

9 The dead of night

SFX - maybe some brandy pouring into a glass; a radio tuning in to different stations; German music and announcers; office atmos

MX - German public domain

The coup had collapsed around him, but General Fromm, commander of the Home Army, was not sure. Arrested by the conspirators, he waited in his private quarters, trying to hear the latest news on the radio. To the last, he wanted to make sure which way the wind blew before he acted.

SFX - keys in the lock; Fromm's door is open

Finally, an officer came and reported that the conspirators had been detained. The key members of the coup were being held in his office, while all other suspects were under guard in Claus's office. Fromm pondered a little longer, then made his way to confront the conspirators.

SFX - radio fades into rustling papers; matches being struck

In the Home Army commander's office, soldiers levelled sub-machine guns at the ringleaders. Claus von Stauffenberg stood impassively at the map table. He was obviously wounded, but no one attended to him. He made no complaint. General Olbricht stood beside him. The elderly Colonel General Beck sat at a table. Colonel Mertz and General Hoepner stood to the side. Lieutenant Haeften desperately tried to burn papers on the floor.

There was a commotion, and then a hush. Fromm stood in the doorway, pistol in hand, at the head of a retinue of officers. He paused to gloat.

Claus glared at him with a look of contempt.

'So gentlemen,' Fromm said, 'now it's my turn to treat you as you treated me this afternoon.'

But Fromm had no intention of doing to these men what they had done to him – locking him in a room with brandy and sandwiches. Claus, Olbricht, Mertz and Haeften had attempted a coup. As their superior officer Fromm had known all too much about it and had done nothing to prevent it. Once interrogated by the Gestapo, the conspirators in his office could implicate him in high treason. His very life was at stake.

Now, to protect himself, he would at last proceed decisively.

‘You have been caught in the act of high treason. I declare you under arrest. Lay down your weapons!’

MX in - theme

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

Episode nine, “The Dead of Night”.

MX fade

SFX - office atmos

MX in - ominous drones

Werner von Haeften, the man who had felt it would be morally wrong to kill Hitler, made to shoot Fromm. Claus restrained him. This would not be a killing for a greater purpose – just empty blood-letting. There had been enough of that.

Colonel General Beck, former Chief of the German General Staff, was Fromm’s former superior, and a revered officer. ‘Surely you will not ask me, your old commander, to do that. I can draw the necessary conclusions from this sorry situation. I would like to retain my pistol – for personal purposes.’

‘Go ahead,’ said Fromm, ‘but be quick about it.’

Beck sat down in an armchair and loaded his pistol.

SFX - loading gun

Fromm warned him not to point it at him. Claus knelt beside Beck to support him.

'I think of earlier times—' he began.

'I said be quick about it!' barked Fromm.

Beck looked at Fromm and then hurriedly squeezed the trigger.

SFX - gun shot

The bullet merely grazed the top of his skull.

'Did it fire properly?' Beck asked.

'Help the old fellow,' said Fromm. Two officers approached Beck.

SFX - gun shot

Beck pulled the trigger. This time he severely wounded himself. He was left writhing in his death throes.

Fromm turned to the other prisoners: 'Have you any final wishes? If you want to write anything, you still have a few moments.'

Claus made no answer. Mertz and Haeften stood silently with him.

Hoepner appealed to Fromm, saying he had nothing to do with the conspiracy. He would be able to defend himself in a trial. Fromm considered.

Olbricht said 'I would like to write something.'

With a strange burst of sentimentality, Fromm led him across to a writing table, "Come over to the table here, where you always used to sit opposite me.'

SFX - writing

Olbricht sat writing a final note to his wife in a silence broken only by Beck's groans.

SFX - quick footsteps come to a stop; German voice: "General Fromm!"

Word came that a detachment of troops from the *Grossdeutschland* Guard Battalion had reached the Bendlerblock. At any moment the Gestapo might arrive, with authority to question the conspirators.

MX out

Time was running out for Fromm.

