

German Studies Association

"The Rift in Our Ranks": The German Officer Corps, the Twentieth of July, and the Path to Democracy

Author(s): Jay Lockenour

Source: *German Studies Review*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Oct., 1998), pp. 469-506

Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of the German Studies Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1431232>

Accessed: 22-03-2019 10:30 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/1431232?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



German Studies Association, The Johns Hopkins University Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *German Studies Review*

“The Rift in Our Ranks”: The German Officer Corps, the Twentieth of July, and the Path to Democracy

Jay Lockenour
Temple University

Introduction

When North Korean soldiers crossed the border into South Korea in June 1950, Western European leaders and their American allies were convinced that their cold war enemies had developed a new tactic in their quest for world domination: war by proxy. The analogy for the European theater seemed clear. The East German *Kasernierte Volkspolizei*, supported ultimately by Soviet forces, would overrun the newly created Federal Republic of Germany on their way to conquering the entire European peninsula. With this situation in mind, and given the clear numerical superiority of Soviet and other communist forces in Europe, Western military planners saw the need for additional forces and proposed what would have seemed unimaginable only three years before: to rearm the Germans.

German rearmament was a troublesome issue, not only in Europe but in Germany as well. Memories of two world wars made Europeans, and the French in particular, reluctant to see German men in uniform once more, and many Germans, seeing themselves as victims of the last war, responded to the call to arms with cries of “Ohne Mich!” (Without Me!). The efforts of the United States and the other Allies to identify “German militarism” as the key to understanding the problematic recent history of Germany backfired now that they believed they needed German soldiers to defend against the threat from the East.

The Germans called upon to plan for this new West German “defense contingent” quickly decided that one way to defuse the potentially explosive emotions surrounding German rearmament was to link the new armed forces to the memory of those soldiers who had tried to kill Hitler on 20 July 1944. By claiming the legacy of those “good Germans” around Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg who had resisted Hitler, Konrad Adenauer and his security advisors (many of whom were linked to the conspiracy in some way) hoped to make the idea of a new German military more palatable to those who had suffered so much at the hands of the old one.

Here the imperatives of rearmament and the rehabilitation, in some form, of German military traditions ran up against opposition (I would not dare say “resistance”) from within the organizations of former *Wehrmacht* officers whose members of necessity would fill the ranks of the new army’s leadership. In the late 1940s and early 1950s it was crucial to the self-image of many former officers of the *Wehrmacht* that they be able to justify their service under the Third Reich in terms of their loyalty to the German *Volk* and the necessity of “doing their job” at the front. But in so doing, those officers situated themselves ideologically in opposition to the conspirators of the twentieth of July 1944. By dutifully fulfilling their military obligations, they were at least implicitly supporting the regime which Stauffenberg, Beck, and the others had tried to overthrow. Many former officers in West Germany were therefore ambivalent about their government’s fascination with the twentieth of July and the efforts to rearm Germany under the aegis of the conspirators’ legacy.

For the former German officer corps, suffering from a strong identification with Hitler and the Third Reich, the adoption of Stauffenberg and the other plotters as models of military (and in some ways, civic) virtue in West Germany created a number of problems. Many officers identified with the conspirators because of the military background of men like Stauffenberg and because of some superficial similarities between the conspirators and themselves in terms of political and social vision. They were also eager in many cases to use the example of the military conspirators to support their argument that the officer corps had been the element of German society least infiltrated and corrupted by Nazi influence. Yet their attitude toward the coup attempt was overwhelmingly negative. Many veterans objected not only to the timing of the coup and the means employed by the conspirators, but also to the plotters’ willingness to assassinate the supreme commander of the *Wehrmacht* to whom they had all sworn an oath of allegiance. To these former officers, steeped in the traditions of the German military, “political murder” (as they called it) greatly offended their sense of honor and duty.

Because of this ambivalence, the discussions which took place among former officers and their associations indicate something of the difficulty with which many officers made the transition from the National Socialist dictatorship to the pluralistic, parliamentary democracy developing in the Federal Republic after 1949. The ways in which the honor-bound former officers negotiated the minefield of truth, myth, and public opinion which surrounded the twentieth of July coup attempt gives important clues to the structure of their political ideology, their conception of their role in the Third Reich, and their desire for acceptance in the Federal Republic. That they did ultimately make that transition also helps to explain, in some ways, the success of the Federal Republic of Germany as a democratic state.

Caveat

Before I examine the attitudes of former officers toward the twentieth of July coup attempt, I feel it necessary briefly to define the parameters of my discussion.

It is important to note that I do not claim to be dealing with the attitudes of the group of reform-minded former officers (many of them members of the twentieth of July conspiracy themselves) who actually performed the work of creating the *Bundeswehr* between 1950 and 1955. The stances of men like Johann Adolf Graf Kielmansegg, Wolf Graf von Baudissin, and Adolf Heusinger regarding the acceptable traditions for the new army are well known, thanks to a number of important studies on German rearmament and the problem of tradition.¹ Rather, this study focuses on the significant number of former officers who, as members of several prominent veterans' organizations, saw themselves as the keepers of German military traditions and who, because of the circumstances outlined above, achieved a great deal of influence, albeit fleeting, in the public debates between 1950 and 1955.

I also approach this subject from the perspective of the social history of the Federal Republic and the development of democracy in postwar Germany. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to situate this work within the large historiography dealing with the details of the coup and the goals of the plotters because, in fact, much of the discussion hinges precisely on the former officers' and the German public's *misperceptions* of the realities of the conspiracy. The work is not wholly irrelevant to the historiography of the twentieth of July, of course, as much of the recent literature has concerned itself with the legacy of the coup.² The discussion within the veterans' organizations shows how this legacy was instrumentalized "in the trenches" or "on the ground" so to speak. It also reveals one way in which the twentieth of July does contribute to postwar democracy, though not in the direct way the German government has often claimed.

The Twentieth of July 1944

The details of the assassination attempt need only be outlined here.³ On the twentieth of July 1944, Claus Schenk Count von Stauffenberg flew from his station in Berlin to the *Wolfschanze*, Hitler's headquarters in East Prussia, carrying with him two bombs. Stauffenberg, as the "trigger man" for a conspiracy of military and civilian notables, intended to use the bombs to kill Hitler at a briefing scheduled for that afternoon.

Although Stauffenberg's bombs failed to kill Hitler, who suffered only an injury to his right arm, a perforated eardrum, and the loss of a new pair of pants, the effects of the attempted assassination and coup on the twentieth of July continued to be felt for the remaining nine months of the Third Reich. Several of the conspirators, Stauffenberg and a number of the others captured at the Bendlerstrasse headquarters in Berlin, were summarily executed by General Fritz Fromm. An estimated 7,000 arrests followed in the next few months, and at least 150 people committed suicide or were executed, many of them in the last weeks of the war at the Gestapo prison at Flossenbürg.⁴ The attempt also spelled the end of resistance efforts on the part of the military, the group which had had, until that moment, perhaps the most realistic chance of overthrowing Hitler.⁵

Though the conspiracy was extremely diverse, the most obvious institutional connection among the plotters was the *Wehrmacht*. Stauffenberg was a colonel in the General Staff. The main group of conspirators in Berlin included two very prestigious officers, General Erwin von Witzleben, and former Chief of the General Staff, Generaloberst Ludwig Beck, as well as many other high-ranking military men. Field Marshal Rommel was also indirectly linked to the coup, and was “allowed” to commit suicide as a result, though his role in the conspiracy was far less active than is portrayed in the many films glorifying Rommel’s life. Though sometimes portrayed as a strictly military coup (particularly by the Nazis themselves), the conspiracy also included many civilians, ranging from conservative parliamentarians and diplomats, to Social Democrats, to the “aristocratic radicals” in the “Kreisauer Kreis.”

The Twentieth of July in Postwar Germany

As Robert Weldon Whalen phrased it in his recent book:

Posterity has idealized and condemned [the twentieth of July coup]; sanctified the conspirators and vilified them. Posterity has brooded over the conspiracy; as of 1984, the fortieth anniversary of the conspiracy, some six thousand publications had been devoted to the German anti-Nazi resistance, and many of these dealt in one way or another with the 20 July plot. Posterity has fretted over and gnawed at and broken its teeth on the conspiracy, and refused to let it go.⁶

One reason the twentieth of July coup attempt refused to fade from memory was that it conveniently meshed with the ideological agendas of both new German states in the growing Cold War after 1949. As the division of Germany became more concrete, both the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) developed a pantheon of heroes which best suited the purposes of the regime in question. While the occupation governments in both east and west quickly suppressed and disbanded many of the indigenous antifascist groups (*Antifas*) which emerged in Germany during the final months of the war, both camps were anxious to link their respective German clients to elements of the pre-war resistance in order to legitimize their rule.⁷

Writers on both sides of the Elbe focused on the types of resisters and the elements of the resisters’ ideas which best suited the purposes of their cold war agendas. Not surprisingly, German historians and publicists in the Soviet zone and the leaders of the later German Democratic Republic identified “resistance” with the actions of socialist and communist elements of the working class to overthrow or undermine the National Socialist regime. The “worker’s state” needed worker-heroes.⁸

Because of its foundation in the *Wehrmacht* and among conservative circles around Carl Goerdeler and Ulrich von Hassell, the twentieth of July conspiracy did not achieve the prominence in the East that it was to enjoy in West Germany. A

number of public declarations and official publications praising the attempt on Hitler's life did nevertheless appear in the Soviet zone of occupation in 1945 and 1946. In 1947, former members of several resistance groups formed the *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes (VVN)* in order to encourage historical study and commemoration of all resistance movements throughout Germany as a whole. The VVN even attracted some 55,000 visitors to an exhibit in Berlin in 1948 which honored the twentieth of July alongside the communist and other resistance groups.⁹ By the end of the 1940s, however, the powers that be in East Germany were squeezing the conspiracy out of the public limelight, first by highlighting only the Socialist elements within the group and their connections to the Communist Party, and finally, by dismissing the coup as a reactionary, imperialist plot directed against the Soviet Union.¹⁰

If they acknowledged worthwhile resistance within the military at all, East German sources focused primarily on the activities of the Soviet-sponsored *Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland (NKFD)* and *Bund deutscher Offiziere (BDO)* which existed within the German prisoner of war camps or the Berlin contacts of the Soviet spy network known to the Gestapo as the "*Rote Kapelle*."¹¹ These groups, as well as resisters in communist organizations or among the working classes were held up as the harbingers of the "new Germany" being created on eastern side of the Elbe river.

In the West, however, resistance groups like the *Rote Kapelle* or the *NKFD* were quite often seen as "traitors" who had not only caused the deaths of untold numbers of Germans by giving information to the enemy during wartime, but had also paved the way for another dictatorship, a Stalinist one, to achieve a foothold on German soil.

