

Operation Valkyrie

MX in - The Ride of the Valkyries (as if through radio)

SFX - radio broadcast of Hitler speaking

Whenever Hitler spoke on Radio Berlin, 'The Ride of the Valkyries' from Wagner's *Ring* was used as an introduction. *The Valkyrie* is the second of the four operas that comprise the *Ring*.

SFX - as Hitler's voice fades, the music becomes clearer, as if it's no longer coming through the radio but is live on stage

MX in - Wotan's Farewell

The Valkyries were daughters of the king of the gods – Wotan – who had lost an eye. They carried heroes fallen in battle to Valhalla. Wotan's favourite daughter was Brünnhilde. She is 'the' Valkyrie.

When the iconic 'Ride' is played the sisters meet on a mountaintop. Brünnhilde is fleeing Wotan. Wotan wishes to punish her, for she has disobeyed him. Her sisters desire to protect her. What was Brünnhilde's offence? Wotan, following his wife's insistence, ordered that Siegmund should be killed in his fight to the death with Hunding. Brünnhilde instead supports Siegmund, disobeying the literal word of Wotan's command because she knows her father really wishes Siegmund's victory.

For her disobedience – her treason – Wotan sentences Brünnhilde to die, then relents and sentences her to sleep surrounded by a ring of fire. Only the greatest hero would be able to brave the fire and wake her.

In 1943, Hitler approved 'Operation Valkyrie' a plan for the Army to take control throughout the Reich in the event of a slave uprising. There were more than a million foreign slave workers in Germany. They had little opportunity to organise a revolt against their masters, but the Nazis feared the monster they had spawned. The orders came into effect on 13 August 1943.

The code name 'Valkyrie' was chosen by design: the Valkyrie was someone who could be trusted to fight for the real wishes of her master, but who slept until her moment came.

SFX - The Ring comes to a close; applause

This is *Treason*, the remarkable true story of Claus von Stauffenberg and the plot to assassinate Hitler.

Episode six, "Operation Valkyrie".

The Nazi Reich was a seething mass of rival organisations, divergent lines of command, and divided allegiances. The rivalry suited those at the top of the structure, because it kept potential challengers in a state of constant tension with each other. But it was highly dangerous if the nation had to meet an internal challenge at short notice.

MX in - drones

The German Army was divided into many units and regions of authority. These units served the replacement requirements, and ongoing service needs, of armies stationed in the field. The units that remained within Germany were described as the 'Home Army', which was controlled from the Home Army Headquarters in Berlin. The Home Army was housed in a building known as the 'Bendlerblock'.

Under Operation Valkyrie, all troops, weapons, transport and equipment were made available to the commanders of the Home Army. Party leaders, the SS, the Gestapo – all would be under the control of the Army once 'Valkyrie' was ordered. Moreover, none of these Nazi agencies were involved in developing 'Valkyrie' or knew of its existence. The need to keep Operation Valkyrie secret was emphasised in all orders. Leaders of the military regions were provided with sealed orders to be opened only on receipt of the code word.

'Valkyrie' provided the perfect framework for the Army to conduct a coup. It would need careful work to redraft the orders, and to place conspirators into key command positions, but the Valkyrie plan was authorised. Officers and men could be expected to obey Valkyrie orders.

In August 1943, Claus was summoned by General Olbricht to Berlin. Olbricht had primary responsibility for drafting the detailed orders for Valkyrie, and would have special responsibilities for their implementation. Although by no means recovered, Claus was initiated into the details of the operation. Immediately, he began the task of fine-tuning the 'Valkyrie' orders – redrafting them for a complete takeover of the Reich. Having 'Operation Valkyrie' to work with, Claus could see a way forward. A way for the resistance movement to seize power.

SFX - typewriter tapping

Tresckow, Claus and Olbricht continually worked on the Valkyrie orders, which had to be typed. Tresckow's wife Erika, and Margarete von Oven, a secretary in the Bendlerblock, undertook this work. Tresckow insisted that they wore gloves, so as never to leave fingerprints on the paper. The typewriters had to be securely hidden, and could be used for no other work. Discarded drafts had to be burnt.

