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Disobeying Hitler: German Resistance After Valkyrie

By Randall Hansen



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On July 20, 1944, Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg was executed in the courtyard of the Third Reich's military headquarters in Berlin for attempting to assassinate Adolf Hitler. A member of the unsuccessful plot to overthrow the Nazi government -- codenamed Operation Valkyrie -- Stauffenberg was shot by a firing squad along with his co-conspirators, and their bodies were dumped in a shallow grave.

Most discussions of German resistance during World War II end here, with the failed July 20 plot and the subsequent execution of its leaders. And yet this was far from the last act of disobedience carried out against the Nazi regime, as Randall Hansen reveals in his fascinating new book. Although "resistance" as a commitment to regime change all but ended with Stauffenberg, Hansen shows that if we consider resistance as disobedience -- of orders to detonate a bridge, to wreck a factory, to destroy a harbor or to defend a city to the last man -- then a very different picture emerges. Resistance-as-disobedience continued, and indeed increased, throughout late 1944 and early 1945. And it had a more profound and lasting material effect on the war and its aftermath than did the military resistance culminating in Stauffenberg's attempt on Hitler's life. From the refusal to destroy Paris and key locations in southern France to the unwillingness to implement a scorched earth policy on German soil, disobedience in the Third Reich manifested in numerous ways after 1944, and ultimately impacted the course of the war by saving thousands of Allied and German lives, keeping supply lines open, and preserving cities and infrastructure.

In a period of thorough and at times fanatical obedience, the few instances of disobedience against the Nazi regime become all the more striking. Considering various forms of opposition across the Western Front, *Disobeying Hitler* is a significant contribution to the literature on German resistance.



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Editorial Review

Review

"Scholar Hansen employs his considerable knowledge of Allied movement into Germany at the close of the war to reveal where the pockets of resistance were located, especially in light of Hitler's furious, scorched-earth endgame...An authoritative, compelling study sure to raise hackles." -- *Kirkus Reviews*

"A vivid and compelling portrait of the resistance in France to Hitler's instructions that Paris 'is to become a heap of rubble.' Above all, Hansen's book is a chilling look at Nazi Germany in collapse." --*The Globe and Mail*

"In *Disobeying Hitler*, Canadian historian Randall Hansen breaks some fresh ground by examining and documenting German resistance efforts after July 20, 1944, the date of the assassination attempt... Hansen makes a compelling case that the German leaders of the resistance who survived the Nazi purges that followed the failure of the July 20th assassination attempt should be credited with saving many thousands of lives on both sides in the European conflict." --*Winnipeg Free Press*

"Many military officers and Nazi officials, obedient to the last, did exactly as Hitler instructed, and fought to the end, squandering countless lives and wreaking devastation in a final explosion of vandalism. But a number did not, choosing instead to disobey Hitler's decree. These individuals are the focus of *Disobeying Hitler*, a welcome counterpoint to the Hollywood image of German resistance as portrayed by Tom Cruise in *Valkyrie*. The truth was rather more complex, and much more interesting. Hansen has done a fine job of rescuing from obscurity these few, morally hazy individuals, making decisions at the messy end of a cataclysmic war." --Ben Macintyre, *The Times* (UK)

"Randall Hansen here offers a comprehensive review of instances when German military and civilian individuals holding relevant positions deliberately chose to disobey Hitler's orders...Hansen shows in carefully crafted accounts how some German commanders saved cities and towns by negotiating local surrenders with American, British, French, and Soviet generals." --Gerhard L. Weinberg

"Resistors had different reasons for opposing Hitler, from practical to noble, and *Disobeying Hitler* is an impressive overview of these many acts of defiance outside of the July 20 plot in the Wolf's Lair." --*Breitbart.com*

"*Disobeying Hitler* offers stories not often told. They are stories about the falling apart of a totalitarian state and the opening of personal choice for those with the courage to disobey. Ordinary people are given brief chances for heroism that only sometimes ends well." --*The Seattle Times*

About the Author

Randall Hansen is a Professor of Politics and holds a Research Chair at the University of Toronto. He is the author or editor of five books, including a bestselling narrative history of the Allied bombing of Germany during the Second World War, *Fire and Fury*.

Users Review

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David Hogan:

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Stephen Wilson:

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