In the Federal Republic, resistance to Hitler quickly became identified with groups like the *Kreisauer Kreis*, its allies among more conservative politicians, and the conspirators within the *Wehrmacht*, all of whom were linked to the twentieth of July attempt. As a result, the twentieth of July conspiracy became an increasingly integral part of the self-image of the nascent West German state in the late 1940s and 1950s. Of noble, or at least respectable upbringing, espousing sometimes democratic and even "Christian Socialist" political ideas, and sharing in many cases a connection to the German military, the conspirators served as valuable tools for a West German government run by Konrad Adenauer and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) which was attempting not only to establish its democratic credentials but also to pursue a policy of rearmament in the face of stiff public opposition.¹² As Frank Stern has pointed out, the conspirators helped conservative politicians "to dream of an untainted German conservatism, without Hitler."¹³

Though the alleged democratic ideals of the conspirators had no direct effect on the *Grundgesetz* or the actual structure of the Federal Republic,¹⁴ countless public pronouncements by Chancellor Adenauer, Bundespräsident Heuss and other major West German political figures indicate that the "spirit" at least of the

twentieth of July was intended to be a major element in establishing the legitimacy of that state. The conspirators' actions and moral convictions created, some believed, "the moral preconditions" for the founding of the Federal Republic by proving that Germany had not been entirely corrupted by the Nazis and that noble and ostensibly "democratic" sentiments like the conspirators' had survived the "Twelve Year Reich."¹⁵ Pundits were also fond of claiming that the conspiracy contained representatives of every strata of German society, so that their example helped to blunt the charge of Germans' collective guilt for the war and the atrocities committed under National Socialism.¹⁶

The picture which resulted from the efforts of the West German government to extol the conspirators of the twentieth of July was a somewhat distorted one, however. The studies of historians such as Hans Mommsen and Hermann Graml since the 1960s have shown that the "program" of the conspirators was hardly as clear or as "democratic" as some in the 1950s suggested. The conspirators, while often from starkly different backgrounds, were hardly a representative slice of German society.¹⁷ Nevertheless, many Germans in the decade following the war willingly overlooked the often authoritarian proposals of the conspirators for the future of Germany or their unrealistic appraisals of the chances of negotiating an end to the war. General von Witzleben, Count von Stauffenberg, and the others became models for the conscience of Germany, proving that much that was good and noble had managed to survive in Germany despite the Third Reich.¹⁸

The work of the government in mythologizing the coup attempt was made easier by the fact that in the 1950s, very little scholarly work had been done on the conspiracy, apart from the seminal works of Hans Rothfels and Gerhard Ritter,¹⁹ and reliable information about the conspiracy itself, let alone the intricacies of the constitutional plans of groups like the Kreisauer Kreis was not widely disseminated. Only the vaguest notions of the plotter's real plans permeated the public's consciousness, shaped strongly by both National Socialist slander prior to 1945, and the almost equally distorting efforts of officials in the Federal Republic to enshrine the conspirators in the pantheon of "good Germans" who had allegedly struggled for liberal democracy in the face of tyranny.²⁰

As a result, while the actual social and political ideas of the conspirators have been a subject of great interest for historians in the past thirty years, these plans and ideas are not necessarily relevant to the argument contained in this paper.²¹ Given the often-distorted view of the conspiracy promulgated by West German officialdom, the degree to which the legacy of the coup was politicized, and the prejudices held by many Germans, it is more important for my purposes to understand how the legacy of the coup, real or imagined, was used in the postwar period.²²

There were a number of ways in which the government of the Federal Republic actively promoted the conspirators as models of civic courage. Adenauer himself gave prominent speeches praising the members of the resistance in 1951 and 1954; the Bundestag issued a statement in 1953 lauding the services done for the German

people by those who resisted Hitler. Bundespräsident Heuss gave a highly publicized speech on the anniversary of the coup attempt in 1954, and countless other party, church, and educational leaders followed suit.²³

Approval of the twentieth of July became an acid test of any individual's or group's loyalty to the Federal Republic. This was made quite explicit when it came to testing the loyalty of former officers in particular. In 1955, the Bundestag ordered the creation of a *Personalgutachterausschuss* (PGA), a committee which would screen applicants for the rank of colonel and above for the *Bundeswehr*. The guidelines of the PGA tellingly included the following statement: "the future soldier must acknowledge the decision of conscience by the men of the twentieth of July 1944. He should combine this [recognition] with respect for them and for the many other soldiers, who, with a feeling of duty, risked their lives to the very end [of the war]."²⁴ Although the PGA was technically independent of the government, many of its selection criteria, and particularly the sections relating to the twentieth of July, were developed at a much earlier conference at Weinheim near Heidelberg, attended by Theodor Blank and numerous other government officials.²⁵

Especially after the uprisings in East Berlin in June 1953, the legacy of the resistance became ammunition in the war of words waged with the Federal Republic's eastern counterpart. Hans Rothfels, in a lecture commemorating the tenth anniversary of the coup attempt, called the twentieth of July and the seventeenth of June "particularly linked dates" because both involved, he claimed, resistance against the power of a "foreign occupation."²⁶ Though Rothfels goes on to admit that the comparison is perhaps tendentious, it was nevertheless one that was made quite frequently. Eight years later, Ernst Lemmer, the federal minister for "Greater German questions," tapped into the same logical vein when he lamented the fact that "sixteen million of our countrymen are still living under an oppressive fate that the men and women of the twentieth of July tried to cast off forever."²⁷

A similar, if less momentous, example of the instrumental importance of the twentieth of July occurred in 1952 and involved the person of former Colonel Adolf Dickfeld. Dickfeld founded the *Gemeinschaft Deutscher Ritterkreuzträger* in 1952 and planned its first meeting for November of that year. Theodor Blank accepted an invitation to speak at the meeting, but the government soon discovered that "Colonel" Dickfeld may not actually have been a colonel and was wanted in Austria for alleged smuggling, using an assumed name (he had entered Austria as Albert Winter), fraud, and currency violations. After much negotiation and fretting about the potential public impact of either forbidding the meeting or actually allowing it to take place, the government and the Society were able to reach a compromise: the meeting could take place as planned, although without the presence of Blank and on the condition that the assembled *Ritterkreuzträger* issue a statement affirming their rejection of radicalism, their approval of the Federal Republic and, significantly, their admiration for the courage of the men of the twentieth of July. This statement seemed to assuage most of the fears of the government despite the fact that an

observer at the meeting noted at least one member of the society giving the Hitler salute as he entered the hall.²⁸

The government also used more overtly propagandistic methods to enforce a particular view of the twentieth of July. The Federal Minister for Refugees, Dr. Hans Lukaschek (himself a member of the Kreisauer Kreis) gave a speech in 1952 which the official Press and Information Office of the Federal Republic reproduced under the simple headline, "Twentieth of July 1944 Shows Way for the German People."²⁹ When Federal President Heuss gave his speech in the Bundestag commemorating the tenth anniversary of the coup attempt, all factions of the parliament voted to have the speech printed as a brochure and distributed free of charge to teachers and students in the Federal Republic.³⁰ Years later, the government continued its campaign to establish the twentieth of July as a national legend by publishing a collection of documents and analyses, entitled *20. Juli 1944*, through its Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.³¹

Although historians were later to fault the conspirators as somewhat opportunistic or overly authoritarian, initial writings on the coup in West Germany often mimicked the government's pronouncements and were generally very positive. In particular, writers such as Marion Gräfin Dönhoff emphasized the democratic and ethical nature of the revolution proposed by the conspirators, especially the *Kreisauer Kreis*.³² Speaking in 1954, Wilhelm Ritter von Schramm claimed that:

It was a clear political program that these men of the twentieth of July had, completely in the spirit of reconciliation, in the spirit of a unified Europe, as one hopes for today. Therefore these men were not "traitors" but pioneers of our times, whose program is a testament which we must fulfill.³³

A spate of popular films in the mid-1950s also reinforced the conspirator-as-hero legend by emphasizing the drama and suspense of the event, the nobility of the actors, and the tragedy of their failure, while perhaps necessarily obfuscating the details of Stauffenberg's planned postwar order. *Es geschah am 20. Juli* and *Der 20. Juli* both appeared in 1955 and dealt directly with the 1944 coup attempt. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, in its review of the film *Der 20. Juli*, wrote of the conspirators, "Theirs was moral revolution, not only against Hitler but against the deep-rooted conception which freed not only Hitler, but also all Germans from every moral law."³⁴

As a result of these inputs from a variety of media, public attention coalesced around a short list of ideas attributed to "the men of the twentieth of July," drawing largely from the ideas outlined above and centering on the ethical nature of Stauffenberg's resistance to National Socialism. The conspirators were strongly associated with a belief in the importance of individual responsibility and the necessity of a return to Christianity, with both antifascism and anticommunism, and with a strong sense of respect for their fellow man. Described as "good democrats,"

the plotters were also identified with a government based on free speech, free press, and free association.³⁵

Yet, despite the overwhelmingly positive spin placed on the twentieth of July by the media and the government, public opinion of the conspirators remained noticeably divided. A June 1951 public opinion poll indicated that only 40 percent of respondents approved, while 30 percent disapproved, of the efforts of the conspirators (the remaining 30 percent either expressed no opinion or did not know of the event).³⁶ A slightly later poll by the Allensbach Institute for Demoscopy was more varied in its categorization of respondents and similarly found that among the general population, the ratio of positive to negative opinions was 40 percent/30 percent. The later poll revealed more, however, as the table below indicates:

Answers to the question: "In your opinion, how should the men of the twentieth of July be judged?"³⁷

Group	Positive	Negative	No opinion	No knowledge of 20 July
Total	40	30	19	11
Men	43	38	14	5
Women	38	24	23	15

Political Party

CDU	47	21	19	13
SPD	47	29	17	7
FDP	56 ³⁸	33	9	2
Bavarian P.	35	26	17	22
Deutschen P.	33	49	11	7
BHE	37	46	6	11
SRP	15	81	4	-

Men were far more knowledgeable about the coup than women (only 5 percent claiming no knowledge as opposed to 15 percent of women). The table also clearly reveals how the interpretation of the twentieth of July impacted the political culture of the Federal Republic, with the mainstream parties of both right and left much more prominently endorsing the coup (or claiming ignorance, which seems difficult to believe) and the parties of the right and the special interest groups such as BHE (Bloc of Dispossessed and Disenfranchised) espousing more negative reactions. It seems almost as if the Socialist Reich Party (SRP) was founded on the basis of its opposition to the dominant interpretation of the coup, with a remarkable 81 percent of its constituency disapproving of the "men of the twentieth of July." This fact is

not so surprising when one realizes that the founder of the SRP was none other than former Major Otto Remer, the man most responsible for the rapid suppression of the coup in 1944.

There are many reasons why the German public was ambivalent at best about the conspiracy to overthrow Hitler. The abuse heaped upon the plotters by the Nazis in the aftermath of the coup had not been without effect. Though postwar occupation officials, anxious to stamp out German "militarism" would be unwilling to acknowledge the fact, a rift had opened between the German officer corps and the German people long before 1944, and the immediate response of many Germans to the coup had been to join with the Nazis in decrying the "cowardice" and "treason" of Stauffenberg and his fellow officers.³⁹

The twentieth of July was also an implicit refutation of the idea of a "Stunde Null." By proving that resistance had been possible, the conspirators pointed a silent, accusing finger at all Germans who had not acted to overthrow the Nazi regime.⁴⁰ The very real moral stance and the remarkable courage of the conspirators was bound to evoke a certain shame among people whose actions did not measure up to that virtually unattainable standard. The government's often too-rosy picture of the conspirators and their ideas only compounded these problems.

Defensiveness therefore often prevailed among the public when issues surrounding the twentieth of July were raised. From uncensored testimony provided by visitors to the Berlin exhibit that the VVN produced in 1948, we can hear how the confrontation with the moral example of the conspirators clashed with individuals' own memories of past complicity and with their present perceived suffering. One visitor noted that he had been impressed by the exhibit and was, as a Christian, opposed to the atrocities that the Nazis had committed. But, the visitor continued, "when will mankind improve? My uncle and two friends my age died in the current concentration camps [constructed by the Soviets]! When will people finally stop? How can I endorse the current political direction in light of these incidents?"⁴¹

Public discomfort with the glorification of the conspiracy meant that critics of the twentieth of July achieved a certain prominence in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The mysterious defection to East Germany of Otto John, a former conspirator and later president of the Verfassungsschutz, in 1954 raised questions as to his wartime loyalties as well. John's apparent treason added credence to the widely held presumption that the conspirators had committed an act of "treason" in 1944 and not "resistance." Otto Remer also received widespread notoriety during his well-publicized trial in 1952, though ultimately Remer's defeat in that trial probably did more to improve the prestige of the conspirators rather than to diminish it.⁴²

Hans Hagen, Remer's political officer in 1944, also survived the war and publicly lobbied against the coup as a model of civic responsibility, though in less extreme terms than those used by Remer. At a soldiers' conference at the

Evangelische Akademie in Bad Boll in November 1950, Hagen gave a speech entitled, "The Twentieth of July—Oath and Responsibility," in which he attributed the failure of the coup to the power of the officer corps' oath to Hitler and to the cowardice (though he never uses that word) of the conspirators. The coup failed, Hagen succinctly stated, because no one was willing to sacrifice himself.

