hitler into visiting the Army's fortifications along the Siegfried Line near the Dutch border where he commanded a base. Hammerstein and his co-conspirator, retired General Ludwig Beck, had planned a 'fatal accident' to Hitler during his inspection of the base. Hitler however, never honoured the invitation, instead he turned the tables on Hammerstein by placing him on the retired list.

#### POLTAVA

Another plot to assassinate Hitler was hatched at Army Group B Headquarters at Walki near Poltava in the Ukraine. This time the conspirators were General Hubert Lanz, his Chief of Staff, Major-General Dr. Hans Speidel and Colonel Count von Strachwitz, the commanding officer of the Grossdeutschland Tank Regiment. The plan was to arrest Hitler on his anticipated visit to Army Group B in the spring of 1943. Hitler, at the last minute, changed his mind and instead decided to visit his forces fighting in Saporoshe further east.

#### SMOLENSK

On March 13, 1943, three attempts were planned on Hitler's life. Field Marshal Guenther von Kluge, commander of Army Group Center on the eastern front, finally managed to lure Hitler into visiting his headquarters at Smolensk. However a number of officers on Kluge's staff had other thoughts on how to assassinate Hitler. Colonel Henning von Tresckow, who hated Hitler and the Nazis, together with Lt. Fabian von Schlabrendorff, Colonel Rudolf von Gersdorff and Cavalry Captain Georg von Boeslager had hatched a plan to get rid of their Führer.

#### Plan 1

Captain von Boeslager and his company were to serve as armed escort to Hitler's motorcade. During the drive from the airfield the Führer's car was to be gunned down in an ambush. The attempt was aborted when Hitler arrived with his own armed escort of 50 SS guards.

#### Plan 2

The second attempt was to take place during lunchtime in the mess hall. At a given signal, Tresckow was to rise from the table and open fire on Hitler as he ate lunch, but the sight of so many SS close to Hitler arouses fear of failure and so once again the attempt was aborted. Colonel Tresckow (Now Major General) on hearing the news of the failure of the July Plot of 1944, in which he was implicated, committed suicide by walking into a Russian line of fire on the Eastern Front.

#### Plan 3

As Hitler leaves by plane for Berlin, Tresckow instructs Schlabrendorff to hand over a package to Colonel Heinz Brandt who is flying back with Hitler. The package, containing two bottles of brandy, is a gift for Major-General Helmuth Stieff in Berlin. Concealed in the package is a time bomb but it failed to explode owing to the high altitude cold air freezing the acid in the detonator cap. When news of Hitler's safe arrival reached the plotters, Schlabrendorf immediately flew to Berlin with the regular courier plane and retrieved the package from Colonel Brandt, replacing it with two genuine bottles.

In February, 1945, Albert Speer, Hitler's Armaments Minister, came to the conclusion that his Führer was deliberately committing high treason against his own people. It was then that Speer decided that Hitler must be eliminated. During one of his many walks in the Chancellery gardens he took note of a ventilation shaft leading to Hitler's bunker. An idea formed in his mind and he discreetly asked the head of munitions production, Dieter Stahl, if he could procure some of the new gas, Tabun, which he intended to conduct into the ventilation shaft of the bunker. Stahl, who was sympathetic to the idea, revealed that Tabun was effective only after an explosion and would not be suitable for the purpose which Speer intended. Another gas had to be found but the whole idea was thwarted when armed SS sentries were placed around the bunker entrances and on the roof. A chimney had also been built around the ventilation shaft to a height of ten feet which put the air-intake of the shaft out of reach. At the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, Albert Speer was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment, which he served to the very last minute, in Spandau Prison, Berlin. While in Spandau he wrote his memoirs "Inside The Third Reich"