The conspirators knew that the success of their plot hinged on taking centres of key importance. Paris would have to be secured - from here the armies of the west were controlled. The conspirators would have to take Vienna, through which supplies for the armies in Italy passed. They would need to take Prague to deny it to the Nazis. But, by far, the most important strongpoint was the capital, Berlin. If the conspirators controlled Berlin they would probably control the Reich. Without it, their plot was hopeless.

MX in - Valkyrie theme

Upon the death of the Führer, the resistance would claim “an unscrupulous clique of party leaders” had tried to take control. Therefore, in order to save the Reich, supreme command of the Armed Forces would be entrusted to Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben, who would in turn delegate power to resistance members dotted over the German Reich. The *Waffen-SS*, elite, well-equipped troops, fiercely loyal to the Führer, would be incorporated into the Army, under the local army commanders. The orders imposed the ‘elimination’ of the SD security apparatus, including the Gestapo.

The orders gave the pretext that the plotters were acting on behalf of ‘the Reich government’ and also accused party leaders of attempting to ‘stab the deeply-committed front in the back’. The plotters knew they would be accused of treason: they decided to get in first.

SFX - montage of footsteps; knocking on doors; telemetry communication; phone ringing; typewriter; a lot of work being done

It was a bold and daring plan. To make it work, Tresckow and Stauffenberg set about recruiting officers to key positions. Their work was complicated by the constant redeployment of the officers they appointed. Allied bombing also meant that the buildings to be occupied, and the method of doing so, needed continual revision.

SFX - clanging of the typewriter fades into the German countryside

The pressure and stress it put upon Claus was extreme. At home, Nina found him changed. Half-jokingly, she accused him of acting like someone in a conspiracy. Claus admitted that he was, but gave her no names. He told her that the less she knew the better.

It was a serious matter for anyone to be involved in a conspiracy against the Nazis. For her husband and the father of her children to take such a step bordered on the irresponsible. Nina might have preferred he stay out of it, whatever the fate of Germany. He was risking their family to save their

country. But Nina knew the man she married. Terrified, she supported his decision.

Claus knew of the mass extermination of the Jews – to say nothing of the other enormities of the Nazi regime. How could he sit down at meals with his family, play with his children, offer advice to growing sons and daughters, when he, as a German officer, shared responsibility for such things? If he did nothing about the Nazi regime, if Jewish families were being destroyed in the name of Germany, then acceptance of this or even reaching an accommodation with it would destroy all that it meant to have his own family.

MX in - Claus' theme (piano version)

For Claus, to enjoy his family after turning his back on the moral destruction of his country was unthinkable. He would be so compromised that he would only be able to bring part of himself back to his loved ones.

In September 1943, shortly after Claus took up his duties with General Olbricht, Colonel Boecker of the General Staff discussed the proposed coup with him. On Claus' desk was a photo of his children. Boecker pointed to it. He didn't need to voice the question which it raised. Claus looked at the photograph and said: "I'm doing it for them."

Almost as soon as Claus von Stauffenberg began working on Operation Valkyrie, it was clear that he had the spark of energy which would reinvigorate the opposition. He was recognised as the natural leader of the movement, even though he was only 35.

Tresckow and Olbricht were confident in Claus, and set about placing him in contact with all the disparate groups of the German opposition movement.

This included men and women with a wide range of political views, class backgrounds, and religious persuasions. Profound differences as to methods, and as to the shape of a new Germany, permeated their discussions. Their

motivations also varied, although there was considerable overlap. But they were united in detesting Hitler and Nazism. They were also united in having the courage and character to take a stand against the evil into which their nation had fallen.

MX in - Mendelssohn (public domain)

Knowing that they needed the police to cooperate in the coup, Claus was introduced to Count Wolf von Helldorf, the Berlin Chief of Police. Helldorf had been involved in the 1938 coup attempt, and gave his backing to Claus and his daring plan. The police would fall into line behind Helldorf.

In September 1943, Tresckow introduced Claus to a civilian leader of the resistance – the politician Carl Goerdeler.

Goerdeler was a former mayor of Leipzig who resigned his office when the Nazis removed a statue of Mendelssohn (who was Jewish) from the square outside the town hall. Nominally Goerdeler had an industrial job thereafter, but he used his position to work indefatigably for the German resistance.