The assassination attempt was prepared and calculated down to the smallest detail, in all human probability, no one present in the room could survive the blast. The single moment, when the assassin left the bomb alone sufficed to allow the oath-bearer [Hitler] to remain alive, as though fate did not want to accept such an inconsistency.⁴³

The conspirators wanted to build a new world, Hagen admitted, but no one was willing to be the sacrificial victim whose death would sanctify the new order, in the spirit of the medieval *Bauopfer*. It was pointless, Hagen concluded, to glorify Stauffenberg and the other conspirators as heroes and prophets from the vantage point of 1950. Most postwar commentators credited the conspirators with a great sense of moral responsibility, but Hagen argued that the soldiers who did not act, or who acted to crush the coup in 1944, did so because they too felt a moral responsibility to the German *Volk*, which was engaged in a life or death struggle on two fronts. "That we did not present to the world a picture of a fortress garrison which tears itself to pieces before the enemy breaks in, seems to me to be a conciliatory motif in this symphony of ruin [*Untergangssymphonie*]." ⁴⁴

Figures with an even higher public profile reinforced these negative opinions, so that such criticism became part of the mainstream public dialogue concerning the twentieth of July. Many of the earliest and most influential postwar pronouncements regarding the coup came from the senior ranks of the *Wehrmacht's* officer corps. Hasso von Manteuffel, a former General der Panzertruppe and later Bundestag delegate for the FDP, seems to have originated the charge against the conspirators, repeated ad nauseam by Hagen (above) and by others in the 1950s, that using a bomb was a dishonorable method for attempting an assassination and accounts in large part for the coup's failure. Why had no officer found the courage, Manteuffel asked in 1949/50, simply to pull out a pistol and settle things with Hitler face to face? Of course, Manteuffel ignored the many obstacles to such action and probably was ignorant of the conspirators' desire to eliminate Himmler and Göring at the same time, if possible.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, his formulation gained currency because it resonated with the discomfort many Germans felt about resistance in general and about the timing and method of the assassination attempt in particular.

While testifying at Nuremberg, both Jodl and Rundstedt had condemned the coup as an act of cowardly treason. "How one can conduct an external war during which one's existence or non-existence is at stake and at the same time make revolution... I have no idea," Jodl said. Rundstedt seconded Jodl's interpretation,

calling the coup attempt “common, naked treason.”⁴⁶ Both the charges of cowardice (à la Manteuffel) and the charges of treason (à la Jodl and Rundstedt) would remain constant features of the public discussions surrounding the twentieth of July.

Former Career Soldiers and the Twentieth of July

If ambivalence and defensiveness prevailed among the general public, such attitudes were even more pronounced within the ranks of former career soldiers. Initial reactions to the coup in 1944 had been mixed, at best. While countless examples of comradeship and courage occurred as officers at various posts tried to shelter those under suspicion of involvement, most career soldiers met the news of the assassination attempt with shock and dismay. Many officers were, of course, too busy trying to hold together Germany’s rapidly disintegrating fronts to have thought very deeply about the coup. If they did, most evidenced little understanding for the attempt to kill the German commander-in-chief, to whom all had sworn a personal oath, during the middle of a war rapidly being lost.⁴⁷

Such emotions persisted long after the war among former officers, and were only exacerbated by the situation in which officers found themselves after 1945. Thanks to the Allied efforts at “demilitarization,” former career soldiers spent months or even years in prisoner of war camps, lost their pensions due to the dissolution of the *Wehrmacht*, suffered under union and civil service boycotts, and experienced problems in enrolling in universities. Even worse, from their perspective, they were confronted with the animosity or at best the indifference of the German people, who held them largely responsible for the lost war and the suffering and humiliation that ensued. Given their heightened sensitivity to charges of complicity with the regime, their response to the glorification of the conspiracy was even more characterized by defensiveness than the general public’s.

Attitudes toward the twentieth of July among former career soldiers were even more complex, however, because, for a number of reasons, they stood to gain from the glorification of the coup attempt. Men such as Remer and Hagen obviously had a vested interest in seeing the events of the twentieth of July in as negative a light as possible. But other officers were linked to the attempted coup and affected by it only indirectly. Former career soldiers, especially those older men of higher rank and longer service, felt compelled to comment on the historical interpretation of the assassination plot since they believed that it fundamentally influenced the image of “German soldierdom.” It was these self-defined custodians of German soldierly tradition whose attitude toward the coup and the conspirators was most ambivalent because of their simultaneous identification with the conspirators and disapproval of the conspirator’s methods.

The most obvious connection felt by the veterans was that many of the conspirators were themselves officers. What they had done simply reflected on the officer corps as a whole, for better or for worse. This identification placed former career soldiers and especially their organizations in a difficult position. Career

soldiers were twice as likely as the general population to disapprove of the coup attempt, according to the same poll by the Institute for Demoscopy cited above. While a roughly similar percentage of officers approved of the coup (35 percent as compared to 40 percent of the general population), the number expressing no opinion or no recollection of the event fell drastically (to 4 percent and 2 percent, respectively), while 59 percent of former career soldiers “judged the men of the twentieth of July” negatively, nearly twice as high a percentage as the general population.⁴⁸

The fact that the percentage of officers who saw the merits of the coup was roughly the same as the public’s reveals that it was not a clear-cut case of these traditionalists being out of step with the postwar political scene as was sometimes the case regarding other issues. Rather, it indicates that some former officers, like their civilian counterparts, were participating in the efforts to grapple with (and rehabilitate) the recent German past. However, because the twentieth of July so directly impacted the *Wehrmacht*, emotions concerning the issue ran much higher among the former officer corps. It is clear that the overwhelming majority of career soldiers condemned the coup attempt when it came down to a simple matter of “judging” the event as the poll asked them. This final judgment indicates that many former officers did not want to be associated with men that they deemed as noble, yet misguided, in the best case, or assassins and murderers, in the worst.

Hans-Erich Volkmann, in his article on the domestic-political aspects of German rearmament, could not decide whether the “demonstratively negative judgment” of the twentieth of July by former career soldiers was better understood as “an intense [*intensive*] connection to National Socialism or as a consequence of their upbringing to a specific military *Ethos*.”⁴⁹ Certainly, the officers, like many Germans, continued to feel the influence of Nazism and continued occasionally to espouse ideas common in National Socialist propaganda. From the papers of the veterans themselves, however, it is clear that for most, their primary concern was for the impact of the coup attempt on the image and values of German “Soldatentum.”

During the late 1940s, when the so-called defamation of the German soldier was at its height, many former officers in fact blamed the conspirators for the low esteem in which soldiers were held by the general population. As noted above, of course, the public was not universally in favor of the glorification of the conspiracy. Most Germans felt no more positively inclined toward the coup than former officers were (though they felt much less negative about it), so soldiers were not really so isolated in this regard as they imagined. Because of their defensive attitude, however, the public ceremonies and the speeches by government officials rankled.

In part because the twentieth of July was so mythologized by the government of the Federal Republic, opposition to the coup attempt became a way for former officers to express more general discontent with the current politics of West Germany. At a meeting of *Frontkämpfer* near Celle in 1951, the motto, according to a confidant of General Johannes Frießner, was “without us [an explicit reference

to 'ohne mich' the rallying cry of those opposed to the formation of the *Bundeswehr*], against the advisors of the federal government (that is, Speidel and Heusinger), against the people of the twentieth of July, who should not be allowed to show their face in the new *Wehrmacht*."⁵⁰

There existed a great deal of concern among former career officers about the implications of the coup attempt and its memory for the "honor" of "*Deutsches Soldatentum*," as is made clear by the motto of the gathering mentioned above. Former Colonel Ludwig Gümbel repeated that sentiment when, during a speech on the twentieth of July, he acknowledged the sacrifice of the conspirators for the German *Volk* but insisted that by planning such a coup they were denouncing the "eternal values of soldierdom." "We believe," Gümbel continued, "that we should be allowed to expect that they forego any effort to return to *Soldatentum*, because their return would mean an endangerment of the soldierly spirit, without which any defense contribution [*Wehrbeitrag*] is unthinkable."⁵¹ Not everyone shared Gümbel's exact sentiment, but many were equally concerned with the potential impact of the coup attempt on the nature of the soldierly profession in the future.⁵²

Many former officers, including Admiral Gottfried Hansen, a prominent figure in postwar veterans' organizations, seemed to imagine some sort of "court of honor" at which individual soldiers would be "tried" for their actions on the twentieth of July to determine whether their behavior could be construed as treason or cowardice.⁵³ Other officers would have understood well the context of such proposals. An "Ehrenhof" had already examined the actions of most of the conspirators. In 1944, Hitler charged Generaloberst Heinz Guderian with the task of expelling from the *Wehrmacht* those soldiers guilty of treason as a result of the coup attempt. Though Guderian is often credited with doing his best to save as many soldiers as could be saved from the clutches of the Gestapo, he and Field Marshal Keitel nevertheless discharged their duties, crowning their "achievements" with an order, issued by Keitel, declaring the "disgraceful proceedings surrounding the twentieth of July" officially terminated as far as the armed forces were concerned. Keitel also ordered, as many former officers would later wish were possible, that "every mention of the consequences of the twentieth of July" was thereafter forbidden. The case was closed, he insisted, and any further discussion of the matter would only carry with it the "seeds of destruction."⁵⁴

Very much in the spirit of the wartime activities of Keitel and Guderian, Heinrich Baron Behr wrote in 1951 that "today one must ask each of the men of the twentieth of July *when* he was there and *how* he was there." "One thing is certain now as then, desertion [*Fahnenflucht und Überlaufen*] is now as then a crime worthy of death."⁵⁵ Even the lower ranks of soldiers insisted, according to Gert Spindler, that a distinction be made between the honorable and the dishonorable acts of resistance and that sentence be passed on the "recognized and convicted traitors (the true '*Landesverräter*')" and that their "expulsion from the ranks of former soldiers" be made public.⁵⁶ The fact that Spindler, like the more radical Gümbel, even

imagined that someone could be so expelled (from an army which no longer existed!) and that men like Hansen and Behr would propose “courts of honor” to determine a former officer’s fitness for service in the *Bundeswehr* indicates how immersed in tradition and how out of touch with the realities of the postwar situation many former officers were.

Much of the discussion among former officers concerning the historical meaning of the twentieth of July coup attempt naturally centered on its potential impact on the structure of authority in any future German army. This was particularly the case at some of the conferences sponsored by the *Evangelische Akademien* at Bad Boll and Loccum attended by officials of the *Dienststelle Blank* and in the papers and meetings of certain organizations, such as the *Gesellschaft für Wehrkunde* (GfW), which dealt with soldiers’ issues. “The oath as an obligation to a person is doubtless discredited by the political events between 1933 and 1945,” wrote former General Kurt Brennecke, the chairman of the GfW (Bonn) in 1954. “One cannot and may not ignore this question of the ‘twentieth of July’. This question will be posed to the leader of tomorrow by his soldiers.”⁵⁷ The issues of loyalty and oath, some argued, would be especially crucial when one realized for what purposes a future *West* German army might be used.⁵⁸

As Donald Abenheim indicates in his book on the search for tradition in the *Bundeswehr*, the twentieth of July became strongly associated with the *Bundeswehr*’s notion of *Innere Führung*, the controversial and somewhat vague concept governing the way leadership and authority would be structured in the new armed forces.⁵⁹ In accordance with this desire to avoid the charge of renewed militarism, the members of the *Dienststelle Blank* sought to ensure the future democratic nature of the *Bundeswehr* by adopting the command principles known as “*Innere Führung*” or “*Inneres Gefüge*,” which roughly translates as “internal guidance or leadership.”⁶⁰ The Defense Ministry bureau in charge of implementing the new idea published its *Handbuch “Innere Führung”* in 1957, which critics likened to Mao’s *Little Red Book*, and followed that up with a multivolume series entitled *Schicksalsfragen*, which contained essays by prominent officers and intellectuals on the role of the military in world society and history. *Innere Führung* was variously described as an “idealistic goal,” a “critical consciousness,” “a program for a democratic army,” a new way of conceiving of older principles of command, and a significant departure mandated by the nature of modern technology and ideological warfare.⁶¹

The variety of these definitions indicates the all-encompassing nature of *Innere Führung*. The most frequent justification for the gargantuan effort expended in elaborating the concept was twofold. *Innere Führung*, the Defense Ministry explained, would enable the seamless incorporation of the armed forces into society and strengthen the soldiers’ resistance to the new forms of psychological warfare waged by communists by basing the command structures of the military on democratic principles. In principle, *Innere Führung* would mean an end to parade drills and harsh treatment of trainees, a more relaxed barracks life, and an emphasis

on self-discipline and responsibility in training. Practically, it meant an incessant flow of prodemocratic and anticommunist propaganda directed at the soldiers for the purpose of “spiritual armament.” The aim was to balance democratic freedoms with military authority. No one proposed that parliamentary procedures be adopted in the field, of course. Rather, officers would command by means of respect, not coercion, and would serve as models of democratic soldiery.⁶² This is where the twentieth of July came in. The example of the conspirators was meant to provide, as Graf Kielmansegg later phrased it, not prescriptions for action, but models of bearing.⁶³

