

A high-contrast, black and white graphic of a person's face, possibly a woman, with a red text overlay. The image is heavily stylized, with the background being a dense, dark, textured pattern. The text is in a bold, red, sans-serif font, centered horizontally across the middle of the face. The overall aesthetic is reminiscent of a stencil or a graphic print.

ST AUF FERNSEHUNG

STAUFFENBERG

The story of how one man nearly toppled the Nazi German regime
on July 20th, 1944

Jane Bürgermeister

ONE

It was barely after noon and already the temperature was soaring into the forties. The sweat was raining down his back. His tension had reached fever pitch. He walked out of the narrow, dark confines of the bunker passage, up some steps and came face to face with the dazzling sunlight. The air was on fire. The forests seemed to dance in the flames.

Irritatingly, there were mosquitoes everywhere, obscuring his field of vision. They formed clouds in the sunbeams which had penetrated the pine trees towering up on either side of the path. Through the dark and constantly moving specks of mosquitoes, he saw Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel and General Buhle about 130 metres ahead, walking together to the conference. About 100 metres further on, the glint of a

chain link fence flashed. Two soldiers with gleaming coal scuttle helmets and rifles were standing at the gate of the innermost security zone, the Sperrkreis Ia. One of them was holding a water canteen in one hand, and swatting mosquitoes with the other.

The forests in Rastenburg in East Prussia were hotter than hell in summer, and the countless lakes and bodies of water made the place an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes. Rittmeister Leonard von Möllendorf had offered him repellent when he had joined him for breakfast in the shade of an oak tree outside the Kurhaus Görlitz in Sperrkreis 2, showing him the painful-looking swellings and red spots covering his hands and neck. He wished he'd accepted. He thought he had prepared himself mentally and physically the best he could for his attempt to kill Hitler. He felt ready for everything, ready even for death. He had imagined different situations and thought about what he'd do. He had even taken steps to stop dehydration in the heat, drinking plenty of water when he joined Möllendorf for breakfast in spite of the many interruptions and telephone calls. He knew from his experience in command of a Panzer Division belonging to the Afrika Korps in Tunisia how a lack of fluids negatively affected his concentration. But he had not been prepared for the plague of mosquitoes. They had driven him crazy during the briefing with Buhle. They had even managed to infest Keitel's underground office deep inside a massive bunker, humming in the shadows left by the neon light. Mind you, the mosquitoes were the least of his problems, he thought to himself as he started to walk down the path. Next, he heard boots hammering behind him.

"Can't I carry that briefcase, Stauffenberg?" asked Major Ernst John von Freyend, catching up.

John made to take the briefcase.

The 36-year-old Stauffenberg had been seriously injured in combat in North Africa. He had a black patch over his left eye. One of his tunic sleeves was empty. He had lost his left hand and two fingers of his right hand. An Iron Cross and other combat badges were pinned to his silver-grey tunic filling John with awe but also impatience.

“No need.”

Stauffenberg wrenched his briefcase away.

“We’re late already ...” John muttered.

The whites of his eyes flashed in the shadow of his peaked cap with the imperial Wehrmacht eagle badge.

“You know how the Führer hates it when people are late for a conference. And today we’re really pressed for time. Mussolini is arriving in just two hours and the Führer plans to greet him with a ceremonial guard at the station. I just don’t know how we’re going to get through half the things on the agenda.”

“So let’s get a move on. Field Marshall Keitel’s almost at the gate.”

Clamping his briefcase under his left arm, Stauffenberg walked off. He had managed to prime a 950 gram packet of plastic explosives secretly with the help of his ordinance officer in a room in Keitel’s bunker minutes earlier.

He had prepared himself mentally for the event. He had even anticipated that the time of conference could be changed at short notice, as had indeed just happened. He had prepared a pretext, and he had just used it -- the need to change his shirt -- to split away from Keitel and prime the bomb. But he had not anticipated Keitel’s Oberfeldwebel pushing his way in to report a phone call.

Only quick reflexes had averted disaster. The Oberfeldwebel had seen the papers but no trace of the bombs or the pliers.

Stauffenberg had broken open the acid capsule and detonate one of the bombs when John had called him. The fuse was set to explode in 30 minutes. In warm weather, the detonation could occur in 15 to 20 minutes.

There was a 300 metres walk over to Hitler's bunker in the inner most security zone, Sperrkreis 1a. He had only one final obstacle to get through – the gate at the end of the path.

Virtually insurmountable security protected the Wolf's Lair, Hitler's military headquarters, in an isolated rural location in East Prussia. The Masurian lake district formed a natural defensive barrier to the east of the camp . A single access road traversed the installation from West to East. The complex, sprawling over six square kilometers of primeval forest, was divided into three security zones. Stauffenberg had familiarized himself with all the security barriers by studying secret maps. Along with five-meter-high fences, watchtowers at 200-meter intervals, minefields, anti-tank ditches and concrete bunkers, there were also checkpoints along the only access road with elaborate security checks. Everyone had to show a valid ID and a special day pass to be allowed to move through the gates from security zone to security zone. The guard duty officer recorded the identity of visitors as well as the time of their arrival and reported them to the relevant unit by phone. In addition, sophisticated camouflage concealed the Wolf's Lair from enemy air planes. The living quarters of Adolf Hitler and other Nazis like Martin Bormann were located in gigantic bunkers -- bunkers number 13 and 11 respectively -- made of reinforced concrete and located in the most protected zone, Sperrkreis 1.

An SS division, the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, modeled on the Praetorian Guard set up by the Roman emperor Augustus, had been established to act as the Nazi dictator's permanent personal body guard. Six thousand soldiers were stationed in whatever headquarter Hitler happened to be at with the rest serving at the front. That July, 1944, all twelve thousand soldiers belonging to the Leibstandarte were garrisoned in either the Obersalzberg or the Wolf's Lair, Hitler's two main headquarters. The Russian army was only 100 kilometers away from the frontier of East Prussia. The Allies had landed in Normandy in France on June 6th. The endgame for Germany was approaching. Security around Hitler had been stepped up.

Five days earlier, Hitler had left his luxurious chalet, the Berghof, in the mountains of Bavaria to take charge of operations on the crumbling eastern front, making his journey under top security. In the middle of the night and pouring rain, his Mercedes limousine had driven down from the Obersalzberg Mountain as part of a convoy of fifty vehicles. The convoy had crossed a bridge and entered the village of Berchtesgaden, taking the narrow, cobbled side streets to the station where an armored train was waiting to bring him overnight across Germany to East Prussia and the Wolf's Lair. After inspecting two thousand soldiers on the platform, Hitler had entered his carriage and sat down to dinner in an oak paneled dining room together with his personal staff while guards double checked the locks and fastened metal shutters over the windows outside. At a signal, the train composing twenty carriages to accommodate the Leibstandarte soldiers and protected by artillery pieces mounted in wagons set off on its journey across the heart of Germany to Prussia.

There was only way to get close enough to Hitler to assassinate him. That was to be invited to attend a military conference by him. Stauffenberg had managed to get just such a summons as newly appointed chief of staff of the Home Army. This was his fourth visit in as many weeks. He had been issued with a special pass for that day, July 20th. He was to report to Hitler on the new divisions to be formed to reinforce the crumbling eastern front.

Assassinating Hitler was only the first part of his mission. Toppling the Nazi regime by launching a coup from his base in Berlin using a secret code word was the second part. That meant he had to get out of the Wolf's Lair immediately. The alarm would be raised in a matter of minutes of the explosion. The camp would be put in lock down.

Stauffenberg saw Keitel stop by the gate to show his ID. The purple stripe of his breeches tucked into his high boots, and the golden leaf brocade on the shoulders of his tunic and cap stood out among the drab grey uniforms.

The SS Sturmbahnführer standing beside a concrete post holding up a chain-link fence took Keitel's ID and examined it carefully. Next, he took the ID of Buhle and examined it in the same serious and pedantic way.

Buhle and Keitel stood talking to the sentry for a couple of minutes, something which made Stauffenberg nervous.

His heart started to race as he walked up to the sentries. He didn't expect his briefcase to be searched. But nothing was certain. Hitler had said an unpredictable routine was the key to his security. He was known to leave conferences without warning.

Stauffenberg clamped his briefcase under his left arm, imagining how the Sturmbahnführer would react if he found out what was inside. The

SS divisions were subjected to systematic racial and ideological brain washing. Its members believed the propaganda portraying Hitler a kind of savior, and the last hope to avert total defeat.

The thought of what would happen to his wife and children was especially scary. His close family relations would all be put in concentration camp under Sippenhaft.

The mental strain of being under constant scrutiny, of having to control his every emotion was taking his toll on him. He had to use all his will power to keep his face blank as he stopped together with John in front of the sentry.

His coalscuttle helmet gleamed above his red face glistening with sweat. His sleeves were rolled up at the elbow. His tunic was open at the neck. Baggy field grey trousers hung around combat boots. The combat patches on his breast showed he had done tours in Russia, where some of the worst racially and ideologically motivated war crimes had been committed. A belt with a pistol and a water canteen was fastened around his waist. Like all members of the SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, he was also equipped with a dagger for ceremonial purposes but also for hand to hand combat.

The SS Sturmbahnführer examined their passes minutely. He treated Stauffenberg with respect but there was no doubt he considered him to be a second class soldier as a member of the Wehrmacht.

After handing back the pass, he raised his right arm in salute.

“Heil Hitler!”

“Heil Hitler!” said John.

As a member of the Wehrmacht, Stauffenberg was not required to give the Hitler salute. But he could not afford any extra attention.

“Heil Hitler!” he said.

He walked on past the concrete posts, into the innermost security zone, Sperrkreis 1a. The main building was the monstrous concrete Führer bunker. It looked surreal, like some temple in a South American jungle, lurking among tall leafy trees and camouflage nets. A few clouds had blown in from the north. A storm was brewing.

Stauffenberg made a systematic scan of every segment of the area around the bunker starting with the area nearest where the potential danger was also greatest. He couldn't see any soldiers on the path ahead of him, and continued his scan, sweeping a 240 degree arc with his vision. Keitel and Buhle were about 30 metres ahead walking on the path leading to Hitler's bunker. A truck painted in splotchy green stood outside the bunker entrance under a piece of camouflage netting held up by poles. Some soldiers were carrying boxes from the truck through the door of the bunker. He scanned the bunker at higher elevation. He spotted an artillery piece on the roof partly concealed by camouflage netting. He detected some soldiers positioned behind it. There was a gleam of a helmet, a slight movement. More soldiers manned machine guns. Their muzzles were turned towards the dense forests.

All of a sudden, Keitel and Buhle turned off the main path and followed a side path, heading towards a barracks located about 70 metres away and shaded by trees. Had there been a change of plan?