Goerdeler was the designated political leader of the resistance and was to be chancellor of a new Germany, with Beck as head of state.

Claus also met several Social Democrat politicians, most notably Julius Leber.

Leber had served as a Social Democrat deputy in the Reichstag from 1924 to 1933 – when the Nazis sent him to a concentration camp. After his release in 1937, he gravitated to resistance circles. He was a friend of Beck, but once he met him, quickly developed an even closer friendship with Claus.

There was some talk that Leber would make a better chancellor than Goerdeler. Leber would almost certainly be more acceptable to most Germans, and Claus wanted him for that role. But Leber would not accept the role of chancellor.

In late 1943, Claus was introduced to other groups within the resistance, most notably the 'Kreisau Circle'. The group debated the way Germany should be structured after the Nazis. At their meetings they delivered papers and debated political theory.

Although accepted in the Kreisau Circle, Julius Leber remained aloof from it, concerned about the group's all-talk-and-no-action tendencies; their 'planning euphoria'.

Claus also found the Kreisau Circle frustrating. A man firmly believing in action, he did not trust the airy intellectualism of Count Helmuth von Moltke, one of the Circle's central figures. There appears to have been a genuine personality clash between the two men. Moltke never agreed to the assassination of Hitler, while Claus was frustrated with esoteric discussions, especially when the group would not commit itself to full participation in the coup. He commented to one friend that the time for tea parties and debates was over.

However, these personal frustrations do not appear to have inhibited cooperation between Claus and the group, which may have been down to the presence of Adam von Trott.

MX in - Resistance theme

Claus's brother Berthold had introduced Claus to Trott before the war. The two men became close friends, Trott admiring the way Claus' 'fiery' character, had given new impetus and vigour to the resistance.

Trott was a diplomat who joined the Nazi party in 1940 as cover. He established many contacts abroad on behalf of the resistance, including with exiled opponents of the regime. Under his guidance, the Kreisau Circle sought a Europe which came together without borders, not under German hegemony, but with a common market and even a common currency.

By the end of 1943, Claus's determination to act had brought together disparate groups within the German opposition.

He had accelerated the whole movement.

MX out - Resistance theme plays out

In October 1943, Claus asked Colonel Helmuth Stieff to kill Hitler. Stieff was head of the Army High Command's organisation section, and had been won over to the conspiracy by Tresckow. He hated the Nazi regime.

Stieff considered smuggling a bomb into Hitler's briefing room. Claus gave him explosives for the task, but Stieff – not often invited to a Führer conference – couldn't come up with a way of getting the bomb into the briefing hut and detonating it unobserved.

Stieff then made a plan to kill Hitler at an inspection of uniforms. The brave officer modelling the uniform, in which explosives could be secreted, would blow up Hitler – and himself.

The idea was sound, so Claus sought a soldier prepared to make this sacrifice. He found a much-decorated officer – Major Baron Axel von dem Bussche-Streithorst. Bussche had been scarred by the regime.

MX in - dark drones

SFX - sounds of an airfield; windswept snow fields; holes being dug; children crying; then gunshots

A year earlier, Bussche found himself at Dubno airfield in Ukraine. There, he witnessed the Ukrainian SS, in calm, orderly fashion, compel Jews – including many women and children – to dig a pit, strip in the snow and lie face-down. More Jews were compelled to strip and lie on the freshly killed or still-writhing bodies of those in the pit.

The SS murdered five thousand people that day. And Bussche saw it all.

Bussche knew these SS men were acting under orders. The initiative for mass murder of the Jews must have come from the government – to which he had sworn allegiance.

Bussche was traumatised by this experience. He was determined to do anything in his power to remove Hitler and his regime. Including assassinating Hitler.

He told Claus he could be counted on for the task.

SFX - scissors and sewing machine

Colonel Stieff arranged for a one-kilogram charge used for bridge demolition to be delivered to Bussche. The initial plan was to strap the explosive to his body, but he found he could conceal it all in one of the capacious pockets of his wide army trousers.

All was ready. The conspirators waited for Hitler to carry out the uniforms inspection.

Hitler did not give advance notice of his movements, but his aides provided an approximate date. From 23 November 1943 Bussche held himself in readiness for the assassination.