Many former officers were concerned that because of the difficulty and divisiveness of the issue of the twentieth of July, it could not possibly be incorporated into the new army’s leadership and discipline guidelines. Soldiers, they feared, would remain unmotivated by the examples of Beck and Stauffenberg. “No new *Wehrmacht* can be created on a foundation of disloyalty, and that is exactly what is demanded, even if this ‘decision of conscience’ should be recognized,” wrote Werner Fuchs in 1955.⁶⁴ Members of the tradition society of the former *Großdeutschland* division were relieved to read in their newsletter, *Die Neue Feuerwehr*, that not everyone in the government shared Count Baudissin’s enthusiasm for glorifying the conspirators to the exclusion of other potentially positive role models. In the interview published in the September 1959 issue, Erich Mende, FDP delegate to the *Bundestag* and member of the defense committee, reassured the readers that he

did not want to grant the twentieth of July an exclusive place in their awareness of tradition, as is sometimes demanded. We must reach further back. Also to Scharnhorst, Blücher, Gneisenau, Yorck. Especially Scharnhorst is a good example for the democratization of the army. Also in the Second World War there were outstanding soldiers, to which our army could form connections. I think of Rommel or Mölders, naturally not of Schörner.⁶⁵

The wariness of former officers concerning the legacy of the twentieth of July was evident in nearly every discussion of the proposed German “defense contribution” during the early 1950s. At a conference at the Evangelische Akademie at Bad Boll in 1951, the participants were unanimous in wanting to “draw a line” under the events of the twentieth of July, to set them apart from the normal course of German military history. According to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, former soldiers could be proud that their comrades had acted out of conscience to try to save Germany, but for a future Germany army, the actions of the conspirators could only represent some vague moral example, not a model for action.⁶⁶

However, while they criticized the glorification of the conspirators and worried about the coups’ impact on the nature of the soldierly profession, many career soldiers recognized the positive effects which the public portrayal of the twentieth

of July had on the prestige of the officer corps. After all, because of the actions of Stauffenberg, Beck, Rommel, and others, the officers could claim, not entirely incorrectly, to have been members of an organization which formed a bastion of resistance to Hitler's schemes throughout the years of the Third Reich. It was Beck who had counseled against the attacks on Poland and France. It was Rommel who had urged Hitler to negotiate with the Western Allies after the landings at Normandy in order to stabilize the decaying Eastern Front, and it was Stauffenberg, finally, who had come closest to eliminating Hitler and paving the way toward a quicker end to the war and National Socialist atrocities. The military had been one of the last organizations to fall to the Nazi *Gleichschaltung*, they argued.

Some former officers were inclined, therefore, to try to use the publicity generated by the twentieth of July to promote the cause of veterans, their organizations, and their goals. One soldiers' newspaper recognized in 1954 that the twentieth of July was the key to overcoming international opposition to German rearmament because "the [twentieth of July] has perhaps decisively contributed to the German name regaining the measure of respect and prestige that is granted to it by the world."⁶⁷ Similarly, when it became known that the *Bundestag* had voted to publish *Bundespräsident* Heuss's speech on the twentieth of July in a brochure, at least one associate of Admiral Hansen regretted that the *Verband Deutscher Soldaten* (VDS) had not taken a lead in the propaganda effort and published a similar brochure itself.⁶⁸

Personally, many soldiers also faced the dilemma of largely identifying with the plotters, despite any qualms about methods or loyalty or oaths. The military men among the conspirators, like other career officers, shared, to a large degree, certain values and ideas as a function of their class background, their training and education, and their careers as officers. The conspirators were personally very brave, successful, and highly decorated officers. Men like Ludwig Beck and Erwin von Witzleben had been seen in the 1930s and during the war as models of soldierly skill and demeanor. Stauffenberg was a highly decorated officer who had been severely wounded in North Africa, losing an eye, one arm, two fingers on his remaining hand, as well as suffering hearing loss. Yet, during his convalescence, he steadfastly refused pain medication, relying instead on his own powers of endurance, and he recovered in record time. Most former officers could only admire such a model of ascetic perseverance. Add to that Stauffenberg's impeccably noble upbringing and one realizes that Stauffenberg, even in the absence of the conspiracy, could easily have been a legend within the officer corps.

Even the nonmilitary members of the conspiracy shared with the former officers of the postwar period certain ideals, such as the importance of responsibility (*Verantwortung*), loyalty (*Treue*), and duty (*Pflichterfüllung*). In a style which had a distinctly soldierly ring and which would frequently be repeated by former officers after 1945, Helmut James Graf von Moltke (the leader of the Kreisauer Kreis) wrote that "a feeling of responsibility requires both freedom and commitment (*Bindung*).

All actions which affect the community, that is, all imaginable actions, must be informed by this feeling of responsibility."⁶⁹ Just as the former officers prided themselves on their decisive nature and their willingness to take responsibility, Ger van Roon describes Moltke as willing to volunteer for any operation, as devoting his whole person to an action, "unconfused by social accident or class prejudice.... His whole being was dedicated to practical action."⁷⁰ Similarly, Roon describes the defining characteristics of Peter Yorck von Wartenburg (a lieutenant in the reserve himself) as "loyalty, consciousness of duty, acknowledgement of responsibility to the community, [and] a patriotic attitude [*Gesinnung*]."⁷¹ Such phrases had been part of the litany used by career officers to describe themselves and their worthy comrades for centuries and remained as such after 1945.

There is no direct evidence that former officers tried to school themselves in the intricacies of the conspirator's ideas. Relying primarily on the public commemorations of the coup attempt and the little information that could be gleaned from other media, former officers believed that they understood well what the conspiracy had been about. Interestingly, there are at least superficial similarities between the ideas for the future political structure of Germany as outlined in the few remaining papers of the military and civilian resistance and those expressed within former career officers' circles immediately following the war.⁷²

For example, officers shared the conspirators' hopes that the end of the war would bring Germany a chance for renewal. They spoke of living in an "Endzeitalter," a period of epochal and fundamental change, in which the best and most idealistic forces available in Germany needed to be mustered in order to avoid an apocalypse. Words like "Occident," "Community," and "Responsibility" litter the writings of both the conspirators and former career soldiers.⁷³

Former Major Karl Heinrich Helfer understood these similarities when he proposed that the "study of the ideas of Stauffenberg and his friends which dealt with the reconstruction of a German state [would be] more important and more fruitful for the future," even though he feared that the disagreements over the coup attempt itself might divide German soldiers.

Moreover, during the last years of the war there was, independent and without connection to the men of the twentieth of July, a wide, though unorganized strata of German soldiers who were not closed [to the idea] of the necessity of German state reform in the sense of a departure from dictatorship, although they served Hitler's regime loyally to the end in view of the enemy's demand for unconditional surrender. In age and rank far younger than the mass of the generals, often also in more or less secret opposition to them, this generation received the nickname 'the young Turks'. Even if the comparison with the revolutionary movement of the old Ottoman Empire only applies at a few points, it indicates that the essential desire of this strata was to be seen in the effort [to create] a new, and even a democratic state.⁷⁴

Helfer saw the political ideas of the men of the twentieth of July uniting former German soldiers, even if the actions of the twentieth of July remained divisive.

Indeed, many former officers shared with the conspirators the notion of a conflict-free society and a suspicion of self-serving political parties.⁷⁵ The “apolitical,” ethical character of the conspiracy was a common feature of postwar commemorations of the event and was proven by the “fact” that the plotters had come from all “*Stände, Richtungen, und Konfessionen*,” as Hans Rothfels phrased it in his 1954 lecture.⁷⁶ The former officers’ desire to be “apolitical” or “above politics,” a legacy both of the officer corps’ service under the Hohenzollerns and its antipathy toward the Weimar Republic, coincided with the feeling of many of the members of the Kreisau and the Goerdeler groups that parliamentary democracy had proven unworkable. That the former officers vented these suspicions at the same time that they intoned their support for a “pluralistic and democratic state” was not necessarily hypocritical or even contradictory, since the resistance groups had sometimes expressed similar suspicions of the Weimar political parties and yet were deemed by the pundits of the Federal Republic to have been champions of democracy.

It is important in this regard that one particular idea with which the conspirators were identified in postwar West Germany was anticommunism. It has been the subject of great historical debate to what degree Stauffenberg and others did cooperate with communists and how that cooperation would have been affected had the coup succeeded.⁷⁷ Though the members of the Kreisau Circle had been willing to negotiate with the communists in preparing their coup attempt, most of the members shuddered at the thought of a communist, or especially a Bolshevik, domination of Germany. Even Julius Leber and Adolf Reichwein, the Social Democratic proponents of the talks with the communists, were ambivalent about communism, and Stauffenberg, the other advocate of the negotiations, had in 1941 or 1942 abandoned even the idea of overthrowing Hitler because of the ongoing war against the Soviet Union. “We must first win the war,” he said to his cousin, Freiherr Hans Christoph von Stauffenberg. “One does not do such a thing [overthrow Hitler] during a war, especially not during a war against the Bolsheviks.”⁷⁸ Though Stauffenberg eventually and obviously changed his mind on the subject, his attitude in the early 1940s indicates that he must have made the decision to negotiate with the communists only very reluctantly. In any case, in the highly politicized Cold War context in which the twentieth of July was discussed in the 1950s, the anti-communism of the conspirators was taken for granted.

Certainly, former officers saw in the conspirators’ alleged rejection of communism one of the twentieth of July’s few saving graces. By the early 1950s, it was self-evident to nearly all former officers living in the Federal Republic that Germany must be “rescued” from communism. Reinforced by the postwar spin placed on the legend of the twentieth of July, and especially on the coup’s implications for cold war anticommunism, veterans in particular latched onto this

element of the conspirators' ideology, turning Moltke and Goerdeler into prophets of the cold war and attempting to justify their own continuation of the war as a crusade against communism. The fact that many of the officers who claimed to have been fighting the good fight against the communists had in fact done their best to defeat the Allied armies in France in 1944 did little to disturb the surety of their conviction that they, like the conspirators of the twentieth of July, had wanted to rescue Germany from communism.⁷⁹

There is also an unmistakable similarity between some of the proposals for European federation promulgated by soldiers after 1945 and those of Adam von Trott zu Solz. The supposed "essential" strengths of the German people which Trott cited as the Germans' contribution to a unified Europe bore an overt similarity to those which the nationalistic German officers expressed in statements, like Helfer's in 1951, that the duty of the former soldier was to represent "the standpoint of a German patriotic sensibility based on an awareness of supranational European responsibility."⁸⁰ Though these similarities may seem fairly superficial at first glance, they do indicate, along with the other elements of the conspirators' lives and personalities, the grounds for a potential identification with the plotters by career officers both during and after the war. Nor was the admiration and identification strictly one way. Goerdeler viewed the German officer corps as a model of an organic, self-reliant *Gemeinschaft*.⁸¹

This is not to say that the former officers in the postwar period exactly shared the political ideas of the conspirators (as broad as they were) or that the officers even understood the proposals of Moltke, Stauffenberg, and Goerdeler for the future of Germany. What is important is that there existed within the vast ideological legacy of the coup attempt certain elements which appealed to veteran officers after 1945. They selected from among the various elements of the conspirators' world views the ideas which meshed most comfortably with their own cosmology. They conveniently ignored Colonel Stauffenberg's eventual willingness to enlist the aid of German communists in his struggle against Hitler or the prominence of both right- and left-wing Social Democrats within the conspiracy itself. They admired Ludwig Beck for his soldierly demeanor and expertise but rarely acknowledged his exemplary behavior in defiance of Hitler nor heeded his prewar maxims that "their are limits to your obedience" and that "exceptional times demand exceptional actions."⁸²

So, while former officers overwhelmingly disapproved of the coup attempt, they were often not without sympathy for the conspirators themselves, and they were certainly more than willing to reap the occasional benefits, in the form of improved prestige and sometimes grudging respect, which accrued to the German officer corps for the efforts of a few of its members against Hitler.