Stauffenberg scanned the single story cabin made of timber and painted white barracks and immediately realized that most of the force

of the blast from his briefcase bomb would be dissipated through the timber walls and the windows. There were about ten, and all of them were wide open. Sun shone on the pale blue shutters of the windows and played over the roof, covered with leaves and other forest camouflage. There was a real risk Hitler could survive the blast. He had chosen a type of bomb which was designed to kill by pressure waves and not by shrapnel in expectation that the conference would be held in Hitler's bunker and the concrete walls would retain the blast's force.

The adrenaline rushed to his head. His heart started to beat wildly.

"So the conference isn't going to be held in the bunker," Stauffenberg muttered to John, trying to sound as casual as he could.

"Didn't you hear?"

"No."

"There's been a change of venue. The heat, the heat! It reminds me of Africa. Twenty four people are attending today, too many for the little room in the bunker. The Führer bunker's air conditioning systems aren't working," said John, pointing over at the monstrous-looking grey bunker visible through the trees. "All military conferences are going to be in the barracks over there until the weather gets cooler."

Stauffenberg drew a sharp breath. What now? They were only about 30 metres from the barracks. He had perhaps a minute or two to work out a plan. To maximize the chances of killing Hitler, he would have to place the briefcase bomb directly beside him. But how could he place a briefcase at Hitler's feet without attracting attention? There was real a danger that if he tried, he would be observed, stopped, questioned, especially if he left the room shortly afterwards. He rapidly reviewed his options.

Next, there was a flash of light. An idea came to him. As he put his boot on the first step, he stopped and turned to John.

Patches of sun played over the blue shutters of the log cabin and on some wild flowers which had grown up in the cracked, dry ground close to the steps leading to the door.

“Could you please place my briefcase as close to the Führer as possible? I’ll need to have the documents within easy reach,” he said, holding up the handle with the two remaining fingers of his left hand.

There was a gleam of surprise. John hesitated.

“I wish you’d make up your mind, Stauffenberg. One minute, you are ripping it out of my hand when I offer to help and the next, you are pushing it at me.”

“The heat is getting to me.”

A look of shame appeared in John’s eyes.

“Of course, Stauffenberg!”

John took the briefcase and hurried off. His face was full of anxiety, worry and stress as he vanished through the door. The only virtue he recognized was blind obedience to Hitler. To please Adolf Hitler was the surest way to move higher up the career ladder.

After walking through the door, Stauffenberg found himself in a dark and insufferably hot corridor. The sweat rained down his forehead. He waited for a second for his vision to adjust to the darkness. He observed John enter the conference room at the end of the corridor with the briefcase.

When he reached the ante room, Stauffenberg stopped. The door to the communications room was open. He took off his peaked cap and hung

it on a peg in a prominent place. He unfastened his belt with his service pistol and hung it high up for everyone to see. He glanced at his watch. It was 12:35. He estimated the bomb would explode in five to ten minutes. The heat would cause the acid to eat through the wire very fast. His heart was beating wildly. The blood rushed to his head. He drew a sharp breath. He walked into the conference room with an impassive expression and closed the door quietly behind him.

Hitler was standing just a few feet away. He had his back to him. His figure bent and stooped, Hitler was peering down at operations maps of the eastern front which had been spread out in front of him on a huge oak table. He was holding a pencil in his right hand and staring rigidly at the map oblivious to the bomb briefcase which John had just a couple of feet away from him while listening to General Heusinger give an update about the latest developments on the eastern front. There were more than twenty officers crowding around the table.

Nets managed to keep the mosquitoes out but not the stifling breath of summer.

General Korten furtively wiped his forehead with a handkerchief.

Next, Stauffenberg heard a hot and the distant chug of a locomotive chuffing through the Wolf's Lair to head to Mauerwald.

General Heusinger pointed at a spot on the map.

“The Russian forces are set to unite here and are going to cut off the North Group unless we can get reinforcements,” he said.

Stauffenberg noticed John mutter a few words into the ear of Oberst Brandt. Brandt nodded, and stepped aside to allow Stauffenberg to come closer to the table – and Hitler. Stauffenberg took two steps forward. He glanced down and saw his briefcase under the table,

leaning against a table leg. He moved his right foot out and pushed the briefcase as far as he could towards Hitler as discretely as he could, then took a step backwards.

That second, Heusinger caught sight of Stauffenberg. The impressive appearance and terrible injuries of the colonel filled him with awe. He immediately stopped talking.

Alerted, Hitler angled his head towards Stauffenberg. A lock of hair fell across his face. He raised a trembling hand to push it aside.

He fixed his hyper vigilant, pale blue eyes on Stauffenberg. Beneath his brush moustache, his razor lips were twisted down in sharp angles of malice. He ran his eyes over Stauffenberg's uniform of a silver-grey tunic and black breeches with a scarlet stripe tucked into polished black boots.

Field Marshall Keitel coughed.

“Colonel Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg is present to report on the new blocking divisions, mein Führer,” he said.

Twenty four pairs of eyes turned on Stauffenberg. He didn't like to play the servile lackey but he had made up his mind to stay cool and show no emotions. He straightened himself and peered down from his great height at Hitler, standing opposite him and so close he could see the beads of perspiration on his face.

Hitler put down his pencil. The room was so hushed, they might as well have been on the mountain top in the desert.

It was so quiet that Stauffenberg could hear Hitler's heavy breathing. He observed an odd-looking creature with a puffy white face standing so close to him. Two bright blue eyes -- the palest blue he had ever seen -- stung him with a vicious look.

Rumoured to be the illegitimate son of the banker Rothschild, Hitler's father was a customs official in Austria. A high school dropout and a corporal during the First World War, Adolf Hitler was one of the most unlikely person to be made Chancellor of Germany in 1932. Even more unlikely was the amount of support "this man of the people" enjoyed from the country's most powerful bankers and industrialists. The chief of the German national bank, Hjalmar Schacht, and other illustrious names in banking and industry had written a letter appealing to the President Paul von Hindenberg to make Hitler Chancellor in 1932 after the country had been ruined by austerity to pay for the banker bailouts spite of the fact that the Nazi Party had managed to obtain only a little over 30% of the vote and other coalition combinations were possible.

Once appointed Chancellor by Kaiser Wilhelm's most loyal general, Hitler moved fast to seize total power and turn Nazi Germany into a gigantic military camp and prison camp.

A gigantic system of lies, propaganda and false religion was a monument of his efforts to seat himself upon the throne to rule the earth. He had had symbols of his religion, the bent cross incorporated, into army uniforms and all aspects of the government and daily life. Worship of Hitler was required.

The muscles in his brow contracted as Stauffenberg came face to face with the most evil man in history, a man who's racially and ideologically motivated crimes of mass extermination on an industrial scale had no parallel in history. He felt a chill run down his spine, hot though it was. On one level it was a meeting between two men. On another level it was an unprecedented cosmic showdown. He was confronting a force of absolute evil. The evil around Hitler was just

palpable. For a second, he was sure he was standing in front of Satan himself.

The way Hitler was dressed was not as someone might expect from Satan. People might expect Satan, the prince of darkness, to appear in pomp and splendor, a golden child of fortune, handsome and charismatic, enjoying honours, pleasures and wealth. But the opposite was the case. Hitler was the most ordinary of men. He had a lean and hungry look of those whose souls are a spiritual wasteland and who cannot enjoy any of their power or wealth. Not even Hitler's brush moustache was enough to turn him from a mundane clerk or gambler into a dreamer.

The devil was a pasty white gambler from Austria devoid of all charisma, all life, all light.

The devil was a nonentity decorating his drab, grey tunic with crosses and awards to make himself look important.

It scared the hell out of him to think Hitler was the most powerful man in Germany and had been elected Chancellor. The evil of Hitler scared the living daylight out of him. He had never experienced so much fear in his life. It was not death he was afraid of. It was this metaphysical force of evil, which Hitler personified. It was palpable in the room.

The horror of war spilled into Stauffenberg's mind. It was like he was there again, in the middle of the horror. It was all so vivid. He could smell the cordite. He could hear the sobbing whispers of the wounded in the light wind which played with the net curtains of the barracks; their screams of all those blown up, shot, impaled, lynched, executed, imprisoned, gased, burned, suffocated, starved, drowned, raped, tortured, poisoned, vaccinated with diseases and toxins, seemed to be

carried on the breeze. Their deaths had been in vain. Millions of deaths had been pointless. The lives of countless people had been sacrificed for the egoism of this man. The knowledge aroused strong emotions of outrage in Stauffenberg and an angry feeling at his heart.

He knew he had to turn inside him for the strength, the energy, the force to carry out his mission. Inside him was the fountain of light, energy, creative inspiration that would allow him to succeed in his task. And so when his nerves started to go, he turned his attention to this interior force, until the spark turned into a fire.

Next, Hitler picked up his pencil. He ran it over the map and looked at Stauffenberg as if to say: “Here, are the kingdoms of the world. The glory of ruling them I will give to you if you fall down and worship me like the others do. You will be a general, a Field Marshall if you just acknowledge the supremacy of me, the prince of darkness. You will have grants of money and land. Not even when Germany collapses will it affect you, so great will your wealth be. The crowds will bow down to you, the conqueror.”

Hitler tapped the pencil on the map. Stauffenberg glanced at it. He saw the vanity, the futility of ruling all the kingdoms of the world. The folly and vanity of being a Field Marshall in any army of darkness.

Hitler was used to servility, flattery, to being called the savior of the world as his subjects competed for privileges and tokens of his favour. He looked at this extraordinary man and felt awe but also fear. There was an honesty about him which made the elderly dictator, full of evil schemes, greed and aggression, suspicious.

Hitler’s lips started to quiver and his eyes to well up with disappointment. “You don’t worship me, do you? You don’t really

adore me, after all, do you? You don't believe I am a superman Well, I've found you out! You traitor!"

An impulse seized Hitler to leave the room. An inner voice told him he was in danger.

They were engaged in a silent duel.

"Look, Stauffenberg. All the men in the room have succumbed to the temptation. To get money and power, they have been ready to serve me with blind obedience. They have pledged an oath of allegiance to me, their loyalty to me, the Fuhrer, the leader, the emperor, styled the savior like a deity. Vast numbers have given their loyalty to me and even if this kingdom of mine crumbles and new kingdom will rise again ruled by the prince of devils. I give them the power to go out and kill and they go out and they kill."

Stauffenberg stood opposite Hitler without any sign of fear. He did not try to impress him or ingratiate himself or please him.

Hitler noticed his fearlessness and his suspicion increased. The way Stauffenberg had overcome all kinds of difficulties and obstacles, including near death and crippling injuries to return to duty indicated a man of unusual physical and moral strength – and that was the kind of man he was most terrified of. That was the man who could come into the temple of his power, to the room from which he ruled the kingdoms of the world, and blow it up.