SFX - from a long way up, a bomb falls; bombs hit their target around the building, before a direct hit destroys it

But then, an Allied bombing raid hit the building housing the new uniforms and they were all destroyed. Until fresh uniforms could be made, Bussche was instructed to return to his unit on the eastern front.

Two months later, Bussche was severely wounded and lost a leg. He was hospitalised for months. The conspirators needed to find someone else who could be called upon when the time arrived. For six months Bussche would carry the small box containing his bomb from hospital to hospital hoping for another chance. When it never came, he dumped the bomb in a lake.

The plotters received word that Hitler would inspect the uniforms in early February 1944. But with Bussche out of the picture they needed to find a new would-be assassin.

Claus asked his aide – Lieutenant Werner von Haeften – to carry out the assassination. Haeften wasn't fond of blowing himself up, but thought he might be able to shoot Hitler with a pistol. He discussed the issue with his older brother, Hans-Bernd von Haeften, who was a Christian, and a member of the Kreisau circle and the resistance. Hans-Bernd opposed the assassination saying 'The methods of the gangster must not be used – even against the gangster.' He worked hard to dissuade Werner from making the attempt, asking whether he was sure that this was a task given him by God.

MX in - drones (string ensemble)

Not only did Werner abandon his plan to shoot Hitler, he continued to be very troubled as to the morality of killing the Führer.

And so, with the inspection only a few days away, Claus approached 21 year old Lieutenant Ewald-Heinrich von Kleist-Schmenzin and asked if he was prepared to make the attempt.

The young Lieutenant first wanted to discuss the matter with his father – Count Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, a lawyer and member of the resistance who had visited Britain in 1938 on behalf of the conspiracy.

To advise his son about such a drastic act called for extraordinary moral courage. Kleist-Schmenzin Sr. stood up, went to the window and gazed out.

After a moment's thought he replied 'You have to do it. Anyone who falters at such a moment will never again be at one with himself in this life.' He urged his son under no circumstances to miss this opportunity to fulfil so vital a duty.

Ewald-Heinrich told Claus he would do it.

But then, repeatedly, Hitler postponed the uniform inspection. Exasperated, the resistance searched for another way of killing him.

MX out

In March 1944, General Tresckow lent a hand by approaching another young officer, Captain Eberhard von Breitenbuch. Breitenbuch was to accompany Field Marshal Busch, the commander of Army Group Centre, to the Berghof to confer with Hitler.

Tresckow and another conspirator met with the young captain. They told him he would be holding Germany's fate in his hands, that it would depend on him whether this miserable war and its air raids on women and children, and its hundreds of thousands of casualties, would continue.

At the end of this speech, Breitenbuch indicated he was prepared to take on the task. He was given a small metal bomb, and told to activate the timer as he went into his meeting, and hold Hitler until it exploded.

Breitenbuch was taken aback. He was prepared to sacrifice his life, but he had to be sure that he would kill Hitler. In the end, Breitenbuch was only willing to make a pistol attack on the Führer.

MX in - tense heartbeat

Days later, Captain Breitenbuch arrived with Field Marshal Busch at the Berghof. Breitenbuch removed his cap, and his belt with his service revolver. He kept his loaded Browning pistol in his trouser pocket.

In Berlin, the conspirators were forewarned. Initial preparations for the Operation Valkyrie were under way.

Breitenbuch waited as more and more officers gathered. At last the doors to the hall swung open. An SS officer announced that the Führer invited the gentlemen to enter. Just as Breitenbuch was about to walk in, the SS officer grasped his arm. Aides were not to be present in the conference that day.

Breitenbuch waited in the anteroom as the conference proceeded. From time to time, SS men walked through the anteroom, looking closely at him. He had to remain outwardly calm. Inside, his mind was racing, fearing his plan had been suspected and wondering how he would get rid of his pistol.

Eventually, Field Marshal Busch emerged. Breitenbuch left with him – his plan undetected.

MX out

The reason for tightening of security on that day remains unclear, but Breitenbuch was not prepared to risk such an attempt again.

Each failed assassination attempt increased Claus's anxiety for action, but the conspirators were running out of options. Claus struggled to find a new way to kill Hitler and launch the insurrection. The tide of war was flowing against Germany and the resistance feared it would be over before they had a chance to act.