The Colonel General quickly proclaimed 'In the name of the Führer, I have convened a court martial, which has pronounced the following sentence: Colonel of the General Staff Mertz von Quirnheim, General of Infantry Olbricht, this colonel whose name I will not speak, and First Lieutenant Haeften are condemned to death.'

He turned to Hoepner and ordered him escorted to military prison. Although Hoepner had been involved in the coup attempt, he knew nothing of Fromm looking the other way, and could give no evidence against him. Hoepner was led away under close guard.

Fromm detailed an officer to organise a squad to carry out the executions at once.

Claus now spoke for the first time. 'This affair is my responsibility. All the others have acted as soldiers under my command, and have merely obeyed orders.'

Fromm stood in the doorway, looked at him, but made no answer. He merely stepped to one side so that the condemned men could be led out.

Once they had left, he ordered an officer to put Beck out of his misery. The officer, unable to take such a step against his former commander, passed the order to a sergeant, who dragged Beck to an adjoining room and finished off the former Chief of the General Staff.

SFX - dragging body across floor; muffled gun shot

Fromm condemned the accused without any charge being formulated, without giving them any opportunity to answer the charge, and without them ever facing a convened court martial. He ordered the sentence carried out immediately – denying the normal recourse to appeal or clemency. Fromm's actions were not challenged by any of his subordinates, but they had no semblance of legality, and were little short of murder.

Legalities did not matter now. All that mattered was power.

After midnight in the courtyard of the Bendlerblock, Claus von Stauffenberg confronted the final reality. He had botched the assassination. The coup had unravelled. Now they were condemned as traitors.

MX in - Wagner (as in first scene of EP01)

They could not then have known the fate of their families, but must have held grave fears as they made their way out into the night.

SFX - sound design used in EP01 opening scene returns

In the courtyard, trucks and staff cars manoeuvred so their headlights shone on a pile of construction sand.

As the sentenced officers walked down the stairway to the courtyard, Haeften supported his wounded colonel.

The condemned men were led out to the pile of sand.

A squad of ten non-commissioned officers formed the firing party. They marched into position and turned to face the place of execution.

A large crowd of Wehrmacht officers lined the sides of the courtyard – spectators for this moment in history.

The doomed men were called forward in order of rank.

SFX - German voice: "General Olbricht, step forward."; then gunshots

Olbricht was first. The orders rang out. He collapsed in a hail of fire.

SFX - German voice: "Colonel Stauffenberg, step forward."; then another German voice: "Long Live Sacred Germany!"; then gunshots

Claus was ordered to stand forward next. Just before the final command, he called out, in a loud, clear voice 'Long live sacred Germany!'

Then the order to shoot was given, but Werner von Haeften, loyal to the last, hurled himself in front of Claus, intercepting the volley, and fell dead. Claus remained standing.

The orders were given again.

A crash of rifles echoed round the square.

Claus lay dead on the cobblestones.

Finally, blinking under his spectacles in the fierce light of the headlights, Mertz stood forward, as ordered. The commands rang out, followed by the blast of the final volley. Mertz lay with the others.

MX in - a moment to breathe and shift focus

Fromm mounted the running board of one of the trucks, and gave an impassioned speech. There was nothing like knowing a cause was already won to stir Fromm to fight for it. He led the crowd in cheers: 'Our Führer, Adolf Hitler! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!'

Anxious to establish his credentials with the Nazis, he ordered a teleprinter message dispatched announcing that the attempted putsch by disloyal generals had been violently suppressed.

He then hurried to Goebbels's quarters to personally bring news of the successful end of the coup.

Soldiers unceremoniously bundled the bodies of their former officers – including Beck – into the back of an army truck.

SFX - truck shifts into gear and drives off

The truck ground its way out of the Bendlerstrasse, and drove to the quiet St Matthew's graveyard in Schöneberg.