His very presence, so evidently warm-hearted and sincere, offered comfort and lifted the spirits of everyone. There was nothing of the arrogant conqueror about him. He looked more like someone who would protect and support the weak and helpless. But he was also not someone to be messed with. He was far too imposing for that. He had

joined the army long before Hitler had come to power – and a cavalry regiment in south Germany that kept alive something of the spirit and ethos of old military traditions of chivalry and honour.

“Can a man like that really be trusted?” Hitler asked himself.

Hitler had studied a dossier compiled by his secret police on Stauffenberg. He knew all about his brave actions at the front and his great achievements in the army staff. He had won the sword of honour at cadet school and come top of his class at the elite military staff college in Berlin. He was as strong as an ox, disciplined, hard working and efficient. He also had the rare but vital ability of military leaders to inspire genuine enthusiasm in soldiers. Keitel had pointed out his evident sincerity to serve his country and persuaded Hitler to promote him...

“What am I worried about?” Hitler thought to himself.

“Who is this man? A no one! A mere colonel! Look at his injuries, too. What can someone like him do to me? He might despise me in his heat but he would not dare to take on someone like me. I am the supreme commander of the German armed forces. There are 22 generals in this room and a division of SS guarding me. I control the Gestapo. I am the lord and master here.”

Hitler straightened himself up, puffed out his chest. His thin lips turned upwards. His cheeks turned to two apple shaped balls as he chuckled.

He reached out his hand and picked up the pencil. He tapped the pencil on the map.

Heusinger resumed his report. Stauffenberg was forced to stand and listen to Heusinger for a minute - and a minute or two was all he needed to take in the entire sordid scene.

Looking like a sordid gambler, Hitler stood at the table, gripping his pencil and staring rigidly at the map in front under the thrall of a compulsion. The very fact that he was so full of such a strong desire to win caused him to

gamble again and again, and waste the lives of millions of lives.

Stauffenberg knew the operations Hitler was planning on the eastern front were pointless. The war was lost. The German army did not have the men or equipment after five years of ferocious war to fend off the Allies in the West and the Russians in the East. Any rational leader would have surrendered and ended the senseless slaughter of millions of people at the front in concentration camps. But Hitler's love of himself, his naked desire to live at all costs and fear of death made him willing to gamble away the last life.

But worse was the perverse pleasure he seemed to detect in Hitler. His cold blue eyes with an intense beam of light appeared to brighten whenever he heard of the deaths of soldiers at the front. He had pleasure not when divisions but when whole armies suffered a violent death.

The ugliest feature of the mob around Hitler was the humility with which they stood around the table watching him planning the destruction of millions. They were all anxious to falling over themselves to show their respect to the cold-blooded killer.

Even John had succeeded in pushing his way to the front of the table, in meantime, and was standing with his hands on the table listening

with rapt attention in order to have a better chance to show their dedication to Hitler.

Worse was the beaming face of Field Marshall Keitel who actually seemed to believe the delusion that Hitler was a great commander who would lead them to victory and who suggested ever more reckless operations in the hope of ingratiating himself even though others would pay with their lives for his reckless

Suggestions. It was Keitel who had proposed recruiting boys as young as 16 for the new blocking divisions for the eastern front.

Next, Stauffenberg heard the hoot of the locomotive.

A voice said to him: "Go now."

Stauffenberg glanced at the clock. It was 12: 42. He took a few steps back from the table. Hitler was too busy pouring over the maps to notice. John saw he was about to leave the room and came up to him.

"I have to go and make a call," he muttered

John looked surprised. He knew that Stauffenberg could be summoned by Hitler to make his report any moment. But Stauffenberg opened the door walked outside and John followed him.

"I am expecting some important information for my report to the Führer from General Fellgiebel. I need to call him," said Stauffenberg.

"This way," said John, pointing to an open door.

Stauffenberg walked inside. Sunlight streamed through the branches of the pine trees outside the window into the room.

A corporal belonging to the signals division was pinning a piece of paper to a cork board.

The dark green collar of his a grey uniform tunic was open at the neck. The breast eagle on the right hand of pocket, his patches and decorations glinted in the sunlight.

He immediately assumed the position of attention, clicking his heels together.

“Connect Colonel von Stauffenberg with General Fellgiebel,” John ordered.

“Yes sir!”

The corporal picked up a phone and dialed a number. He handed Stauffenberg the receiver.

John looked at his watch and then walked back out, his boots hammering on the wooden floor.

Stauffenberg took the phone.

“Oberleutnant Sander is expecting you after the conference,” Fellgiebel said on the other end of the line.

Stauffenberg understood the code and put down the phone without saying a word. There was no time to hang about. The corporal looked at him with surprise. Stauffenberg ignored him and walked out of the room. He saw his cap and gun and holster hanging up, but he did not stop to collect them. He did not want to arouse suspicion. He walked back down the corridor and out of the barracks. It took a moment for his vision to adjust to the brilliance of the sunlight. He walked down the steps, his boots clattering on the wood.

His collar felt tight. He found it hard to breath. The sweat was raining down his forehead. His eye path was irritating him. The pain was excruciating. The adrenaline was rushing through him and he felt the impulse to just make a run for it. A man running away at top speed

would immediately attract the attention of all the guards. He had to force him to walk at a steady pace towards the gate.

The high strength steel barbed wire glinted between the poles.

He walked past the SS Sturmbahnführer. He saw his look of surprise, He ignored it. It was possible that he had to collect a document or file.

Army trucks and vehicles were moving along the network of roads.

Through the fence topped with concertina wire he saw his adjutant Werner von Haeften talking to General Fellgiebel and Oberleutnant Sander.

50 meters further along, he saw an eight- cylinder Mercedes cabriolet standing in the shade of a tree on the edge of the wood.

He walked up to Haeften and Fellgiebel.

Haeften was holding the briefcase with the plastic bomb that they had not managed to detonate. He looked very nervous. Sander was smoking a cigarette in the shade of a tree.

“Conference over already?” he asked, wearily.

“I have to catch an urgent flight to Berlin. Where’s the car?”

Stauffenberg asked Haeften.

Haeften looked alarmed and then ran over to the Mercedes. The driver was standing close by.

Stauffenberg looked through the fence over at the barracks. They would soon notice his absence. That thought scared the living daylights out of him.

Next, there was a roar like thunder. It was a crazy explosion, like an artillery shell he had heard so often on the Russian front.

He froze and then a split second later he saw what at first looked like a sheet of yellow and blue lightning coming down from heaven. The barracks jumped into the air and collapsed.

Pieces of wood and debris were flying everywhere, soaring through the air, impacting on the chain link fence. He heard pieces of wood whizz inches from his head, hitting the ground, pinging off the vehicles parked close by. He ducked down.

“I wonder what that could have been?” asked Fellgiebel, feigning surprise.

“Probably another deer stepping on a mine, it happens all the time,” said Sander puffing on his cigarette.

Stauffenberg looked and saw the sentries by the gate had thrown themselves onto the ground.

The soldiers guarding the bunker lost it and were yelling and screaming all sorts of things. They had seen the seen a flash, an orange ball of fire blast apart the barracks, and were sure that the Russians were attacking them using artillery shells. The soldiers on the top of Hitler’s bunker fired their machine guns into the forest. Stauffenberg saw the muzzles flash.

“Must catch that flight to Berlin!” he said.

He turned and walked over to the driver of the Mercedes.

The only way in to the Wolf’s Lair was through a series of security posts. Barriers prevented passage through them. Every vehicle at a roadblock was checked. Every person who wanted to enter had to show their ID and their day pass.

“Drive me to the airport.”

The order startled the hell out of the young lieutenant. He looked at Stauffenberg dazed and confused as he got into the back. Haeften got in at the other side.

“Colonel, allow me to report you are not dressed according to regulations.”

“What does that concern you,” retorted Stauffenberg.

The driver got in. The engine spluttered into life. He put his boot to the pedal and the car redlined it straight through the zone of confusion in front of the barracks.

Stauffenberg jumped to his feet in the back of the Mercedes to get a better look.

On the other side of chain link fence, he saw black smoke, an infernal scene, bodies lying everywhere. Medics were shouting orders. The first of dead were being carried out. There was screaming. A wounded officer staggered out. There was blood all over him.

He glimpsed the corner posts of the barracks. The fire had virtually destroyed the timber structure. A large section of the wall was gone, incinerated.

“He must be dead!” Stauffenberg thought to himself. “What an explosion!”

The blue sky seemed to smile down from its great height. All the trees seemed to wave in the wind and telegraph their delight. The bloodthirsty dictator had been killed. The lives of millions of people and the honour of Germany had been saved.

“Hurry up!” Stauffenberg yelled.

There were soldiers running all over the place. Fire trucks and ambulances were careering towards them. They swerved out of the way at the last moment.

The car stopped at the first barrier.

The guard on duty walked up to him.

“I have to go to the airport and catch an urgent flight back to Berlin,” Stauffenberg said.

“Yes, Colonel von Stauffenberg!”

The order was given for the barrier to be raised. The car sped down the road.

They drove down the main access road. There was nothing to see on either side of the road except trees and more trees. Clouds had blown across the sun. The forest looked dark and gloomy. Next, Stauffenberg heard sirens.

He was frantically scanning the road when he saw the second barrier, the main check point through which all the vehicles had to enter the Fuhrer Hauptquartier. The soldiers were jumping over the sandbags and threw themselves down on the ground before scrambling to get into firing position behind machine guns. Others were clambering into armoured vehicles and pulling down the hatches. The soldiers on the watch towers located at intervals along the perimeter fence had manned their machine guns.

An SS Obersturmbahnfuhrer was standing in front of the barrier.

The Mercedes stopped in front. The Obersturmbahnfuhrer walked up.

“I have to get to the airport,” said Stauffenberg.

“No one is allowed out, Colonel.”

All eyes were glaring at him

A dozen soldiers in field grey tunics made of wool with open neck and rolled up sleeves surrounded the car. Their machine guns were pointing at him, scaring the living daylights out of him.

“My plane leaves at a quarter past one. I have to get back to Berlin immediately.”

“No one is allowed out.”

Obersturmbahnführer eyed him suspiciously.

He had obviously heard the news about the assassination attempt.

Stauffenberg felt a chill run down his spine. He looked at the metal barrier blocking the road ahead. He saw chain link fences topped with barbed wire forming a continuous obstacle around the outer security zone. Signs warning of landmines were visible in the undergrowth.

The idea of falling into the hands of the Gestapo scared the hell out of him. He didn't even have a pistol to defend himself.

He sent up a prayer. Please God get me out of here.

In between the trees, he caught sight of the roof of the Kurhaus Görlitz. An idea flashed through his mind.

He recalled how helpful Möllendorf had been at breakfast earlier that morning, offering him mosquito repellent.