This ambivalence, however, created problems for organizations of former officers. General Hans von Donat in particular hoped to limit the constituency and the tasks of the BvW in 1951 and 1952 strictly to officers and their pension issues and the fight against the defamation of the former German soldier, so as to prevent

the inevitable “passionate battles of opinion” over such issues as rearmament, politics, and the twentieth of July.⁸³ Former Colonel-General Kurt Student similarly pleaded at the founding meeting of the VDS in September 1951 that the goals of the organization be strictly limited to fighting defamation and promoting comradeship.⁸⁴

Many veterans felt, however, that the public demanded some official response from soldiers on the issue of the twentieth of July.⁸⁵ This led to some awkward posturing on the part of individual soldiers and particularly the leadership of the veterans’ organizations in trying to balance their personal disapproval of the methods used on the twentieth of July with a willingness to accept the purity of the motives behind the attempt to assassinate Hitler. The most spectacular example of this awkwardness occurred on 22 September 1951 at a press conference held by the newly appointed Provisional President of the *Verband Deutscher Soldaten* before the Foreign Press Association.

At this press conference, now infamous among historians of the postwar German military, General Johannes Frießner presented before the entire world a frightening image of the attitudes of former German officers which made him a veritable pariah and which handicapped former career soldiers in their efforts to organize for years to come. As the Provisional President of the newly founded VDS, Frießner hoped finally to bring about the resolution of the many issues which concerned former soldiers, such as the war criminals question, the problem of those still in POW camps, and the structure of the proposed German army. With a strong and united organization like the VDS behind him, Frießner was very optimistic prior to the conference. “As I have learned in discussions with the Bundespräsident and the Bundeskanzler, this work of unification [among former soldiers] is an historic occurrence of great foreign political significance, especially in the current situation. ... It all depends on us staying true to the [goals] decided upon in Bonn and published in the press and not to allow their implementation to be disturbed by irresponsible blunders of a party-political nature.”⁸⁶ But the biggest blunder was to be his own and had nothing to do with party politics and everything to do with Frießner’s construction of the past and his soldierly prejudices.

The London *Times* reported on 22 September 1951 that General Frießner explained the aims of the VDS to the foreign press, “and in doing so he unconsciously combined a sense of mysticism, a touch of self-pity, soldierly German pride, and uncompromising demands for the rehabilitation of the German man of arms in a way that did not surprise, but did disturb, his audience.”⁸⁷ During the interview, General Frießner nonchalantly insisted that the *Wehrmacht*’s attack on Poland had been entirely justified, generally supported the claim made by Hitler and others that the West was misguided in fighting Germany and should have joined with the *Wehrmacht* in executing Operation Barbarossa, and callously blamed Germany’s former allies for the loss of the war.

Frießner’s comments illustrated not only that he was out of his depth in terms of the public relations requirements of his new job as president of the VDS (even if he held those opinions, he should have known better than to relate them to the

press), they also provide insights into the mindset of Frießner and many of his colleagues. They indicate first of all an unwillingness to confront the role of the *Wehrmacht* in Germany's disastrous development between 1933 and 1945. When Frießner later tried to explain his remarks at the press conference, he claimed that he meant that the war in Poland was justified because Hitler had ordered it and he implied that the military knew nothing more about the reality of the Polish threat than what it was being told by Hitler and his propaganda machine.⁸⁸ By elaborating these opinions (the first one irresponsible and the second an outright lie), Frießner probably hoped to make the start of the war a nonissue for the VDS, fitting it in under the already crowded rubric of "just following orders." Paradoxically, however, General Frießner probably did not even believe he was lying. In fact, it was his overbearing sense of forthrightness and "honesty" (shared with many of his former comrades) which impelled him to make the damaging statements in the first place. Having been asked a specific question, Frießner no doubt felt it was his duty to answer it strictly according to his own conscience, at the risk of his much-vaunted honor. At the press conference, General Frießner felt that he was on trial before a hostile jury. "The cross-examination," Frießner later wrote of the interview, "was worse than in Nuremberg."⁸⁹

General Frießner insensitively addressed other sensitive issues as well. One of his statements which attracted a good deal of attention related to the twentieth of July coup attempt. Concerning his judgment of the men of the twentieth of July, Frießner stated:

As a soldier and a Christian, I reject political murder, especially when at the front one is fighting for existence or non-existence. The soldier cannot appreciate that the supreme commander is to be murdered behind his back.

On the other hand, I now know more than I knew at the time of the assassination attempt, and I must credit those that proposed the attempt, that they made up their minds only with difficulty out of an inner duty to their conscience and out

The method of the attempt is to be rejected. One does not set a case under the desk of the victim, but rather draws one's pistol and shoots the man and then oneself dead.

The moment of the assassination attempt was in any case unfortunate. All of those who suddenly claim to have known that the state leadership was leading the entire nation into chaos, should have acted sooner. I believe it to be absolutely essential for the future that a line be drawn and a reconciliation of the parties in the spirit of the common goal take place.⁹⁰

Like Manteuffel, Hagen, and the other more extreme critics of the plotters, Frießner objected to the "cowardice" of the method and insisted that had Stauffenberg stayed

with the bomb and sacrificed himself, the coup would have been a success. Many other former officers shared this opinion, which was so clearly based in soldierly notions of honor.⁹¹ As they saw it, attempting to flee the scene and survive was the tragic flaw (in a very real dramatic sense) in Stauffenberg's conspiracy.

That Frießner's views on the twentieth of July and on other issues reflected those of at least some of his former comrades is evidenced by the fact that he received a number of supportive letters following the press conference. The letters primarily indicate the degree to which the legacy of the coup was tied to former officers' efforts at self-justification and many betray the defensiveness common in their writings. By endorsing Frießner's views, career soldiers could express their ambivalence about the issues of timing and method, treason and their oath that were the main themes of postwar criticism of the coup. Former Generaloberst Kurt Zeitzler, even congratulated Frießner on his election as president of the VDS and claimed that Frießner's words were spoken from his very soul.⁹²

Frießner's performance at the press conference drew immediate and scathing criticism from a variety of sources. The government quickly distanced itself from the VDS. An official press release in early October 1951 stated that the government welcomed the unification of former German soldiers in one representative organization because of the potential for promoting understanding of and loyalty to the Federal Republic inherent in such a group. However, the article continued, the government regretted the damage done to the image of Germany in the world due to comments like Frießner's and viewed such expressions as violations of the assurances granted by the VDS that it would avoid "political activity."⁹³ Newspapers, unions, and other soldiers' organizations all joined in denouncing Frießner and denying his right to speak for "the German soldier."⁹⁴

Peter von Zahn, in his radio program "Von Nah und Fern," perhaps summarized Frießner's comments best and typified much of the general criticism of the press conference. If any general ever displayed a severe lack of diplomatic skill, said Zahn, it was General Frießner "as he tried to make the goals of the Verband Deutscher Soldaten clear before the foreign journalists."

Because as he poured out his heart there, a few other things fell out which were better left in. The Americans were made to understand that it was not them but the Germans who were to thank that the Russians did not now stand on the shores of the Atlantic. The allies of the former Poland were told that the war against Poland was completely justifiable. That this war began after Frießner's supreme commander had agreed upon the division of Poland with Soviet Russia did not matter. The allies of Germany in the last war were told, that they did not do their part in the coalition. The opponents of Hitler among the former German soldiers the general labeled 'murderers', and if one expected that he would atleast also properly disassociate himself from the atrocities of Hitler, for example the murder of Rommel, one was disappointed.⁹⁵

Ironically, Frießner's statements about the twentieth of July in many ways reflected the views outlined in a declaration drafted by Admiral Hansen in March which received widespread notice and little criticism. "The rift," wrote Hansen,

which has broken into our ranks because of the twentieth of July must be bridged. The one of us stayed true to his oath, the other, in further-reaching recognition of all that was occurring, placed his loyalty to the *Volk* above his duty to the oath. No one should be reproached because of his attitude, as long as not self-interest, but rather noble motives determined his action. From this recognition of motive it must follow that one must have understanding for the conduct of others!⁹⁶

Hansen first drafted this declaration as chairman of the BvW in March 1951, before the foundation of the VDS and Frießner's interview, in order to find some common ground among former officers on this potentially divisive issue. It quickly became the model for "soldiers' opinion" on the issue and many other groups adopted some version of the declaration as their own official stance toward the coup attempt.⁹⁷ Hansen's declaration was designed to promote mutual understanding by recognizing the perceived duties of both the conspirators and those who did nothing to resist Hitler, but Hansen was unable to step outside of the primary assumption he shared with almost all of his former comrades, which was that duty came above all else.

Even so, Hansen's statement bears a remarkable similarity to the official stances taken on the issue of resistance versus loyalty by Adenauer, military reformers, and even former conspirators like Johann Adolf Graf von Kielmansegg. Speaking much later, at a lecture series in 1984, Kielmansegg similarly iterated that "those soldiers who did their duty in good faith and in good conscience, should not permit any reproach or any attack on their moral character to concern them."⁹⁸ The future *Bundeswehr* general and advisor to Theodor Blank, Adolf Heusinger, expressed his understanding for those who remained loyal in 1944 with the words: "There was no fundamental decision for everyone, only tragic, irreconcilable conflicts of duties."⁹⁹ Though there are crucial differences when comparing Hansen's and Heusinger's ideas with Frießner's comments, like calling the conspirators "murderers" and otherwise criticizing the assassination attempt, it is clear that Hansen and Frießner, Kielmansegg and Adenauer all shared certain motives, namely the desire to rehabilitate those soldiers who did *not* perpetrate the coup and to prevent the issue from being divisive within the ranks of former officers.

Despite the conciliatory tone of Hansen's statement and despite the fact that it was echoed in government and other circles, the military resistance to Hitler continued to divide former officers, creating a simple problem of membership which organization-builders like Hansen and Frießner were anxious to address. This is in part the reason for both men's focus on "drawing a line" under the event. In the aftermath of his press debacle, General Frießner even expressed the wish to

make the “cursed conflict disappear from the face of the earth.” “Therefore,” he wrote to Otto Mosbach, “the commandment of the hour is to speak of it as little as possible.”¹⁰⁰ Frießner could have been quoting Keitel’s 1944 order directly.

Precisely because the coup was so often spoken of, some former officers felt the need to withdraw from the *Verband Deutscher Soldaten*. One such officer was Generaladmiral a.D. Hermann Boehm, who, after a lengthy exchange with Admiral Hansen (spanning two years) on the nature of treason versus high treason (*Landes- und Hochverrat*), finally and spectacularly declared the withdrawal of his membership from the VDS. For years, Boehm argued that Hansen’s declaration was too vague and only dealt with the extreme case of those conspirators who had actually committed high treason, for whose motives Boehm expressed sympathy despite his rejection of their methods.¹⁰¹ In the three-page letter explaining his withdrawal, Boehm objected strenuously to the official VDS stance on the twentieth of July, as elaborated in the Hansen declaration, insisting that some of the conspirators were traitors no matter what their motives. “It has been proven,” wrote Boehm,

that individual resistance fighters, in total confusion [*Verwirrung*] of all soldierly concepts, committed *Landesverrat*, insofar as they betrayed important military secrets to the enemy, that is practiced sabotage of the war and sent their comrades to their deaths. I am of the opinion that this criminal behavior is to be rejected in the interests of the German *Volk* and above all a coming *Wehrmacht*, and I therefore objected to the [Hansen declaration] already in 1951— without success!¹⁰²

Other former officers similarly spent countless hours agonizing over such distinctions and their impact on how the twentieth of July should be remembered.¹⁰³ No other example of such a notable objection to the Hansen declaration exists in the records of the VDS, but Boehm’s withdrawal indicates how seriously some soldiers took the issue of the twentieth of July and its implications for the perceived “honor” of soldierdom in Germany.