SFX - holes being dug; bodies hit the ground; dirt placed back in the holes

MX in - solemn interpretation of Claus' theme

In the silent small hours of that night, a priest blessed Claus and the others while, by torchlight, soldiers dug five graves. There was no moon. They dumped in the bodies, wearing their uniforms and decorations, and quickly shovelled dirt over them.

SFX - with each fall of dirt, music and sound design becomes more muffled

With the crisis over, SS troops, in their ghastly uniforms adorned with death's heads, heavily accoutred with weapons, swept into the courtyard of the Bendlerblock like a withering wind. At their head was the commander of the SS in Berlin, Otto Skorzeny and the head of the Gestapo, Ernst Kaltenbrunner.

Anxious to show their loyalty to the regime, soldiers and officers threw out the Nazi salute and cried 'Heil Hitler!' as the Nazis swarmed in.

Skorzeny and Kaltenbrunner were furious to learn that key conspirators had been executed, taking with them their knowledge of who was involved. Told that further prisoners were awaiting execution in Claus's office, Skorzeny and Kaltenbrunner stormed up there.

Without a word, Skorzeny approached the prisoners and tore off their medals and insignia, one by one, throwing them into a coal-scuttle helmet on the floor. He then switched on the radio and made them listen.

SFX - radio music; then an interruption

It had taken some time to truck the necessary broadcasting equipment to the Wolf's Lair, but at last the music stopped. At one o'clock in the morning of 21 July, Hitler made his broadcast to the nation.

MX in - sinister drones

SFX - German voice: "The Fuhrer speaks."; then audio from Hitler's radio address

A very small clique of ambitious, irresponsible and at the same time senseless and criminally stupid officers have formed a plot to eliminate me and the German Wehrmacht command. The bomb was placed by Colonel Count von Stauffenberg. It severely injured several of my officers. Some have died. I myself sustained only some very minor scratches, bruises and burns.

The clique of usurpers is, as you may well imagine, very small. It is an extremely small band of criminal elements who are now being mercilessly exterminated ...

I regard this as confirmation of the task imposed on me by Providence to continue on the road of my life as I have done hitherto

Hitler had no basis for the repeated assertion that the group of conspirators was 'very small'. This was said, not because it was true, but for reasons of propaganda. It was essential for the Nazis to belittle and marginalise the movement against them. The lie was widely believed then, and it has not been eradicated from public perception to this day.

MX out

SFX - city atmos

At Goebbels's apartment, Fromm triumphantly announced that he had put down the coup. But the Nazi hierarchy was not fooled by Fromm's feigned ignorance of these events and he was immediately arrested.

Later, Fromm would be charged with cowardice. Care was taken to avoid the political embarrassment of charging the commander of the Home Army with treason. He was convicted, and sentenced to death by firing squad - just as he had done to the conspirators.

The Gestapo began its investigation. It remained to be seen who would escape the net.

MX in - neutral drones

Young Lieutenant Ewald-Heinrich von Kleist-Schmenzin, who had agreed a few months earlier to kill Hitler with a suicide bomb, and who had pressed his pistol into Fromm's belly, tried several times to get out of the Bendlerblock. After knocking

down the soldier guarding him he went looking for a window, but blundered into a room full of SS.

General Fellgiebel's activities in extending the blackout brought him early attention. When he received the inevitable summons from Keitel late that night, his adjutant asked him if he had his pistol. He replied: 'One doesn't do that. One takes a stand.'

Across Germany, some conspirators took flight. Others were exhausted, and could not contemplate more hiding and running. Some hoped that by surrendering they might protect their families – in this they were to be disappointed. Still others thought that the only honourable thing left was to let the evil of the regime be taken out on their bodies. Many hoped that at their trials, at least, they would have a chance to publicly denounce Hitler, and bear witness to their stand against the Nazi regime.

Fritz-Dietlof von der Schulenburg had struggled for years against Hitler. As the coup collapsed, a friend raised the possibility of flight. 'No,' replied Schulenburg, 'we must drain this cup to the dregs. We must sacrifice ourselves.'