In June 1944, Claus was appointed Chief of Staff of the Home Army. He would now be in a prime place to lead the resistance.

When he reported to his new superior officer, he stood before a man who was his antithesis in outlook and temperament.

Colonel General Friedrich Fromm was cynical, where his new chief of staff was idealistic. He was lazy, where his subordinate was dynamically energetic. Fromm preferred to sit on the fence until there was a clear winner; his new executive officer would commit himself from the outset and shape the conclusion to his will. Fromm wanted to sit out the war. Claus wanted to end it.

In his new position, Claus could issue orders in Fromm's name, and would be relied on to draft appropriate orders. But only Fromm could issue the code word for 'Valkyrie'. He was the man with ultimate authority, the man who had the power to give orders directly when the moment came. Claus knew he must win him over as soon as possible.

MX in - serious, playful piano

At their first meeting at the 'Bendlerblock', Claus told Fromm at the outset that he considered himself duty bound to advise his superior that he was considering a coup.

Claus's boldness in dealing with the matter so directly took Fromm off guard, giving rise to a still more incredible response. Fromm must have known that if Claus were caught, suspicion would fall on him as Claus's superior officer. He must have known that a claim of ignorance would be treated sceptically if things went wrong.

But Fromm merely thanked Claus for his frankness, and changed the subject. Rather than take a stand on the issue, Fromm preferred to feign ongoing ignorance. He had made several strong remarks against Hitler, yet he had kept his counsel when approached by plotters. The fence is an uncomfortable place to sit. In Fromm's case it was utterly perilous.

For his part, Claus had hopes that, when the time came, Fromm would throw his authority behind the coup. His decision to confront Fromm was a calculated bid to bring matters to a head.

SFX - radio broadcast of D-Day

News clip: This is Robert St. John in the NBC News Room in New York. Ladies and gentleman, we may be approaching a fateful hour. All night long bulletins have been pouring in from Berlin claiming that D-Day is here; claiming that the invasion of western Europe has begun.

On 7 June 1944, the day after D Day, and two days after the Allies captured Rome, Claus and Fromm travelled to the Berghof for a special briefing with Hitler, along with Keitel, Himmler, Göring and Speer. Hitler had not met with Fromm for more than two years. Fromm must have realised that the Führer was more interested in seeing Claus than him.

Claus was very highly regarded. It was reported that Hitler chose Claus for the position as Fromm's Chief of Staff to invigorate Fromm, who had 'grown tired'. A general had remarked that Claus was 'the best horse in the General Staff stable.'

MX in - Claus' theme mixes with the Nazi theme

And so it was, for the first time, that the protagonist of this drama confronted the antagonist.

Here stood a feckless, unemployable neurotic; the ill-educated son of a petty rural official who had demonstrated, in his rise to become the conqueror of Europe, immense willpower, but preached hatred. A man of charm who crammed his jails and concentration camps with political dissenters.

Facing him was the scion of the Hohenstaufens, an aristocrat loyal to his nation; a decorated war hero, disciplined staff officer, a husband and father. A man determined to restore Germany's moral greatness.

Hitler took Claus's maimed left hand in both of his, greeting him warmly.

"My dear, Colonel Stauffenberg."

With Allied troops having survived their first night on the beaches of Normandy, Hitler no doubt had much to distract him. He continually shuffled situation maps around, his hands shaking, and paused frequently to stare unnervingly at Claus.

Claus found himself unimpressed by his Führer. Hitler's eyes made him look poor and weak. Claus found the atmosphere around him degenerate, mouldering and rotten, making it difficult to breathe. He viewed most of those present as psychopaths.

The meeting lasted an hour. The wounded young colonel made an impression. Himmler personally helped him on with his coat and carried his heavy briefcase.

For Claus, not only could he take the measure of Hitler, the man, but he was able to assess the Führer's security arrangements first-hand.

SFX - battlefield sounds reminiscent of D-Day

Events on the battlefield were moving fast. The resistance wondered if there was still any point in moving forward. Indeed, after the Allied landing at Normandy, and with the war clearly in its final phase, Claus asked Tresckow if the assassination and attempted coup still served any practical purpose.