In one way, at least, the former officers’ preoccupation with honor and treason coincided with the public discomfort concerning the actions of the conspirators and other resistance groups like the NKFD. Interestingly, the NKFD rarely appears in the soldiers’ papers in relation to the twentieth of July, but it is clear from their discussions of the prisoner-of-war issue that they believed the NKFD and its officer-only counterpart, the BDO, had crossed the boundary between loyalty and treason.¹⁰⁴ The case of Otto John, however, sparked animated discussions among former officers as to the wartime activities of John’s fellow conspirators and whether they, too, were simply Soviet spies as well. The cases of Hans Oster and Wilhelm Canaris, known for their resistance activities within the Abwehr, also aroused criticism both in the public and among former officers because their activities, which involved providing sensitive information to the Soviet Union, looked more like “common”

treason, which may have cost German soldiers their lives, than the “high” treason of Stauffenberg, which had been directed against the criminal government of the National Socialists.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

As at least one former officer noted, the conspirators of the twentieth of July emerged as victors despite the failure of the coup in 1944. Hitler was defeated, and several of the plotters who somehow escaped the Gestapo were raised to positions of power in postwar Germany. Their memory was given a place of honor in the historic iconography of the Federal Republic. The twentieth of July came to represent both the tragedy of the Third Reich and the salvation of Germany which, so the story went, had tried to resist, if only belatedly and unsuccessfully.¹⁰⁶

But many former officers simply wanted to be done with the whole affair, as evidenced by the frequency of the phrase “*einen Strich ziehen*” [to draw a line under] in reference to the coup attempt. Individuals and groups of officers continuously pleaded with their comrades that the twentieth of July be declared off-limits as a topic of discussion. They called it “divisive,” “destructive,” and “a danger point” but because the twentieth of July affected soldiers so deeply and was so important to the political mythology of the Federal Republic, former officers and their organizations were forced to confront the issue year after year.¹⁰⁷

Marion Gräfin Dönhoff recognized in 1952 the problems which many former officers faced when dealing with the twentieth of July. The first problem was that in the process of turning the twentieth of July into a myth, it had become too closely identified with the military and thus was easily turned into an issue of disloyalty versus loyalty. It was too often forgotten that many of the conspirators and leaders of the resistance were civilians, ambassadors, and civil servants. Second, Dönhoff expressed sympathy for the defensiveness of many former officers on the subject of resistance, since an unfair measure of heroism had been established by the conspirators. “To demand heroism as the norm,” she wrote,

is simple absurd. Instead of honoring the true heroes of the twentieth of July, one cursed as cowards and guilty ones those who did not act. No wonder that those who, neither cowardly or guilty, but who in the sense of the twentieth of July were also not heroes, feel first indignation and then resentment towards those who unjustifiably were set up as the measure.

Yet at the same time, Dönhoff refused to let former officers lapse into complacency on the subject of their service and their responsibilities in the Third Reich. Their notions of honor, duty, and loyalty were simply outdated in an era “in which the state, even the democratic state, exercises a power barely imaginable even a few decades ago.... The standards of the nineteenth century are no longer adequate.” The irony is, as Dönhoff indicated, that many of the officers who with

regard to the Nuremberg trials were so “progressive” in declaring the nineteenth-century Hague convention to be outdated and incapable of governing the exigencies of twentieth-century warfare, are the same ones who with regard to the twentieth of July argue the loudest about the applicability of nineteenth-century notions of treason.¹⁰⁸

Some soldiers did have the insight that the twentieth of July was not simply about who did or did not break their oath and was instead a remarkable circumstance which never should have needed to occur in the first place. Former General Heinrich Eberbach, who organized several “soldiers’ conventions” at the Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll and was himself involved in the coup, objected to the arguments made by Hans Hagen and others about the significance of the oath to Hitler and the “disastrous” effects of glorifying the conspirators. Hagen’s notion of the oath, elaborated at the conference at Bad Boll in 1950, Eberbach disparaged as “romantic.”¹⁰⁹ H[erbert] Selle also recognized the extraordinary demands placed on the consciences of officers in the Third Reich. There are, he wrote,

fateful circumstances, which could force a high military leader above all else to deny obedience to the state leadership. In general, such cases simply do not occur in an orderly *Rechtsstaat*. The immoral National Socialist state, on the other hand, challenged the men responsible for the leadership of the army several times within a very limited time frame to turn against [the state] out of the highest sense of moral responsibility.¹¹⁰

Both Eberbach and Selle concluded that in a *Rechtsstaat*, no coup would have been necessary. Selle wrote:

That many high military leaders of the German *Wehrmacht* in the Third Reich, just like large circles of the *Volk* did not recognize that they no longer served an orderly *Rechtsstaat*, ... was not only their fatal error, but their tragic guilt, even if Hitler knew how to disguise [the fact] with demonic skill and cunning.¹¹¹

That is the message of the twentieth of July 1944. The coup was not about loyalty or treason or maintaining the values of “eternal German soldierdom.” It was about a group of Germans, not just soldiers, realizing that they no longer lived in a *Rechtsstaat* and that they served an immoral system. As former General Georg von Sodenstern noted in 1947, “the realities of soldiering posed career soldiers in the Third Reich more difficult problems than any other occupational group in the world has ever been confronted with.”¹¹² This statement is true in both a military and a moral sense. The foreign policies of Hitler’s Third Reich confronted the *Wehrmacht* with the impossible task of fighting a war on two fronts against overwhelming odds. Hitler’s military, racial, and occupation policies confronted the officers with what was, for them, a choice between loyalty and humanity. It is unfortunate that the vast

majority of former German officers were unable or unwilling to face the moral issue of service in the Third Reich as Stauffenberg, Beck, and others did, but having said that, it is fortunate that they were not able to solve their military dilemma either.

In terms of implications for the Federal Republic, the attitude of the former officers toward the canonization of the twentieth of July conspirators indicates the trouble which many members of this former elite had in adjusting to the political culture of the new German state. Feeling themselves defamed by the German public and the German (and Allied) governments, the officers were nevertheless dedicated to the reconstruction, both physical and moral, of Germany. As such, they were worried that the wrong message was being sent to future generations of Germans by a government and a public willing to glorify the actions of men the officers considered to be assassins. The majority of officers concerned with the implications of the coup attempt wished simply to ignore the event and, echoing Keitel, to strike it somehow from the pages of history. Hansen's statement contains elements of this sentiment, as do the statements of many former officers found in their private letters.

And yet in the end, this unwillingness to confront the past on the part of many officers was without significant political or social consequences. They protested, wrote position papers, and sought to turn certain elements of the coup attempt to their own benefit, but eventually, the veterans and their organizations were able to do little to change the government's policy regarding the coup or its role in the new army. After the shock waves emanating from General Frießner's disastrous press conference subsided and after men like Boehm finally either withdrew from the VDS or reconciled themselves to that group's necessarily equivocal public stance on the issue of the twentieth of July, most former officers quietly turned their attention to other matters. The twentieth of July caused neither the massive splintering of the soldiers' organizations nor did it undermine the morale and discipline of the *Bundeswehr* after 1955, as some predicted. The sound and fury which surrounded the discussions of the conspiracy among former officers signifies on the one hand the continuing isolation of the former German officer corps in a polity which still held it largely responsible for the horrors of the Second World War. Yet, it also shows very clearly ways in which former officers shared the concerns and ideals both of the German public and the government of the Federal Republic. As some public opinion data and the similarity of Hansen's declaration to other statements on the twentieth of July indicate, the views of most former officers on the issue of service under the Third Reich were not fundamentally different from the mainstream. The officers, like the public, felt uncomfortable about the glorification of the twentieth of July, and the officers, like the government, wanted to see a new German army at almost any cost.

Former officers felt isolated and betrayed; they railed against the government's glorification of "traitors"; they fretted about their beloved honor code and the future of the German military. But the fundamental coincidence of their interests with the public's and with the goals of those in power, in conjunction with similar

circumstances in other areas of their lives, helped to ease the transition of the former officers of Hitler's army into the democratic West German political culture.

¹David Clay Large's recent work, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (University of North Carolina, 1996), is a much-needed general history of German rearmament after 1945 which deals very comprehensively with the debates about the form the new army would take. On the search for acceptable traditions within the Bundeswehr, see also Donald Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross: The Search for Tradition in the West German Armed Forces* (Princeton, 1990), Wolfgang von Groote, "Bundeswehr und 20. Juli," in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 12/1 (1964): 285-99, Georg Meyer, "Auswirkungen des 20. Juli 1944 auf das innere Gefüge der Wehrmacht bis Kriegsende und auf das soldatische Selbstverständnis im Vorfeld des westdeutschen Verteidigungsbeitrages bis 1950/51," in Militärgeschichtliche Forschungsamt (MGFA), ed., *Aufstand des Gewissens: Militärischer Widerstand gegen Hitler und das NS-Regime, 1933-1945* (Herford, 1984), Norbert Wiggershaus, "Zur Bedeutung und Nachwirkung des militärischen Widerstandes in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der Bundeswehr," also in MGFA, ed., *Aufstand des Gewissens* (Herford, 1984), Robert Buck, "Die Rezeption des 20. Juli 1944 in der Bundeswehr: Anmerkungen zu deren Traditionsverständnis," in Gerd Überschar, ed., *Der 20. Juli 1944: Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstandes gegen das NS-Regime* (Cologne, 1994), and an unpublished dissertation by Claus Donat, entitled *Deutscher Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus aus der Sicht der Bundeswehr* (Bamberg, 1976). Other good sources on the subject of German rearmament during this period are MGFA, ed., *Aspekte der deutschen Wiederbewaffnung bis 1955* (Boppard am Rhein, 1975), Alexander (ed.), *Wiederbewaffnung in Deutschland nach 1945* (Berlin, 1986) and Förster, Greiner, Meyer, et al., *Anfänge westdeutsche Sicherheitspolitik, 1945-1956* (Munich, 1990).

²On the postwar legacy of the coup, see Robert Weldon Whalen, *Assassinating Hitler: Ethics and Resistance in Nazi Germany* (Assoc. Univ. Presses, 1993), the contributions by Hans Mommsen and David Clay Large in David Clay Large, ed., *Contending with Hitler: Varieties of German Resistance in the Third Reich* (Washington D.C., 1991), Peter Steinbach, "Widerstand im Dritten Reich—die Keimzelle der Nachkriegsdemokratie? Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Widerstand in der historischen politischen Bildungsarbeit, in den Medien und in der öffentlichen Meinung nach 1945," in Gerd Überschar, ed., *Der 20. Juli 1944: Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstandes gegen das NS-Regime* (Cologne, 1994), and Raimund Neuss, "Wem gehört der deutsche Widerstand?—Der Streit zum 50. Jahrestag des 20. Juli 1944," in *German Life and Letters* 49/1 (Jan. 1996): 101-19. *The Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* devoted an entire issue to the subject in 1994 (volume 42/ issue 7) which contains a number of thought-provoking articles, especially on the coup's impact on postwar East Germany.

³Countless historians have described the events of the now-legendary twentieth of July 1944 in great detail. Peter Hoffman's exhaustive account, *The History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977) (a translation of his 1970 work, *Widerstand, Staatsstreich, Attentat*) is perhaps the standard. For the sheer variety of topics explored and opinions expressed, I recommend Jürgen Schmädke and Peter Steinbach, *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus: Die deutsche Gesellschaft und der Widerstand gegen Hitler*

(Munich, 1985). Other works include Graml, Mommsen, Reichardt, and Wolf, *The German Resistance to Hitler* (Berkeley, 1970), Dieter Ehlers, *Technik und Moral einer Verschwörung: 20. Juli 1944* (FFM, 1964), and more recently, Robert Weldon Whalen, *Assassinating Hitler: Ethics and Resistance in Nazi Germany* (Assoc. Univ. Presses, 1993). Joachim Fest's 1994 *Staatsstreich: Der lange Weg zum 20. Juli* has also just been translated into English as *Plotting Hitler's Death* (New York, 1996).

⁴The number around 150 comes from Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, *20. Juli, 1944* (Bonn, 1964), 230ff. The Nachrichtenblatt of the VDS Landesverband Südweststaat in 1954 cites an "official source" as giving the number of deaths at an extraordinary 4,980 men and women. NB #20 Juli/August 1954, BAMA MSg3-269/1.

⁵A number of historians have insisted that the participation of the armed forces was absolutely essential to the success of any attempted coup d'état. Peter Hoffmann, "Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg in the German Resistance to Hitler: Between East and West," *Historical Journal* 31/3 (1988) 629.

⁶Robert Weldon Whalen, *Assassinating Hitler: Ethics and Resistance in Nazi Germany*, 38.

⁷Mary Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation: A History of Germany 1918-1990*, 135-36.

⁸A great deal of work has been done in recent years on the communist resistance to Hitler and its importance in legitimizing the German Democratic Republic. Allan Merson's *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany* (London, 1985), though not uniformly praised, represents a valuable, single-volume treatment of the subject, and most of the recent works on the resistance cited in notes 2 and 3 contain sections or contributions on the communist resistance.