He would try to get Möllendorf to issue the order allowing him to leave the Wolf's Lair. It was a long shot but what choice did he have?

“I want to speak to the commander,” said Stauffenberg, getting out of the car.

“No one is allowed to pass, sir. There has been an explosion in the Sperrkreis 1a. The camp has been put into total lock down.

“I said I want to speak to the commander.”

Stauffenberg walked over to the guardhouse. The windows were protected by grilles. It was still extremely hot. He grabbed a water bottle when he walked into the guard hut and took a few gulps. He picked up the phone and dialed the number of the operator. The Obersturmbahnführer walked into the hut and stood right beside him.

“Stauffenberg at the south guard post. I want to speak to the commander of the Wolf’s Lair urgently,” he said.

“Yes sir, I will connect you.”

While he was holding the receiver, he scanned the sector outside the window. He saw some of the soldiers peeking around the Mercedes suspiciously.

Next, he heard Möllendorf on the line.

“Möllendorf, this is Stauffenberg. I have to get to the airport at Rastenburg and catch a flight to Berlin at 1:15. But the security detail won’t let me pass.”

“Let me talk to the man in charge.”

Stauffenberg handed over the receiver to the Obersturmbahnführer.

“Yes sir!” he said, after a minute.

He put the phone down and strode out of the hut.

“Lift the barrier!”

Stauffenberg followed him out of the hut and got into the back. The car accelerated away down the narrow road. After a couple of kilometers, Haefen tossed the package out of the car into the undergrowth of the forest.

They drove onto a grassy strip in the middle of the forest. The silver fuselage of a Henkel 111 gleamed in the dull light. A fuel truck stood beside it. The Luftwaffe ground crew who had just finished refueling the plane. Two soldiers were rolling in the fuel pipe. Tents to house fuel, ammo and personnel were hidden inside the forest, which bordered the strip.

The cabriolet drove up to the plane. Stauffenberg jumped out and ran across to the plane. The clouds had gathered. The first rain drops fell. It was going to be one hell of a storm. The humidity had been terrible. A few minutes later, the plane was hurtling down the runway. The plane was up in the air and heading for Berlin.

Stauffenberg was emotionally drained and still shaking. He was thinking how he was lucky to be alive. He had never experienced anything like the roller coaster of emotions of that day. Fear and hope had alternated at incredible speed, leaving him shattered.

At last, he had some time for himself. The last few months had been pretty hectic. He had had to do the planning for the assassination of Hitler and the coup in parallel to his regular duties. The planning had been incredibly hard. The omnipresent Gestapo were ready to punish anyone who so much as breathed a word of criticism against Hitler. The Gestapo had arrested Julius Leber a few days earlier.

The evening before he had gone through the whole plan one last time with the main conspirators in the Bendlerblock. He had dropped into his bed at midnight exhausted. At five that morning, he had been woken up by his brother Berthold. At six the car had come to bring him to Berlin Rangsdorf where he had met Haeften.

The plane had taken off at 8 am after a delay of an hour due to the fog and flown the 585 kilometers to Rastenburg in just over two hours,

arriving at just after ten. A car had collected him and driven him the 6 kilometers to the Wolf's Lair.

It was an amazing moment, finally to have reached the goal he had set himself so many years ago and to have proved himself in action. The thought that he had overcome so many difficulties, obstacles and dangers to assassinate a man who was the most evil in history filled him with incredible pride. He knew that his family would also be proud if they knew what he had done.

Stephan George, the poet, who had inspired him and predicted had the heroic action.

He recalled George telling him he should always live his life as he were one of the greatest people on earth. He should set big goals and chase big dreams, use his imagination and boldly pursue a life of service and dedication to others.

He had come to be convinced that God was real; the universe is a friendly place, designed to support everyone in their search to develop their highest self. The intelligence that had created and ordered the world, nature and human beings was a benevolent one which nourished all living things at every level so they could have lives of adventure, excitement and growth. It was a universe whose beauty and mystery filled him with wonder and awe.

But inside this universe, upon this planet earth, on the continent of Europe, centered on the state of Germany, the Nazis had emerged thanks to the funding of the bankers and industrialists, and erected an empire based on military conquest that was so out of tune with the laws of nature and the universe, and so artificial, so destructive and cruel that there was perhaps not a single person left who could enjoy

the pure, uncomplicated fact of being alive in the shadow of the totalitarian terror state and the carnage of the Second World War.

He, too, had allowed himself to become a tool, a cog in a brutal killing machine that killed millions of civilians, women and children in crime after crime. That July 20th he had finally made amends.

It's very rare that a person had a chance to make an impact for the better on the lives of millions. Yet he had just had that chance and he had used it. He felt cleansed, purged, renewed. He had regained control over his life, removed obstacles to a better future for him, his family and country. But there were some obstacles still left...

By now Fellgiebel should have informed Quirnheim that the bomb had gone off. The first of the Wehrmacht units should be moving out of their barracks under orders to seal off the government quarter in Berlin, confine the SS to their barracks and liberate the concentration camps.

TWO

The floodgates of heaven had opened and rain poured down although the heat was as oppressive as before.

From under the peak of his cap, Adolf Hitler scanned the mist hanging over the forest and railway tracks. It reminded him of the smoke he had just staggered through two hours earlier after Stauffenberg's bomb had exploded.

"To think I could be dead now! If Brandt hadn't happened to move Stauffenberg's briefcase to the other side of the table, it'd have been curtains for me!," Hitler thought to himself, pulling his black cape closer together with a shaking hand. His nerves were shot and his arms were trembling.

“It’s a miracle I am alive! And to think Brandt only moved the briefcase in the last second! I’m lucky to be alive!”

Hitler felt emotionally shattered as he stood on the platform of the Wolf’s Lair station together with his press chief and a dozen other military officials, including Field Marshall Keitel, waiting for the train bringing Benito Mussolini from Italy. His doctor, Morrell, had given him an adrenaline shot after bandaging the grazes on his hand and legs. For once, the injection hadn’t been necessary. His heart was racing at top speed as it was. Any sudden noise, movement or light – a roll of thunder, a Kubelwagen roaring by or a railway signal changing colour -- made him give an involuntary start. He constantly moved his head from side to side to scan his surroundings while rain flashed around him like lightning. He was usually very careful about his health and made every effort to avoid getting wet. That July afternoon, though, he was too preoccupied with what had happened to notice the rain. He had never experienced so much fear as when the briefcase bomb had gone off during the midday conference. Staring at the pine trees on the other side of the platform, he kept thinking about the way he had looked up from the operations map and seen Stauffenberg and the cool look on his face. Next thing he knew a ball of fire had blasted him into the air. Hands had picked him up out of a pile of debris. He had stumbled through the smoke, his trousers ripped and torn to shreds.

This had been the first ever attempt on his life which had almost succeeded. The ring of security around the Nazi dictator had kept away all potential threats so far. Only Georg Elser had come the close to killing him in a beer hall in Munich in 1938 when he had planted a bomb, which had, however, detonated after he left.

Standing in the pouring rain, pattering on the top of his cap and his black cape, Hitler asked himself over and over if he really had done enough to ensure that he was safe from another assassination attempt. Had he forgotten some detail? Had he overlooked some weakness in his security in the Wolf's Lair? Had he left a loophole for anyone who wanted to stop his reign of terror to get to him? Had he done enough to ensure that his Gestapo were now at work finding and destroying Stauffenberg and any other conspirators in Berlin? Had he done enough to tighten his control over every single institution and aspect of life in Germany? And what about the countries he had conquered or annexed?

"There could be an assassin lurking anywhere, even among the soldiers guarding me," he thought to himself, turning his head cautiously from side to side to observe his surroundings.

His pale blue eyes flickering underneath his hard peaked cap, Hitler watched an RSD police man close by with a pistol at his side. He was pacing up and down, alertly scanning his sector, his grey uniform soaked through in the rain. Hitler peered at him mistrustfully to see if he was really performing his duties with the precision he wished.

The Wolf's Lair station was usually as quiet as a ghost town. All regular train traffic was blocked from using the railway line between Angerburg and Rastenburg. Only a few trains with special permission were allowed to travel to the top secret Wolf's Lair installation. Two courier trains also made a non-stop journey every night through the darkness to Berlin. But at 2 30 pm that July 20th, there were countless soldiers and military vehicles crawling around the area in Sperrkreis 2 on Hitler's orders. Armored cars had taken up positions at either end of the 500-metre-long platform, and there were several Kubelwagen parked on the platform too.

As the station clock struck half past two exactly, a company of soldiers came marching through the downpour. Iron-soled boots slammed down on the wet road. Coalscuttle helmets gleamed. Black boots flew up into the air, kicking up the flaps of all-weather coats, belted at the waist. It was his elite division, the "SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler". They halted about 30 meters from the platform.

There was a yell: "Company Attention, present arms!" The boots of the soldiers slapped down on the asphalt one last time.

A faint smile appeared on Hitler's bluish lips as he observed the clockwork precision with which the soldiers executed the command and held their rifles in the right position.

What discipline! Hitler thought to himself, weak-kneed. These half machines, half men melted together into one unified whole totally under his command.

He lifted his trembling hand from underneath his black cape and signalled his press secretary to come over. Dietrich immediately left his film team and came up to him.

"Heil Hitler," Dietrich said.

He brought his right hand up in one smart motion and held it there, stiffly, hand, wrist and forearm stretched out absolutely straight.

"Is everything ready?" asked Hitler.

Rain drops dripped from the peak of his cap, *trickled over his quivering eyelashes, his moustache and his razor lips, as he stared at Dietrich with ice blue eyes.*

"Yes, mein Führer!"

"This could be the most important film you will ever shoot for the Wochenschau. The people of Germany need to see that I am alive!"

They need to see how I was saved by an act of fate from Stauffenberg's bomb. They need to see how well protected I am!"

"Yes, mein Führer! All our camera teams are in position for Il Duce's state visit."

"I want to see the film as soon as it is ready. I want to edit it myself."

A hoot startled Hitler. He turned from Dietrich and scanned the railway tracks which emerged out of the pine mist. He could just about make out the side line where his own special train, called "Amerika", was hidden underneath camouflage nets. The chugging of a railway locomotive through the forests became louder. Next, he saw a locomotive appear, steam shooting upwards.

The locomotive shot past him, axles clanking in a thunderous roar. It was followed by carriages and open wagons carrying anti flak guns. German soldiers stood in parade formation inside the wagon in front of their anti aircraft guns. Their coal scuttle helmets and rifles glistened in the rain. Hitler glanced up at the soldier as the wagons slid past. Ornate carriages flashed past. The locomotive braked sharply. The train stopped. Hitler looked up and found himself more or less face with Mussolini himself. Aides opened a train carriage door and Mussolini stepped down onto the platform.