Adam von Trott went into work as normal the day after the coup. Speaking with a friend, he admitted there was no hope left for the resistance. He was offered a flight out of the country to Madrid, but declined. He felt his escape would endanger his wife and children. As the Gestapo had not arrested him yet, there remained a chance he would be overlooked. But that hope proved futile, as he was soon taken away.

And so the arrests went on, at first just a few dozen, then several hundred, and finally thousands.

Major Hans-Ulrich von Oertzen was initially questioned by generals Körtzfleisch and Thüngen (the latter, himself a conspirator). No evidence came to light, but then a secretary implicated him in meetings with Stauffenberg while the coup was proceeding, and the Gestapo were called. Oertzen, 29 years old, had married four months earlier, and now managed to make a farewell phone call to his wife. He had already secreted two hand grenades in sand buckets in a corridor. Before the

Gestapo could take him away, he detonated one next to his head. Still alive, he crawled to the other one, pulled the pin, and held it in his mouth.

Deputy Chief of the General Staff General Wagner had not only supplied the aircraft for Stauffenberg, he had also urged obedience to the conspirators' orders. He knew that his situation was hopeless. On Sunday 23 July, at Army headquarters in Zossen, he shot himself.

Carl Goerdeler, the designated post-coup chancellor of Germany, remained hidden by friends for three weeks. Conscious of the great danger to which he was exposing his keepers, left for a perilous last journey to the place of his birth and his parents' graves. He was recognised, denounced, and arrested.

MX out

Meanwhile, Hitler visited those who had been wounded in the bomb blast, and congratulated the personnel who had helped rescue the injured. He ordered a special medal struck to decorate the officers who had suppressed the coup, particularly Major Remer.

In his radio broadcast, Hitler had darkly promised 'an accounting such as we National Socialists are accustomed to giving'. And he did not speak idly. Hitler worked himself into a rage. 'I want them hanged – strung up like cattle!' he yelled.

Himmler gave full vent to his obsession with mediaeval symbolism. He ordered that the bodies of Claus, Mertz, Olbricht, Haeften, and Beck be dug up, burnt, and their ashes scattered to the winds. Göring was not satisfied with this and said they should be scattered in a sewage farm.

Himmler followed this by urging the imposition of *Sippenhaft* – kin vengeance, or blood guilt – on the families of the conspirators. Relatives – from octogenarians to babes in arms – were rounded up and dispatched to concentration camps. Their blood was bad.

Himmler declared 'The Stauffenberg family will be exterminated down to its last member.'

MX in - Nazi theme

SFX - German countryside

News of the failed coup and her husband's death reached Nina von Stauffenberg. Three months pregnant, she walked in the woods where she was staying, grieving for her husband, terrified for her children, knowing that at the least it would be a long time before she could walk freely again.

She waited another day before telling the children what had happened. Expecting them to be interrogated, she was careful not to tell them that what their father did was right. So that they would have phrases to repeat if questioned, she told them that their father had made a 'mistake' and that 'providence protected our dear Führer'.

The children were stunned and confused. Being particularly close to his father, young Heimeran couldn't stop crying. The children couldn't understand why their noble father had attacked the Führer. Nina told them it was because he believed he had to do it for Germany.

SFX - night atmos; car pulls up; knock at the door

Later that night, the Gestapo arrived. They separated the grieving children from their mother, and arrested Nina and Claus's Uncle Nux.

Then the children were taken away.

SFX - a series of door knocks across the stereo range; a door is opened

Across the German Reich, overcoated Gestapo officers called at the homes of the extended Stauffenberg clan and detained them all.

SFX - night atmos plays out

Treason is written and narrated by me, Brian Walters. Script editing, original music, sound design and editing is by Sam Loy.

You can learn more about Claus von Stauffenberg and German Resistance with the book, *Treason*. Available through Apple Books or the website brianwalters.com You can find a link in the episode's show notes.

Thanks for listening. All the very best, and may you find the inspiration you need in your life.