SFX - telemetry

Tresckow sent word back:

The assassination must be attempted, cost what it will. Even if it does not succeed, we must take action in Berlin. The point now is not whether the coup has any practical purpose, but to show before the eyes of the world and of history that the German resistance is ready to stake its all. Compared to this, nothing else matters.

MX in - Bruckner's 7th Symphony (fourth movement)

Although holding the Allies in a confined beachhead in Normandy, the German military situation in the west strained to breaking point.

On 29 June 1944 Field Marshal Rommel went to the Berghof to see Hitler. He intended to tell him the unvarnished truth.

Rommel opened the conference with the words 'The whole world stands arrayed against Germany, and this disprop-'

Hitler cut him off: 'Would the Field Marshal please concern himself with the military, not the political, situation?'

Rommel rejoined, in a way that must have been rare in Hitler's presence, that history demanded that he deal with 'the whole situation'. Hitler rebuked him again.

Rommel then set out in stark terms the catastrophic predicament of his forces.

Before the end of the conference, Rommel tried again. He castigated the inadequacy of the Luftwaffe, and then said he could not leave without speaking to Hitler 'about Germany'.

Hitler responded: 'Field Marshal, I believe it would be better if you left the room.'

Rommel took his leave, and never saw Hitler again.

From then on, a steady stream of resistance figures came to and from Rommel's headquarters in La Roche Guyon. Although he continued to oppose assassination, Rommel spoke to many officers of his intention to be rid of Hitler

MX in - Resistance theme (simple)

Days later, the resistance received word that at last there would be a uniform inspection. One of the conspirators, Helmuth Stieff, by now promoted to the rank of general, would be present and volunteered to kill Hitler.

Claus met with Stieff on 6 July 1944, the day before the uniform inspection, to hand over the explosives.

But on the day of the inspection...

MX out - delay echoes

Nothing happened.

There is no account of what went on that day, but what we do know is that Hitler walked out unscathed.

Claus's frustration must have been all but overpowering. Months of waiting, plotting and being in a state of readiness had all come to naught.

And so, under a heavy dark burden, but acutely aware of his duty at this moment, Claus decided to carry out the assassination himself.

MX in - Claus' theme

There were many arguments against Claus von Stauffenberg taking on the role of assassin. The most important was that he was needed at the nerve centre of the coup in Berlin to direct the seizure of power. Hitler was based outside the capital, and in the hours between the assassination and his return to Berlin Claus would not be available.

Another reason was that he was severely disabled. To expect a man with only three fingers and one eye to carry out a complex assassination was asking for

trouble. From a personal point of view the decision was very costly. Not only was this highly dangerous, it was the most thankless task in the conspiracy. Stauffenberg's name and honour meant a great deal. Murdering Hitler meant that he would sacrifice even these things. He knew there would be no role for the assassin in the new Germany. All he could hope for was a fair trial.

On the other hand, someone had to do it. Claus had access to the Führer, and was not prepared to wait on events.

MX in - saintly drones

Early in July, Claus asked his brother Berthold and a friend to help draft an oath. All three had been part of Stefan George's 'Secret Germany'. The ceremonial oath was a ritual which strengthened Claus's resolve and called to mind his motivation. Claus said he had little hope of survival and wanted a manifesto of his aims.

In full uniform, Claus and Berthold visited the grave of their father by night, where they swore the oath. It spoke to the importance of the aristocracy, and its obligation of service. Yet, political leadership should not be centred on aristocrats, but on those who by their natural gifts and discipline are outstanding.

The oath placed emphasis on 'all Germans' being guaranteed law and justice. It implored an 'inseparable community', decrying the idea of an underclass, and in particular the criminal treatment of the Jews.

The oath repeatedly invoked the greatness of Germany. These men were engaged in treason, yet again and again they made clear that this treason was borne of their love of their country, not treachery towards it.

Claus' oath carefully opposed the whole of Nazi ideology, but without paying that ideology the compliment of mentioning it.

MX in - show theme begins

Soon after the night in the graveyard, Claus had a ring fashioned, with a Latin engraving quoting the final line of one of Stefan George's poems: *finis initium* – 'I am the end and a beginning'.

It was an appropriate motto for his newfound resolve as Hitler's assassin.