Il Duce looked gaunt, exhausted and tired and confused. But he managed a smile as he walked up to Hitler, wearing a beige cloak over a beige uniform with a leather belt fastened at the waist, riding breeches and high boots.

Hitler threw Mussolini a chuckling glance, said a few soft, courteous words of welcome. He used his left hand to greet Mussolini. He held his bandaged right hand close to his side underneath his black cape, glittering with rain drops.

“Welcome, welcome, my dear friend!” Hitler said. “I am so glad you were able to make it to the Wolf’s Lair.”

“Thank you. I am very glad to be here and able to speak to you about developments in Italy.”

There were lots of chaos and confusion the Italian officials greeted Hitler and their German counterparts.

Hitler steered Mussolini through the pouring rain over to a waiting car. Drops pinged off the bonnet of the Mercedes limousine, and speckled the windscreen mirroring the dark skies.

A soldier held open the door.

Hitler got in the back together with Mussolini. The Mercedes drove off. Soldiers standing in a line beside a raised barrier stood to attention as the Mercedes drove past at the front of a convoy of limousines.

The driver turned left and drove down the main road heading east to Sperrkreis 1.

Mussolini was extremely agitated. He turned to Hitler, his face creased with worries.

“I managed to form a new government in North Italy, Adolf,” he said. “But I don’t know how long it will last. You know, I had to execute, including my son in law! I still can’t believe Galeazzo is dead!”

There were tears in his eyes.

Hitler turned away, wearily. He looked blankly out through the rain-smearred window at the forests and the bunkers of the Wolf’s Lair’s main vehicle pool flashing by outside. Hundreds of Kubelwagens and half track vehicles were parked beneath camouflage nets.

“The day I had to kill Ciano was the hardest of my life. I ask myself: what for?”

Hitler didn't bother to reply. Mussolini's tears filled Hitler with weariness and contempt. He vaguely recalled his meeting with Ciano in 1938 in his Berghof chalet. Mussolini's son-in-law had struck him as an arrogant young pup who had dared to openly oppose a close alliance between Italy and Germany in any war. Hitler had promptly invited him to the isolated Eagle's Nest and in a private conversation, threatened him, his wife, children and whole family with death if he did not do what he was told. Ciano had been so shaken by what he had seen and heard that he had left the Berghof convinced that Hitler was evil personified. In 1943, Ciano had joined in an attempt to depose Mussolini and negotiate peace with the Allies who had landed in Sicily, convinced the war was over. Hitler had sent soldiers to free Mussolini from the hotel where he was held prisoner on the mountain of Gran Sasso and helped him set up a puppet government in the north.

Ignoring Mussolini, Hitler turned the conversation back to himself, his only interest.

“I've got something amazing to tell, something which confirms that I have a special destiny and victory is in sight!” he muttered. “There was an attempt on my life just before you came. It was destiny for me to survive!”

Mussolini looked at Hitler, staggered.

“An attempt on your life, Adolf?” he cried.

“It's a miracle I am alive.”

“It happened just two hours ago,” said Hitler, chuckling. “And look at me! Apart from a few cuts on my hand, I am as fit as a fiddle!”

Hitler held up his bandaged right hand. His pale blue eyes had an ecstatic look. He turned to peer out of the window, covered in droplets of rain. Above 200 metres further on, Hitler saw the barrier of Wache 1 or Gate 1A of the Sperrkreis 1. He observed the security with heightened attentiveness.

“Who did it?” asked Mussolini as they drove past the Wache.

“A colonel in the army chief of staff,” said Hitler.

“A colonel?”

“Colonel von Stauffenberg. At first I thought it was some of the labourers working on the construction of the bunkers here. There are hundreds of them. But it soon became clear that I was wrong. The culprit is Stauffenberg. He felt the conference room just before the explosion. He headed straight for the airport and took off for Berlin at 1 o’clock. What more proof do we need?”

“So the army is rebelling? They know it’s all over too.”

The rain was hammering down onto the roof of the Mercedes so loud, Mussolini could barely hear himself panicking.

The metal barrier had been raised. Dozens of soldiers stood at the side of the road in the pouring rain, their right arms stretched out in the Hitler Grüss.

“The military are stupid oxes,” said Hitler. “It was a tiny clique of traitors. I have ordered Stauffenberg to be arrested.”

“Where is he?”

“In Berlin.”

“What happened? How could anyone get through all this security?”

“Stauffenberg brought a briefcase bomb into the midday conference. Four of my generals were killed. A dozen others were wounded. I survived and only because Brandt moved the briefcase at the last moment. He put it on the other side of the leg of a huge oak table, which took most of the blast. Brandt and the other men standing on that side took the full force of the blast. All of them were killed. But you can see, I got off virtually scot free, a few grazes and bruises on my legs and my hands, a burst ear drum and some singed hair. A miracle! Look, that’s the barrack over there! You can see for yourself!”

As they drove up, Mussolini observed, through high strength steel barbed wire glinting between poles, a gutted barracks surrounded by burned pine trees, scorched by fire. He also saw police men scouring the debris in the mud and rain.

They drove through Gate IA. The Mercedes parked between the Guest bunker and the gutted barracks and they got out.

Hitler gave Mussolini a tour of the barracks which had just been blown up by the briefcase bomb of Stauffenberg. The degree of damage was mindboggling. Mussolini saw that one side of the barracks had been blown apart. Everything was gone, not just the walls, but the inner parts like the floor. The other part of the barracks which was still standing was a wreck and filled with debris and pieces of timber.

There was a moment of surreal calmness as Mussolini gathered his splintered thoughts.

“It really is a miracle you survived a bomb like that,” he finally said.

Hitler flashed him a triumphant look from underneath the black peak of his cap covered in rain drops.

“Destiny!” he cried.

An intense light gleamed in his pale blue eyes.

When they were at lunch in the Casino, Mussolini turned the subject back to his desperate situation in Italy. He pressed on Hitler his need for reinforcements. Hitler assured him he was preparing to send new divisions to Italy. It was all a lie. Hitler knew he had no new divisions. Mussolini knew it too. The fact that Hitler had barely survived an assassination attempt underlined just how precarious his situation was becoming.

“Italy will soon be in the hands of the Allies. My government will soon fall without help, Adolf. Don’t you think it’s time to start negotiating an end to the war?” said Mussolini.

“Why? We are on the verge of victory,” said Hitler. “The decisive thing is will power. If the Germans don’t win against the Red Army, they deserve to die. Let the country go down in flames!” His eyes gleamed with cruel delight.

Mussolini fell silent, convinced he was talking to a madman. He saw Hitler’s will to power in a new light. Hitler suddenly seemed to be the ultimate in tiny-minded egoism acknowledging nothing higher than his own whimsical wishes and moods. It was hard for Mussolini to know how much of Hitler’s inability to recognize objective reality was due to his limitations of intellect and heart and sheer stupidity, how much was due to his cruel and obsessive compulsive psychology, and how much was due to his being an a member of a Satanic lodge, the Ordo Templi Orientis, and an adherent of the black magic school of Aleister Crowley consciously committed to evil. But one thing was clear to Il Duce after talking to Hitler: he could expect no help from his former ally. He faced a depressing future when he returned to Italy. He was hated by his fellow countrymen. Without the support of Nazi

Germany, it was only a question of time before his fragile rump government was toppled by his opponents and the Allies and he was executed.

After lunch, Hitler escorted Mussolini back to his train and saw him off on the return journey to Italy. In the meantime, the sun had come out again. The heat was as intense as before and dried the puddles and rain on the platform as Hitler said his final goodbyes. The mosquitoes also came back out in force.

As soon as Il Duce's train had departed, Hitler got into his Mercedes limousine and ordered his driver to take him straight to his bunker, anxious to find out the latest developments concerning Stauffenberg. Sitting in the back of his Mercedes, fidgeting with a whip, his mood became black.

He had tried to order the Gestapo and SS to scour Berlin for Stauffenberg and have him arrested only to find all the telephone lines had been blocked.

The communications network in the Wolf's Lair was the most efficient in the Nazi German armed forces. Telephone lines ran alongside the railway line, connecting the Wolf's Lair to the telephone exchange at Rastenburg with the number 853 or the exchange at Zossen with the number 500. These exchanges, in turn, could connect the Wolf's Lair to all the commanders at the front as well as all government offices in Berlin and the rest of Germany. The communications network was so efficient it allowed instant contact to be made with virtually every platoon fighting at the front as far away as North Africa. Twelve men worked in three shifts in the windowless communications bunker, which was guarded round the clock by special military police. Every conversation except Hitler's was recorded on magnetic tapes.

Whenever Hitler had a call to make, all other telephone conversations in the Wolf's Lair were instantly halted.

But that afternoon, the communication lines had been sabotaged. Hitler realised that the chief of communications General Eric Fellgiebel and his second in command, Sander, had been involved in the assassination attempt. He had also found out that Quartermaster Eduard Wagner had helped Stauffenberg make his escape, arranging for a plane to wait at Rastenburg airport at 1 pm for him. But Hitler still did not know how many other people were involved. So far, no one had managed to restore the communications system. Fellgiebel and Sander were the ones who understood how the communications system functioned in detail. They had been arrested but they refused to cooperate even at the threat of torture, meaning that it could take hours for Hitler to be able to make phone calls again.

Unknown to Fellgiebel, however, Hitler had ordered a top secret phone line to be installed to contact his closest associates in Germany, Switzerland, and abroad. That single line to the Globalist network of international freemasons in the Ordo Templi Orientis was now his only way of reaching the outside world.

Signposts at intervals showed the way to Bunker 13 -- the Führer Bunker located on the edge of Sperrkreis 1 -- where Hitler had his living quarters. It was the biggest bunker in the complex and beside the bunker, Bunker 11, of his special secretary, Martin Bormann.

Hitler asked himself over and over as he stared out of the window at lakes of water flashing among the trees, the chain link fence and clouds of mosquitoes buzzed if Stauffenberg had already been arrested in Berlin or not.

In suspense, he stared through the window, watching his colossal bunker looming in the windscreen. The Mercedes slipped under the camouflage nets which hung over the approach road. Most of the daylight was kept away by the leaves and branches on the gigantic nets, hanging about ten metres from the ground and held up by poles. But a few beams of light penetrated to form pools on the ground,

His limousine pulled in and parked opposite the main entrance. Hitler got out into the sweltering heat, the flecks of sunlight swirling around at his feet.

He pulled down the peak of his cap to shade his eyes. He could not bear sunlight. Exposure to bright sun actually caused him a painful sensation.

“Heil Hitler!”

Out of the corner of his eyes, Hitler caught sight of bright metal tunic buttons and a polished belt buckle flashing. He blinked and saw a soldier was holding open the door of his car. The silver head lamps of his Mercedes cabriolets glinted like a knife.