⁹Jürgen Danyel, "Bilder vom 'anderen Deutschland': Frühe Widerstandsrezeption nach 1945," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 42/ 7 (1994): 611-22.

¹⁰Ines Reich and Kurt Finker, "Der 20. Juli 1944 in der Geschichtswissenschaft der SBZ/DDR seit 1945," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 39/6 (1991):533-53. *The Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 42/ 7 (1994) is entirely devoted to the subject of the legacy of the coup and contains a number of thought-provoking articles primarily on the coup's impact on postwar East Germany. See also Eve Rosenhaft's article, "The Uses of Remembrance: The Legacy of the Communist Resistance in the German Democratic Republic," in Francis Nicosia and Lawrence D. Stokes, eds., *Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich, Essays in Honour of Peter Hoffman* (Berg, 1990).

¹¹Research into these areas has increased in the West in recent years as well. Peter Steinbach has written a number of articles on the subject, including: Bodo Scheurig, *Verräter oder Patrioten? Das Nationalkomitee 'Freies Deutschland' und der Bund Deutscher Offiziere in der Sowjetunion 1943-1945* (Berlin, 1993), Peter Steinbach, "Widerstand hinter Stacheldraht: Zur Diskussion über das Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland als Widerstandsorganisation seit 1943," in Gerd Überschar, ed., *Der 20. Juli 1944: Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstandes gegen das NS-Regime* (Cologne, 1994). Steinbach's title calls to mind an earlier article by Alexander Fischer entitled, "Die Bewegung 'Freies Deutschland' in der Sowjetunion: Widerstand hinter Stacheldraht?" in MGFA, *Aufstand des Gewissens* (Herford, 1984). The history of the Rote Kapelle has undergone a revision recently in the light of documents made available since 1989. The group's activities are now much better understood thanks to an article by Johannes Tuchel, "Das Ende der Legenden: Die Rote Kapelle im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus," in Überschar, *Der 20. Juli 1944*. Tuchel defends the Rote Kapelle against the long-held Western assumptions that they were

Soviet "spies," rather than "resistors." It is interesting that in the post-1989 era, most politicians (and many historians) seem concerned somehow to unify all the various resistance groups or at least commemorate them equally. A unified Germany can apparently use a unified resistance just as the two divided German states used two separate "resistances:" the ethical/military and the political/communist.

¹²There were a number of personal links between postwar political parties, particularly the CDU, and the twentieth of July conspiracy as well. Theodor Steltzer, founder of the CDU in Schleswig-Holstein, was associated with the conspiracy, and a number of Adenauer's ministers and advisors in the Kanzleramt were also linked to the plot to kill Hitler (Otto Lenz, Hans Lukaschek, Ernst Wirmner [brother of Josef]).

¹³Frank Stern, "Wolfschanze versus Auschwitz: Widerstand als deutsches Alibi?" *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 42/7 (1994): 650.

¹⁴Wiggershaus, Large, and Mommsen all make this point concerning the lack of direct constitutional influence. Wiggershaus, "Zur Bedeutung," Mommsen, "Der Widerstand gegen Hitler," Large, "Uses of the Past."

¹⁵Peter Steinbach, "Widerstand im Dritten Reich—die Keimzelle der Nachkriegsdemokratie?" in Gerd Überschär, ed., *Der 20. Juli 1944: Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstandes gegen das NS-Regime* (Cologne, 1994), 79. In a recent book/memoir which deals with the twentieth of July, Marion Gräfin Dönhoff also claims the coup as the "moral foundation" also of the Federal Republic when she states: "Ich denke, Peter Yorck wäre heute im Verhältnis zum Staat, den er schützen wollte, ein Konservativer, gegenüber den Mitbürgern ein Liberaler und gegenüber der Gesellschaft um der Gerechtigkeit willen, die ihm so viel bedeutete, ein sozialer Demokrat." Dönhoff, *'Um der Ehre willen: Erinnerungen an die Freunde vom 20. Juli* (Berlin, 1994). Cited in Raimund Neuss, "Wem gehört der deutsche Widerstand?—Der Streit zum 50. Jahrestag des 20. Juli 1944," *German Life and Letters* 49/1 (Jan 1996).

¹⁶Hans Mommsen, "Der Widerstand gegen Hitler und die deutsche Gesellschaft," *Historische Zeitschrift* 241/1 (1985): 81.

¹⁷For an early statement of the general critique, see Graml, Mommsen, Reichardt, and Wolf, *The German Resistance to Hitler* (Berkeley, 1970). Klaus-Jürgen Müller has also written in a similar vein, most recently in the introduction (co-authored with Mommsen) to Klaus-Jürgen Müller, ed., *Der deutsche Widerstand, 1933-1945* (Paderborn, 1986). Elsewhere, Hans Mommsen also debunks the idea that the participants in the coup came from "all walks of life," as was often claimed by officials of the Federal Republic during commemorations of the event. Mommsen insists that the conspirators were almost exclusively "outsiders" from the upper-middle and upper classes, which gave the coup an "Honoratorencharakter." Nevertheless, given the state of historical research and public knowledge about the coup in the early 1950s, these pronouncements by the government had a profound effect in shaping the public debate about the twentieth of July. Hans Mommsen, "Der Widerstand gegen Hitler und die deutsche Gesellschaft," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 241/1 (1985): 89.

¹⁸For at least one example, see the article by Ernst Friedländer, "Zuviel Gehorsam," in *Die Zeit*, 27 May, 1948, p.1. The article vilifies the majority of the former officer corps, and particularly the generals, for not having acted in the face of injustice. Witzleben's name is trotted out toward the end of the article as an indication of the correct and possible response to Hitler's "Unrechtstaat."

¹⁹Hans Rothfels, *Die deutsche Opposition gegen Hitler: Eine Würdigung* (Krefeld, 1949).

Gerhard Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung* (Stuttgart, 1954). Other influential works, such as Fabian von Schlabrendorff's *Offizier gegen Hitler* (Zürich, 1946) did appear, but research on the conspiracy remained in its infancy.

²⁰Much of the information regarding the conspiracy came, and continues to come, from Gestapo records made in the aftermath of the coup. Compounding that problem was the fact that much of the positive information about the coup derived from the postwar testimony of survivors and relatives of the conspiracy, whose politics and personal motives have sometimes colored their statements.

²¹See Hans Mommsen and Hermann Graml, *The German Resistance to Hitler*, published in 1970 and Ger van Roon, *Neuordnung im Widerstand: Der Kreisauer Kreis innerhalb der deutschen Widerstandsbewegung* (Munich, 1967). Thomas Childers's contribution to David Clay Large, *Contending with Hitler*, deals with the Kreisauer Kreis, as does Mommsen's more recent "Der Kreisauer Kreis und die künftige Neuordnung Deutschlands und Europas," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 42/3 (1994): 361-77. On Stauffenberg, see Peter Hoffman, "Claus von Stauffenberg in the German Resistance to Hitler: Between East and West," *Historical Journal* 31/3 (1988). Klemens von Klemperer has published a number of works on the foreign-political goals and connections of the conspirators, among them *German Resistance to Hitler: The Search for Allies Abroad, 1938-1945* (Oxford, 1992).

²²It is interesting that, confronted with a similar problem of reconciling reality and perception, Peter Steinbach quoted Marc Bloch: "Es käme nicht nur darauf an herauszubekommen, ob Jesus wirklich am Kreuz gestorben sei... sondern auch darauf zu erklären, weshalb Menschen fast zweitausend Jahre nach diesem Ereignis noch an dieses Ereignis glaubten und es weiterhin in das Zentrum ihres Denkens rückten." From Bloch's *Verteidigung der Geschichte*, cited in Peter Steinbach, "Widerstand im Dritten Reich—die Keimzelle der Nachkriegsdemokratie? Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Widerstand in der historischen politischen Bildungsarbeit, in den Medien und in der öffentlichen Meinung nach 1945," in Gerd Überschar, ed., *Der 20. Juli 1944: Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstandes gegen das NS-Regime*, (Cologne, 1994).

²³All of these speeches and more are cited in Norbert Wiggershaus, "Zur Bedeutung und Nachwirkung des militärischen Widerstandes in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der Bundeswehr," in MGFA, ed., *Aufstand des Gewissens* (Herford, 1984): 208-10.

²⁴Guidelines of the PGA, cited in Donald Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross*, 144. Georg Meyer also addresses this issue in "Auswirkungen des 20. Juli 1944 auf das innere Gefüge der Wehrmacht," in MGFA, ed., *Aufstand des Gewissens* (Herford, 1984): 467.

²⁵Abenheim, 140-41.

²⁶Hans Rothfels, "Das politische Vermächtnis des deutschen Widerstands," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 2/4 (1954): 329.

²⁷Both the identification of Lemmer and the quote are taken from Large, "Uses of the Past," in *Contending with Hitler*, 174. Large in turn found the citation in Ulrike Emrich and Jürgen Nötzold, "Der 20. Juli in der öffentliche Gedenkreden der Bundesrepublik und in der Darstellung der DDR," in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, supplement to *Das Parlament* 26 (1984): 3-12. Of course, the DDR fought back using the same weapons, charging that the conspirators were imperialists and even going so far as to make films (which were advertised in the West, though whether they were shown, I am not sure) about the lives of conspirators such as Hans Speidel linking them to treasonous acts and cowardly motives.

²⁸The Dickfeld affair is mentioned in the papers of the Amt Blank, BAMA BW9-3088,

especially in a letter from Rolf Johannesson to Hellmuth Heye, a copy of which finds its way to Drews in the Amt Blank. No mention is ever made of what eventually happened to Adolf Dickfeld aka Albert Winter or whether he was sent back to Austria.

²⁹Presse und Informationsamt, *Bulletin*, #95, 22.7.1952. BAMA N222-198B. Lukaschek was the Bundesminister für Vertriebene, 1949-1953. Lukaschek was himself connected with the Kreisau Circle and was later the cofounder of the CDU in Berlin.

³⁰Major a.D. Rudolf Zimmerman to Hansen, 16.10.1954, BAMA N222-153.

³¹Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, *20. Juli, 1944* (Bonn, 1964).

³²Dönhoff is cited in Whalen, 40-41. Even later historians were guilty of this exaggeration of the democratic elements of Moltke's vision. A mere four pages before Roon cites the authoritarian and aristocratic impulses present in the Kreisau program, he somewhat incongruously calls the group's conception of the state a "declaration for the pluralistic democratic state and for the free development of individuals and groups as the sovereign elements [of society]." Roon, 385.

³³Wilhelm Ritter von Schramm, cited in the *Karlstädter Zeitung*, 13.1.1954. Clipping in Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv (BAMA) BW9-768. Von Schramm often commented on soldiers' issues and expressed opinions very similar to those of former officers. For example, his statement on the twentieth of July continues in a vein which closely mirrors the statement drafted by Admiral Hansen in 1951 and which became the official stance of the VDS (see below). Von Schramm continues: "Those however, who gave their blood on the battlefield, did not fall in vain. Their death was a sacrament; they atoned for that sinfulness with which their peoples burdened themselves."

³⁴*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, "Gescheitert?", 20.7.1955, in BAMA N222-199. Norbert Wiggershaus also mentions plays and novels such as Plivier's "Stalingrad" and Zuckmayer's "Des Teufels General" as contributing to the general glorification of resistance. Wiggershaus, "Zur Bedeutung," in MGFA, *Aufstand des Gewissens*, 211.

³⁵Scholars of the coup itself will no doubt recognize that, in a general way, this list of "values" is fairly accurate, though it homogenizes the groups involved in the plot and avoids many of the tendentious political issues raised by the ideas of the Kreisauer Kreis, Goerdeler, and the other resistance "organizations" involved with the twentieth of July.

³⁶Whalen, 41. Whalen cites Kurt Tauber, *Beyond Eagle and Swastika* (Wesleyan, 1967) 1127 for his table.

³⁷Taken from the Institut für Demoskopie: Stimmung im Bundesgebiet, August 1951, reproduced in Hans-Erich Volkmann, "Die innenpolitische Dimension adenauerscher Sicherheitspolitik in der EVG-Phase," 489 in Meyer, Wiggershaus, et. al., eds., *Anfänge westdeutscher Sicherheitspolitik*, vol. 2, Die EVG-Phase.