Hitler narrowed his eyes. He walked at a quick pace down the path to the main door, scanning his surroundings, his eyes shaded by his extra large cap.

The colossal bunker built of reinforced concrete and with walls eight metres in thickness resembled a Mayan temple in a South American jungle or a pyramid in ancient Egypt in its profile.

The square block squatted in the depths of the forests like a primeval temple lost in the mists of time.

The lower part of the bunker consisted of a sheer wall about ten metres high and fifty metres long. The six entrance doors cut deep into the

wall on the northern side of the bunker created blocks of shadows on the bare surface. Tiny shadows were also thrown by the rungs of iron ladders, ventilation slots as well as electrical wires and pipes.

The number of the bunker was painted in huge black letters beside the door.

Bu 13. The bunker of the master.

Gripping his whip, Hitler walked over to the entrance decorated with hieroglyphs and Nazi symbols.

Two soldiers stood to attention on either side.

Sunlight glinted on their steel helmets -- rounded at the top and falling down at the back and sides of their heads in a coalscuttle shape -- as they stood, holding his rifle against his shoulder, motionless, like a statue.

Hitler walked through the door into a passage. A steep, narrow staircase led down to the first level where his main chamber was located at the centre of a labyrinth of corridors. Thanks to the air conditioning, humming in the background, the bunker was pleasantly cool. The semi darkness lit up only by weak electric lights was also soothing to his eyes.

For the first time since the midday conference, Hitler felt safe.

Klap. Klap. The SS soldiers on either side of iron doors presented arms. Hitler raised his right arm in salute and walked on through the door. His steps echoed in the cavernous passage as he walked down to his private quarters.

There was something pleasant to his eye about the bare and purely functional corridor. The straight, uncluttered lines made it easy for

him to pick out any unnatural or odd shape, any sudden movement or sign of imminent danger, and so increased his sense of safety.

The helmets of the soldiers standing at intervals of 10 meters along both sides like statues glinted in icy white electric lights, fixed at regular intervals along the wall.

An SS Untersturmführer standing on guard beside the steel door leading to his chamber raised his right arms in salute.

“Heil Hitler!” he said.

"Heil Hitler!" Hitler replied in a hoarse voice, which echoed in the icy stillness.

From underneath the hard peak of his cap, he peered at the soldiers standing on the left and right of the steel door, evaluating and assessing their appearance, looking out for any detail that might give the game way. A speck of dirt on a belt buckle here, an insolent stare there? A sign that they were conspiring to rebel? That they were sick and tired of their slavish existences full of drills and deprivations? That they had realised that he was sending them to their doom and death? Or were these soldiers still so mesmerised by the vision of being masters, having cars, houses, plunder that they couldn't think straight? So spellbound by the dream of owning their own little “Wolf's Lair” that they were ready to follow him to destruction?

All of them had the same, impassive expression as they stood in an attitude of total obedience. The reflections from the overhead lights gleamed on the top of all their helmets, rounded at the top and with rims jutting out above their eyes. Their boots were all shining and cleaned. The metal parts of their sturdy rifles all gleamed. Each one

was armed to the teeth with service pistols, daggers and hand grenades hanging from their belts.

His eyes flickering with fascination, Hitler observed the clean and shining black leather boots. He felt a frisson of pleasure. A red flush appeared on his pale cheeks as he stared at the belts and the weapons of his men. The power latent in all these drilled soldiers with their perfectly functioning weapons and smart uniforms made him tremble.

Hitler gripped his whip, barely able to control excitement.

The young, muscular soldiers with their black steel helmets covering their eyes, black uniforms and black boots, primed to carry out his every command, merged in Hitler's feverish mind with images of absolute mastery, of absolute domination over millions of people, of standing up on a throne high above the crowds, above prisoners bound and captive. He pictured the delight of seeing the fear in the eyes of all his "prisoners". The thrill of standing before them like god! Of lashing their flesh with a whip and seeing the fear on their faces. Oh, to be able to cause suffering to others with impunity! That was the proof of ultimate power! That was the ultimate high in his life! The cause of the adrenaline rush that brought him back from the dead and made him feel so alive!

Fantasies of young, strong men, their faces twisted in pain, writhing naked underneath him, begging him, pleading with him, begging him to stop beating them with his whip, whirled through his mind.

The fact that he did not care in the least bit about his soldiers made Hitler feel carefree.

Each one of these men could be sacrificed without a second thought, he thought to himself. They were all interchangeable. Their only purpose was to carry his name and his spirit of nihilism and destruction out

into the world. That was all. He had only to say the word and the soldiers now standing there cold and fixed would instantly be transformed into energy and power, and run down the corridor like wild men, ready to defend him, ready to attack his enemies.

He walked through a second door and down a narrow corridor, his pale blue eyes fixed on the final steel door leading to his chamber with an ecstatic gleam.

The Obersturmführer standing by the door pressed a button. The doors of the steel elevator slid open. Hitler walked inside his chamber.

Martin Bormann, his secretary, was already waiting for him. He was standing at the top end of a long oak table surrounded by twelve oak chairs with stuff backs. Lamps affixed to the walls like the torches in a medieval castle illuminated pictures of Bismarck and Frederick the Great.

A five-pointed star, or pentagram, hung on the wall opposite the main chair or throne at the end of the table where Bormann was standing, looking at some files.

The star came from a Soviet airplane which had been shot down. Hitler told all his visitors that it was a trophy. But freemasons who were initiated into the allegory and symbols of the freemasons immediately recognised the pentagram of the Rothschilds, the world's ruling family.

The same five pointed star was on the US flag. It was the symbol of the US army. Five gold stars were the highest rank which could be given to a US general. Five pentagrams also formed the flag of Communist China.

Hitler walked over to a side table, picked up a glass and poured himself a drink of apple juice. He gulped it down, thirstily.

“So, have you had that Stauffenberg arrested, yet?” he asked, putting down the glass and turning to Bormann.

Bormann glanced up from his file.

“Not yet,” he muttered.

Overweight, with heavy jowls, tiny, cunning eyes, a short neck and stubby fingers, Bormann resembled a pig. His appetite for sex with women and children was voracious. Like Hitler, he was a member of the French secret lodge, the Ordo Templi Orientis controlled by the Rothschilds, and a follower of Aleister Crowley.

“Why not, Martin? Why haven’t you got Stauffenberg? I want to deal with him myself!” Hitler cried, cracking his whip on the floor.

“Our communication lines are still down.”

“How is that possible?”

“Only Fellgiebel knows.”

“And why haven’t you got the information out of him?”

“Himmler is conducting an interrogation. It isn’t pleasant.”

“I want to know how the Gestapo missed Stauffenberg!”

“We can’t spy on every single person all the time,” said Bormann.

“What if others start taking the initiative and try to kill me? The dangerous thing is the example Stauffenberg has given. He has shown that he is willing to think for himself and act for himself. He has made his own decisions. If all our brain washing failed on him, it could fail on others.”

“The military are stupid animals,” said Bormann. “The German army rushes at the Russian throats without noticing they are funded by the

same side. The Soviet Union has exactly the same cult of the leader, the same media as propaganda, the same totalitarian bureaucracy and the same secret police as Nazi Germany precisely because they have been set up and run by the same people. How stupid can they be not to see that it is all a set up and is bound to end in tears?"

"Stauffenberg obviously saw it!" cried Hitler. "He realises that Germany is heading for a catastrophe and I am responsible. Of course, he can see I am not representing the interests of Germany and don't give a damn about the Germans."

"Don't panic," said Bormann. "We are working on a programme and part of the programme is the defeat of Germany. Germany in total ruins was always the object. They have to be wiped out, obliterated or so busy surviving that we can take total control of the new Germany and the new Europe."

"But we haven't gotten there yet and Stauffenberg almost assassinated me. Have you made preparations for me to escape?"

"You can't go yet. There is too much substance left in Germany. Too many people are alive who remember the bank crisis of 1931."

"Well, I just don't feel safe anymore, not even in this bunker."

"It doesn't matter what you feel. You are just an arm of the Rothschilds like Stalin. You don't make the decisions. We all have to work to a centralised plan. There is world war one, two and then comes world war three with the new state of Israel causing all the trouble. Out of chaos comes order. Rothschild doesn't give a damn about the Jews. He is a Talmudic goyim hater and he has nothing to do with Judaism. But he wants control of the globe."

"I will never live to see it."

“Don’t worry. You will live long enough. Before Germany collapses, you will be on your way to Argentina in a U Boot. The perfect plan is in place to make it look like you committed suicide to throw your enemies off the track. The Vatican networks are activated. It will all be fine in the end.”

“Yes,” Hitler said, gripping his whip. “There was no way out now. I have set in motion a series of events that would ultimately lead to Germany’s total defeat. I either get out or I will be lynched like Mussolini.”

THREE

The driver found the landmark building, the Bendlerblock by the Landwehrkanal in the heart of Berlin.

Four hours after the explosion in the Wolf's Lair in East Prussia, at 4:30 pm on July 20th, Stauffenberg was there again, driving in blazing sunshine past the sentries at the gate where a blood-red Swastika flag flapped around wildly in a hot breeze. The heat was omnipresent that day in the broken city of bombed-out Berlin. Bit by bit, the heat had sucked all the energy out of the guards, sapping them of their strength. Their grey tunics were dripping in sweat. They barely looked up from under their coalscuttle helmets as the Mercedes slide past, its bonnet glinting in the fiery light.

The sprawling office complex had housed the German Imperial Navy Command Centre during World War One, but now housed the headquarters of the General Army and Reserve Army. It was the nerve center of the entire German armed forces in the event of a domestic emergency, equipped with a secure communications centre, including teleprinters, to enable commands to be sent to all parts of Nazi Germany and the occupied territories.

And just such a national emergency had occurred at noon on July 20th. Stauffenberg had seen to it himself by blowing up the conference room in the Wolf's Lair – and the Führer Adolf Hitler with it. That meant, Stauffenberg, the chief of staff of the Reserve Army, had just become the second most powerful man in the country after his chief, the commander of the Reserve Army, Generaloberst Friedrich Fromm.

A special code word allowed Stauffenberg and Fromm to activate operation Valyrie, and mobilize army units to neutralize the SS, arrest Nazis and set up a new government. Stauffenberg himself had persuaded Hitler to sign the Valkyrie decree during his first meeting with the dictator in June in the Berghof chalet in the Bavarian Alps. The dictator had agreed, convinced the Valkyrie decree would help him

deal with an uprising by the millions of slave labourers toiling in factories on German soil or a similar crisis. Little had Hitler suspected that Valkyrie was going to be used against him...

The Mercedes carbiolet rolled into the inner courtyard, wheels rattling over the cobble stones, and parked close to a dozen military vehicles. Stauffenberg stepped out into a blast furnace. The heat was trapped inside the high walls of the courtyard like a caged beast. The heat overwhelmed Stauffenberg. He tried to get a grip but it had gotten to the point where he found it difficult to think. The stress had made him forget to drink plenty of water on his flight back to prevent dehydration. All he could think about now was a glass of water.

“It’s Stauffenberg! Look. He’s back. He’s not dead!”

The words echoed around the courtyard.

“Impossible. Generaloberst Fromm said the Führer was alive.”

“How could he be? Stauffenberg is back! Look, look, there he is!”

Stauffenberg tensed. He looked up and saw, seven stories higher, hanging out of the windows of the largest administration building in the functional complex, a half dozen people. More and more people appeared at the open windows. Secretaries, staff officers and soldiers swarmed to look out. Stauffenberg sensed their confusion and anxiety.

“But General Fellgiebel said Hitler survived the bomb.”

A voice, magnified by the echo, cried out.

Stauffenberg looked at Haeften astonished.

Hitler alive?

Haeften stared blankly.

Stauffenberg drew a sharp breath. It was inevitable that something would go wrong in any attempt to assassinate Hitler and launch a coup, and his plans would run into trouble at some point. But he had never expected a situation to arise where people thought that Hitler was alive. If people believed that Hitler was alive, it was just as dangerous as if he were actually alive. It would give Nazi leaders like Goebbels time to regroup and regain control. Standing in the burning heat, Stauffenberg even started to wonder if Hitler really had survived the explosion in the wooden barracks. Such a fear had been present in his mind when the venue of the conference had been changed from the bunker to a wooden barracks. And then there was the fact that he had only managed to prime one of the two bombs – something he was reminded of by the sight of the leather briefcase Haeften was still holding in his hand.

He wiped the perspiration from his forehead as he dived into his memory.

Had he been dreaming?

Before his mind's eyes, he saw again the scene in the Wolf's Lair. He saw Hitler's pale blue eyes, the briefcase at the foot of the table, the explosion and black smoke which had engulfed the barrack building...

Could Hitler really have survived that? Or was the claim just propaganda to allow the Nazis time to regroup?

The voices bouncing off the walls were almost as harsh as the sun.

“Generaloberst Fromm just spoke to Field Marshall Keitel.”

Keitel alive?

Haeften looked at Stauffenberg with pure panic.

“What the hell?” he muttered.

Stauffenberg had to summon all his will power to suppress his fear and frustration and surprise. Luckily, his training as a soldier kicked in. He had survived many dangers because he had learned never to react to his imagination but to size up a situation and find a realistic way for him and those around him to survive. Stauffenberg knew what he had to do now - focus on performing the actions to move the Valykrie coup forward and end the reign of terror of the Nazis. There was too much at stake to hesitate. He walked through the door and ran up the steps to his office, his boots clattering on the bright stairwell.

The invisible but overpowering heat had expanded into all the corridors and stairwells of the Bendlerblock. It had taken control of the whole building by stealth. The temperatures had soared into the forties.

By the time Stauffenberg got to the third floor, he was out of breath. He walked through glass doors out into the corridor only to find a crowd had gathered.

The afternoon had been filled with chaos and confusion. There had been conflicting reports about whether Hitler was alive or dead. But as soon as the crowd saw Stauffenberg, all their doubts vanished. They exploded into wild cheers.

For eleven years, the Nazis had held Germany in an iron grip of terror. For five years, the Second World War had dragged on. The machinery of war was insatiable. Millions of people had already been killed at the front and in concentration camps and in air raids. Now, finally, Stauffenberg brought a real hope of peace and freedom...The people cast all caution to the wind and started to talk openly. There was terror on the streets of Berlin, Hamburg and Dresden. The Gestapo and spies were everywhere ready to arrest, interrogate, torture and execute

anyone who breathed so much as a word of criticism against Hitler and the Nazis or who even uttered a doubt about the “final victory.”

“Can it be true, the pig Hitler is dead?” someone cried out, overjoyed.

“It’s like a miracle.”

Stauffenberg saw their excited faces and felt the burden of responsibility. He knew how much people had suffered: the pain and sadness of losing their friends and relatives; the constant fear of the Gestapo; the hunger and deprivations; and also the worries connected with the imminent defeat and total collapse of the country.

“Someone said the SS had arrested you at Rangsdorf,” said a secretary.

“We flew to Gatow just in case the SS were there. That’s why we’re a bit late.”

“Is Hitler really dead?”

“I saw the explosion with my own eyes. I’ve just come from the Wolf’s Lair.”

“I saw it all too,” said Haeften.

“Someone said Bormann ordered your plane to be shot down over Berlin. Your luck won’t last forever,” said Hauptmann Siegfried von Heiden with a sullen, hostile look.

Stauffenberg knew there were many Nazi sympathizers Hitler even in the Bendlerblock.

“Lies, lies, lies as usual, Siegfried. Here, I am.”

“I heard Himmler had ordered Kaltenbrunner to the Wolf’s Lair and he had intercepted your plane mid way and forced you down.”

“That pair couldn’t find the moon in a clear night sky without the help of a telescope. Dear friends, we are now in the middle of a national

emergency. As you know, the centre of power in Germany is now here, the headquarters of the Reserve Army. We have a lot to do. If you will excuse me...”

Stauffenberg burst into his office. His brother, Berthold, was standing at the windows in his naval uniform together with Ewald von Kleist, Georg Sigismund von Oppen and Hans Fritzsche.

Almost ten hours had passed since Berthold had left Stauffenberg at the airport in Rangsdorf and the suspense had taken its toll. Berthold rushed over to him and gave him a friendly hug.

“Thank God you’re back.”

“What’s up with the Valkyrie?” asked Stauffenberg, smiling.

“Fromm refused to sign the orders,” he said.

“What?”

“Fromm says Hitler is still alive.”

“He’s dead!”

“Are you sure, Claus?”

“I saw it all from the outside. There was an explosion like a 15 centimetre grenade slamming in. Hardly anyone could have survived that.”

“So you detonated the bomb?”

“Yes, I put it under the table and left the conference room just in the nick of time.”

“I saw it too,” said Haefen. “There was a huge explosion. I’m pretty sure Hitler is dead.”

“You have to tell Fromm.”

Stauffenberg nodded.

“Where is he? In his office?”

“Yes! Merz is with him,” said Kleist. “Fromm has put Merz under arrest for starting the Valkyrie operation.”

“What?”

“Fromm has gotten cold feet. He got through to Keitel at the Wolf’s Lair on the phone and Keitel told him Fromm is alive. The communication lines have just been restored.”

“Already?”

“Fromm wants to pretend he has nothing to do with the coup. He wants to get rid of us. We’re witnesses. He would love to make it look like he sabotaged us.”

“Great!” said Stauffenberg, unbuttoning the top of silver tunic. “I’ll deal with Fromm later. We have to get the Valkyrie operation going.”

“But Fromm has ordered it to be stopped, Claus.”

“It doesn’t matter what Fromm says. There is too much at stake. I’m determined to go on.”

Stauffenberg took a deep breath, and walked on through the door. Merz von Quirnheim’s office and the adjoining rooms had been turned into the nerve centre of the Valkyrie operation. His heart beating wildly, Stauffenberg opened the door and strode in. He froze. To his astonishment, he saw two dozen officers just standing around, most of them looking hopeless and helpless.

Friedrich Olbricht, the chief of the General Army, was sitting on a chair, looking very depressed. General Erich Hoepner was pacing up and down, chain smoking.

The news that Hitler was alive had had a devastating impact on conspirators. General Fritz Thiele had even had an angry outburst, and gone into hiding in panic.

“Fromm refused to sign the Valkyrie, Claus,” said Olbricht, shrugging his shoulders. “There’s nothing we can do.”

“It’s not over yet,” said Stauffenberg

“Hitler is alive.”

“He’s dead. I saw it. I’m taking charge.”

Immediately, everyone looked to Stauffenberg for instructions.

As the chief of staff, he had no formal authority to command the Reserve Army, yet was the dominant player in the Reserve army. Generaloberst Fromm knew that defeat was imminent and spent most of his time at his sister’s house in the countryside or at night clubs in the company of young dancers. He gave Stauffenberg a free reign in the office. Fromm had also asked for Stauffenberg to be his chief of staff in a letter to Hitler, something which gave Stauffenberg extra authority.

Stauffenberg looked at his watch. It was 4:40. He walked up to operations maps spread out on a huge desk and scanned them, hyperalert. His first priority was to get an overview of the situation.

“How far have we got?” he asked as the others crowded around the table.

“Merz sent out the orders to Paul von Hase in Berlin and issued the first set of Valkyrie orders to all the commanders outside the Reich. The army units have started to move in Paris to occupy and cordon off the SS barracks and Gestapo and Nazi buildings.”

Stauffenberg leaned over the table and scanned the maps, calm and focused. The cumulative effect of the heat and the stress had led him

to a state of near exhaustion. But fear pumped adrenaline into his blood stream, and gave him a huge boost of energy. His experiences in combat had taught him to see fear as his best friend as long as he controlled his fear and directed it because fear gave him formidable extra power to master difficulties which he would never have been able to if he had evaded reality and denied the uncomfortable emotion of fear.

As soon as he focused on the operation, Stauffenberg felt his anxiety become lesser and his breathing more even. He took out a cigar case which peaked out of the top right hand breast pocket of his silver-grey tunic and lit a cigarillo.

He decided the priority had to be knock out the SS and Gestapo in Berlin by nightfall. Obtaining control of the capital would be the key to success. He turned his attention to the map of Berlin. Brass symbols placed on top of the map of Berlin glinted in the sunlight. The symbols depicting friendly units had black flags while enemy units had red flags. Their various movements across Berlin had been drawn in manually in black or red pencil.

Stauffenberg observed that enemy units, the SS and some hostile Nazi police units, were located very close to the Bendlerblock itself right in the centre of Berlin while friendly army units were only just starting to move into position to cordon off the government quarter and protect the Bendlerblock. The troops belonging to the Grossdeutsche Wachbatalion had just started to leave their barracks in Berlin Moabit, heading for the Brandenburg Gate, Reichstag, ministries and radio station.

“What’s your honest take on the situation, Claus?” asked Olbricht.

“If we’re lucky we might get control of Berlin by nightfall after all.”

“Reckon?”

“Hope for the best and prepare for the worst.”

“Including a fight with the SS troops... If they really believe Hitler is alive, there could be heavy fighting in the Berlin...”

“That’s why we need to get control of the radio station.”

“I sent Klausen over there.”

“Good.”

“I’m going to send out the next phase of the Valkyrie orders. Where’s the list of commanders?”

Olbricht handed Stauffenberg several sheets of paper, which he had taken from a steel safe.

Stauffenberg scanned the list of command headquarters in numerical order. In each headquarters, there were contact men, who knew what the real intention of the Valkyrie operation was. There was a large network of conspirators across the whole country, ready to act on receiving the coded Valkyrie message to confine the SS to barracks, arrest Gestapo and Nazi officials, and liberate the concentration camps and prisons.

“What about Fromm?” asked Olbricht. “He’ll go crazy if he finds out.”

“Yes, I’ll deal with Fromm,” said Stauffenberg.

Puffing on his cigarillo, he glanced over the Valkyrie orders one last time.

Centered on the top of each page was the security classification: HIGHEST PRIORITY. At the top right was the address of the Reserve Army HQ, the Bendlerblock; the date and time; the message reference number; and the operation order number.

Chomping on his cigarillo, Stauffenberg read first paragraph which described the situation - but in a way that the soldiers at the front brainwashed by years of propaganda could understand. The assassination of Hitler was blamed on a clique.

“The Führer Adolf Hitler is dead! An unscrupulous clique of party leaders far from front has attempted to exploit this situation, has plunged a knife in the backs of the hard-struggling front units and to seize power for their own purposes,” he muttered.

“In this hour of highest danger, the government of the Reich has declared a state of military emergency to maintain law and order and at the same time has transferred the executive power, with the supreme command of the Wehrmacht to the Reserve Army.”

There followed information about the new chain of command, the scope of their authority and a list of specific tasks to be accomplished by the commanders immediately on receipt of the orders, including a list of the key buildings and infrastructure to be occupied, and a list of hostile Nazi and SS units to be disarmed and confined to barracks.

The final paragraphs gave a warning of chaos and a break down at the front if the Reserve Army failed to gain control.

“Any opposition against the enforcement of military power of enforcement is to be ruthlessly broken.

In this hour of grreatest danger for the Fatherland, the unity of the Wehrmacht and the maintenance of full discipline is the what is most needed.

That is why I make it the duty of all commanders of the army, the navy, and the air force to support those with executive power to carry out their difficult tasks with all the means at their disposal and to ensure that the units subordinate to them comply with the directives. The

German soldier is facing an historical task. His efforts and attitude will determine whether Germany will be saved.”

Stauffenberg signed the orders and handed the papers to Kleist.

“Send the Valkyrie orders out right away, will you?”

Kleist nodded and ran off to the teleprinters, located in the basement.

“What will Fromm say when he finds out?” asked Olbricht.

Stauffenberg walked over to his desk, opened a drawer and took out a pistol.

“If Fromm doesn’t go along with it, we have to arrest him.”

In a stressful, uncertain situation, when the soldiers did not know if Hitler was alive or dead, they would highly likely stick to the tried and trusted habits and obey the highest authority. That was Fromm. He had to be persuaded to join in – or be put out of action.

Glancing through the high windows, he caught sight of the trees in the courtyard. His thoughts turned back to his family in the countryside.

At the thought of the danger they and so many other people were in, he felt fear. The key to staying calm, he thought to himself, tucking the pistol into his belt, was keeping control of his thoughts at all times, staying focussed on his purpose.

Stauffenberg walked down the boiling corridor and into Fromm’s office followed by Haeften and Kleist. He saw Fromm standing behind his desk. The Knight’s Cross at his collar glinted in the sunlight.

Fromm looked as pale as ghost. He was a tough, hard drinking man, willing to work eighteen hours a day for the success he believed was his right, but he also liked to party hard. He was proud of being in charge of one of the Reserve Army, and saw it as a stepping stone to

something even greater. At the same time, he had no illusions about the outcome of the war. He knew that the defeat of Hitler was inevitable and that the eastern part of Germany would fall to the Red Army. He had begun to make secret preparations to move to the west of Germany and start his career all over once the war was finished. Throughout the months of planning the Valkyrie operation, Fromm had played a double game, pretending he did not know what was going on, yet positioning himself to take advantage of the death of Hitler to bring himself to safety.

Stauffenberg stopped, clicked his heels. Fromm *stuffed out his cigarette. His eyes flashed through the blue smoke which wound up in the sunlight.*

Merz von Quirnheim jumped up from his chair.

“Claus. Keitel just told Generaloberst Fromm that Hitler is alive.”

Fromm nodded. He pointed at a telephone.

“I just spoke to Keitel in the Wolf’s Lair on the phone. Hitler is alive.”

“The Field Marshall is lying as usual.”

“How do you know? Where you there?” Fromm asked, stubbing out his cigarette in a crystal ashtray.

“I heard an explosion, calls for a doctor and I saw Hitler carried away on a stretcher.”

“Someone in Hitler’s close circle must have done it.”

“Herr Generaloberst, I planted the bomb myself,” said Stauffenberg, calmly. “There was an explosion like a 15 centimetre grenade. Hardly anyone could have survived.”

“Keitel did survive! I just spoke to him. Merz is my witness. Stauffenberg, it has gone terribly wrong. You have to shoot yourself.”

“I had no intention of doing that.”

Infuriated, Fromm slammed his fist on his desk.

“Damn you! The man is a sick, a beast. He is and blood thirsty vampire. You think I want to be hanging from a meat hook when he plunges his fangs into my throat and sucks the last drop of blood out?”

“Generaloberst, your best chance is to sign the Valkyrie orders. It is unrealistic to think you will be spared death given the fact Hitler is such a psychopath.”

Fromm’s eyes blazed.

“The best for us all is if you shoot yourself. Hitler will think you were a lone assassin, acting on your own. Keitel asked where you were. He noticed you had left the conference room. They know you did it. They’ll be coming to get you. They could be here by nightfall. Shoot yourself. It’s the best for you and everyone.”

“I have no intention of doing that.”

“Then you’re under arrest.”

“You’ve misunderstood the situation, Herr Generaloberst. You are under arrest.”

Frustrated, frightened and furious, Fromm clenched his fists and rushed at Stauffenberg.

Haeften stepped in. He put his pistol to Fromm’s chest.

Fromm put up his hands and took three steps backwards.

“You have five minutes to think it over,” said Stauffenberg. “Place the Generaloberst under guard.”

Kleist nodded.

“I’m going get through this ordeal alive, Stauffenberg” cried Fromm.
“Hitler is alive and the coup is never going to work. Shoot yourself while you can.”

Stauffenberg walked back to his office, frowning. He knew that even under the most ideal outcome, the death of Hitler, taking control of the army and would have been a formidable task. German soldiers had been drilled to show absolute obedience to Hitler. Each soldier had also been forced to swear a personal oath to Hitler, cementing loyalties. Indoctrination and brainwashing by the mainstream media encouraged soldiers to think that Hitler and the Nazis were the saviours. And if the propaganda didn’t have the desired effect, terror usually did. Gestapo and military police arrested, interrogated, tortured and handed over for summary executions any soldier who criticised the „saviour of Germany“, “ the messiah”, “the charismatic leader” – at least, that was how the media liked to style Adolf Hitler. But then again, Hitler owned the biggest media conglomerate, in the country, so what would anyone expect?

Punishments for even trivial offences or mistakes were severe and included summary execution. More than thirty thousand German soldiers had been condemned to death by one of the thousands of military courts set during the course of the war. The field courts of four divisions fighting in Stalingrad had condemned 364 soldiers to death in the spring 1943 in eight days alone for “cowardice before the enemy”, deserting and stealing rations. Soldiers who escaped death at a court martial often ended up either in penal battalions sent on suicide missions or in military prisons such as Torgau. Torture, hunger, beatings made the prison notorious. It would be very hard to

persuade soldiers to follow his orders if they thought Hitler was alive or the Nazi regime was in tact.

When Stauffenberg walked back into his office, he saw Ludwig Beck standing there in the warm light that spilled through the window onto the golden parquet floor. He was dressed in a white shirt, tie and grey suit, and looking very much like the head of a new government, Thank God!

Stauffenberg would never, though, get used to seeing the General out of uniform.

It was hard to believe that Beck had been the most powerful man in the entire German army until 1938. He'd been the brilliant, respected, fearless chief of the army general staff surrounded by adjutants and aides. Stauffenberg could still remember visiting him in his imperial office in the heart of Berlin and catching a glimpse of a portrait of Clausewitz hanging on the wall. Clausewitz! The military strategist who always stressed the importance of using military force sparingly to achieve realistic political objectives! Very sensible! And the opposite of Hitler! Hitler and the Nazis subscribed to the cult of brute force. Violence for the sake of violence was glorified. They worshipped at the altar of death. Their plans for war had no hope of success and no exit strategy. They were plans that would result in the deaths of millions and millions.

And that was why Beck had felt compelled to resign in 1938 in a last ditch attempt to stop Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia and the chain of aggressive actions which brought Germany into a second world war and only twenty years after the first world war had ended in such staggering defeat and with so many millions of pointless deaths.

After his resignation, Beck had lived like a monk in Berlin, devoting himself to his books, and only leaving his apartment to attend sessions of the Tuesday Club, an informal gathering of a few, like-minded friends, who belonged to the resistance.

“I heard the bad news,” said Beck. “Hitler is alive.”

“That’s what Fromm says,” said Stauffenberg, picking up a glass of water and taking a sip.

“What happened?”

“I wish I knew! I saw the explosion myself. I’m pretty sure no one could have survived that but...”

“But...?”

“There were several factors at play which I hadn’t reckoned with. The conference was in a barracks made of timber. I only managed to prime one of the bombs. I managed to get it placed just a few feet from Hitler at the bottom of the table. It can’t be ruled out that someone like John moved it out of the way at the last moment. I left the room about a minute before the bomb went off.”

“It’s not your fault,” said Olbricht, giving Stauffenberg a friendly pat on the back. “To expect you to carry out the assassination and return to Berlin to launch the Valkyrie operation as chief of staff was a crazy idea. The trouble was no one else who had access to Hitler was ready to do it. Not Helmet Stieff and not Eduard Wagner. As for Fellgiebel, he could have just taken his service pistol and shot Hitler if he had seen him alive in the Wolf’s Lair. There must have been an opportunity. Where is the commitment? Now we have a total mess on our hands!”

Stauffenberg took another sip of water and looked at the picture of Hitler which he had hung up to remind him of the Fuhrer's mad expression.

His stomach churned over in a sickening flip when he had saw the photo of Hitler with his pale face with dark hair parted at the side, blue watchful eyes, a brush moustache over razor thin lips – a face, which always seemed to have the same arrogant, stiff expression.

“It's irrelevant if Hitler is alive or not,” said Beck. “We've crossed the Rubicon. We have to see this to the end. There is a slim chance that we might still succeed. Even if Hitler is still alive, he might be seriously injured.”

Next, Kleist walked in.

“Claus, some of the commanders are on the phone, asking for confirmation of the Valkyrie orders from Fromm.”

“Put them through to me,” said Stauffenberg, putting down his glass of water.