³⁸This is an unusual result, given the tendency I have observed elsewhere for former career soldiers to sympathize with the FDP more than other mainstream parties.

³⁹Georg Meyer, "Auswirkungen des 20. Juli 1944 auf das innere Gefüge der Wehrmacht," in MGFA, ed., *Aufstand des Gewissens* (Herford, 1984), 477-78.

⁴⁰As seems often to be the case, Marion Gräfin Dönhoff provides an early and clear formulation of this principle. Dönhoff is cited in Peter Steinbach, "Teufel Hitler-Beelzebub Stalin? Zur Kontroverse um die Darstellung des Nationalkomitees Freies Deutschland in der ständigen Ausstellung 'Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus' in der Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 42/7 (1994): 651-62. Steinbach does not provide a reference for the quote, however.

⁴¹Jürgen Danyel, "Bilder vom 'anderen Deutschland:' Frühe Widerstandsrezeption nach 1945," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 42/ 7 (1994): 618.

⁴²On Remer, see Peter Steinbach, "Teufel Hitler - Beelzebub Stalin?" 652 On Dr. Otto John's involvement in the conspiracy, see Hoffmann, "Stauffenberg between East and West," 638-39. On John's postwar activities, see Large, "Uses of the Past," 170-71 and a brief discussion in Gerd Überschar's introduction to Überschar, ed., *Der 20. Juli 1944*, which also mentions the Remer trial.

⁴³Hans Hagen, "Der 20. Juli —Der Eid und die Verantwortung," lecture given at the Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll, 12.11.1950, BB1950, 14.

⁴⁴Hagen in BB1950, 15.

⁴⁵Peter Hoffmann, "Warum misslang das Attentat vom 20. Juli 1944?" in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 32/3 (1984): 441-62.

⁴⁶This discussion of the influence of Manteuffel, Jodl, and others is taken from Georg Meyer, "Auswirkungen des 20. Juli 1944 auf das innere Gefüge der Wehrmacht," in MGFA, ed., *Aufstand des Gewissens* (Herford, 1984), 488-89. Unfortunately, it is not clear from Meyer's footnotes exactly from where and when the Manteuffel citation comes, hence the unspecified date.

⁴⁷Meyer's "Auswirkungen des 20. Juli 1944 auf das innere Gefüge der Wehrmacht," contains an extensive discussion of the wartime impact of the coup on the armed forces. He also makes the worthwhile point that the attitude toward the coup varied drastically by branch of service.

⁴⁸Institut für Demoskopie: *Stimmung im Bundesgebiet*, August 1951, reproduced in Hans-Erich Volkmann, "Die innenpolitische Dimension adenauerscher Sicherheitspolitik in der EVG-Phase," 489 in Meyer, Wiggershaus, et. al., eds., *Anfänge westdeutscher Sicherheitspolitik*, vol. 2, Die EVG-Phase.

⁴⁹Hans-Erich Volkmann, "Die innenpolitische Dimension adenauerscher Sicherheitspolitik in der EVG-Phase," 489, in Meyer, Wiggershaus, et. al., eds., *Anfänge westdeutscher Sicherheitspolitik*, vol. 2, Die EVG-Phase.

⁵⁰Hans Korte to Frießner, 31.5.1951, BAMA N528-20. The meeting near Celle was apparently called by a former SS Gruppenführer named Heim, but there is no indication that the meeting was solely for former Waffen-SS personnel. In any case, Frießner often insisted on treating the members of the Waffen-SS just as he would other comrades and often dealt with the attitudes of the two groups interchangeably. See his earlier letter to Korte, dated 25.5.1951 also in BAMA N528-20.

⁵¹Oberst a.D. Ludwig, cited in Mosbach to Frießner, 2.10.1951, BAMA N528-50.

⁵²Gümbel was in fact seen as too radical by the majority of the leaders of the VDS and the former officers who worked more closely with the government. Mosbach, in the letter citing the Gümbel speech, expresses his dissatisfaction with Gümbel's formulation and Erich Dethleffsen (N648-7) calls Gümbel's suggestions "laughable" in an essay on Frießner's interview (see below). Gümbel was the Landesvorsitzende of the Bavarian branch of the Schutzbund Deutscher Soldaten (BDS), a group whose potential radicalism worried the officials of the Dienststelle Blank. Gümbel himself was a "Blutordensträger" of the NSDAP, and was being investigated in early 1951 for alleged antisemitic and neo-Nazi sentiments. See Der Informationsdienst, 24.3.1951, "Die Lage der BDS," BAMA BW9-3085.

⁵³Hansen was a retired admiral who worked tirelessly to organize former soldiers in the post-war period and was the chairman of several prominent veterans' organizations over the years. Admiral Hansen explicitly used the term "eine Art ehrengerichtlichen Verfahrens" to

describe the process by which officers with some connection to the twentieth of July should be screened for future service in a German army. He imagined that the VDS, as the “official” representative of the former officer corps, would determine the structure of the screening group. Admiral Hansen in Gert Spindler to Frießner, 19.11.1951, “Stellungnahme zu den Aufgaben des Verbandes deutscher Soldaten aus den Kreisen ehemaliger Wehrmachtsoffiziere,” 4-5, BAMA N528-51. Once the PGA was proposed, Admiral Hansen renewed this proposal that the VDS, with its unique knowledge of the personnel involved, at least be represented on the screening committee. The government tenaciously resisted such proposals.

⁵⁴A photocopy of Keitel’s order is included in MGFA, *Aufstand des Gewissens*, 499.

⁵⁵Generalmajor a.D. Heinrich Baron Behr, cited in Gert Spindler to Frießner, 19.11.1951, “Stellungnahme zu den Aufgaben des Verbandes deutscher Soldaten aus den Kreisen ehemaliger Wehrmachtsoffiziere,” 5, BAMA N528-51.

⁵⁶Gert Spindler to Frießner, 19.11.1951, “Stellungnahme zu den Aufgaben des Verbandes deutscher Soldaten aus den Kreisen ehemaliger Wehrmachtsoffiziere,” 5, BAMA N528-51, 7. Spindler’s remark begs the question: How do you prevent someone from being a “former” soldier?

⁵⁷Kurt Brennecke, in a personal comment attached to an official GfW position paper dated 22.6.1954 on “Oath,” BAMA BW9-766.

⁵⁸Unknown to “Ade” [Eberhard Müller’s son to Müller?], 15.7.1950 makes an obvious, if implicit reference to the use of West German troops to “liberate” the eastern zone. BB1950.

⁵⁹Donald Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross*, 147. See also Large’s *Germans to Front* for a complete discussion of the reform movements which defined the new army. A whole chapter of the army’s *Handbuch ‘Innere Führung’* is devoted to the twentieth of July.

⁶⁰Critics often dubbed the plan “Inneres Gewürge” which means “internal strangulation.”

⁶¹Militär-geschichtliche Forschungsamt, ed., *Aspekte der deutschen Wiederbewaffnung bis 1955* (Boppard am Rhein, 1975): 219, Germany, Bundesministerium für Verteidigung, *Vom künftigen deutschen Soldaten; Gedanken und Planungen der Dienststelle Blank* (Bonn, 1955): 19 and 31, Count Wolf von Baudissin, “The New German Army,” *Foreign Affairs* 34, no. 1 (1955) 3. Germany, Bundesministerium für Verteidigung, *Information für die Truppe*, 10/57, 28.

⁶²Germany, Bundesministerium für Verteidigung, *Information für die Truppe*, 1/56, 32.

⁶³Johann Adolf Graf von Kielmansegg, “Gedanken eines Soldaten zum Widerstand,” in MGFA, *Der militärische Widerstand gegen Hitler und das NS-Regime 1933-1945*, 25.

⁶⁴Fuchs to Hansen, 15.12.1955, BAMA N222-201.

⁶⁵“Ein bemerkenswertes Interview,” *Die Neue Feuerwehr*, #89, September 1959, 7. BAMA MSg3-176/1. Schörner, eventually made field marshal, was apparently a favorite of Hitler’s and was named the new Commander in Chief of the *Wehrmacht* after Hitler’s suicide. This of course overstates Graf Baudissin’s own position by assuming that he would exclude the older heroes of the soldier’s pantheon, such as Scharnhorst or Gneisenau, in favor the conspirators.

⁶⁶FAZ, “Fortschritt heißt: in Form bleiben,” dated only “1951” in BB1951.

⁶⁷*Deutsche Soldaten-Zeitung*, July 1954, “10 Jahre: 20. Juli 1944,” 1.

⁶⁸Major a.D. Rudolf Zimmerman to Hansen, 16.10.1954, BAMA N222-153.

⁶⁹Roon, 55 and 510.

⁷⁰Roon, 55

⁷¹Roon, 76.

⁷²Many of these common ideas can be traced to the existence of a “national-conservative opposition” identified by Hans-Mommsen and Klaus-Jürgen Müller.

⁷³A good source for getting a concise sense of the linguistic and the ideological commonalities between the two groups is Hans Mommsen’s “Der Kreisauer Kreis und die künftige Neuordnung Deutschlands und Europas,” in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 42/3 (1994). On the ideological conceptions of former officers in the postwar period, see my own dissertation, *Soldiers as Citizens: Former Officers in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1945-1955* (Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1995). In reviewing Whalen’s *Assassinating Hitler* in the journal *History* (80/258, 1995), Ian Kershaw also succinctly cataloged the conspirators “common traits” as being “the tradition of self-sacrifice for public service, combined with an extreme sense of loyalty and moral responsibility in both private and public matters... the acute sense of honour ... the Christian diminution of the resisters’ ethical motivation.” These are all characteristics strongly valued (if not always exhibited) by the former officers that I studied.

⁷⁴Major i.G.a.D. Helfer, in Adelbert Weinstein, *Armee ohne Pathos*, 68.

⁷⁵Mommsen, 143-44.

⁷⁶Rothfels, “Das politische Vermächtnis,” 541.

⁷⁷Virtually every account of the twentieth of July deals with this issue in some way, but see in particular Peter Hoffmann, “Stauffenberg Between East and West,” cited above.

⁷⁸Roon, 286. Of course, the fact that Freiherr von Stauffenberg related this story during a speech in 1963 begs the question whether Claus von Stauffenberg’s anticommunism was emphasized for cold-war purposes. Nevertheless, the traditional anticommunism of the German officer corps, the course of the war in 1941-42, and the reluctance of even the Socialist members of the Kreisau Circle to meet with the communists would generally lend credence to Freiherr von Stauffenberg’s claim.

⁷⁹Many of the officers who later became very involved in veterans’ affairs and in the creation of the Verband Deutscher Soldaten (VDS) served in 1944 in the staffs of the armies on the Western Front. Blumentritt, Hausser, Speidel, von der Heydte are just a few of the names which appear both in the annals of the Oberkommando West and the VDS.

⁸⁰Helfer to Dethleffsen, 8 August 1951, BAMA N648-9.

⁸¹Mommsen, *Resistance*, 93.

⁸²Beck cited in Henri Bernard, “The German Resistance against Hitler” 20-21 of Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, ed., *July 20 1944: The German opposition to Hitler as viewed by foreign historians* (Bonn, 1969).

⁸³27.6.1951, “Stellungnahme des Landesverband Wü/Ba zu den neuen Absichten des 1. Vors. des BvW vom 26.6.1951,” in BAMA N571-378.

⁸⁴Generaloberst Kurt Student, in “Verband Deutscher Soldaten—Protokoll der Tagung am 9. September 1951 in Bonn,” 10, 17.9.1951, BAMA N648-7.

⁸⁵At the annual meeting of the chairmen and the central committee of the VDS in 1954, the issue of an official response to the twentieth of July came up again, as it had in 1951 and in 1953. “The public demands clarity from former soldiers in such basic questions,” reads the minutes of the meeting. 15.-16.10.1954 Tagung in BAMA N222-153.

⁸⁶This is a clear example of “corporate politics” as practiced by Adenauer in the early years of the Federal Republic.

⁸⁷*London Times*, “Ex-soldiers of Germany—Former General’s Call For Justice,” September 22, 1951.

⁸⁸In his account of the events of August and September 1939 at the press conference (as transcribed by Frießner shortly thereafter), General Frießner said: "Back then we told by the press and radio of the events in the Corridor, of the persecution of the German minority by the Poles and of their atrocities. Politics no longer sufficed to clean these things up. Then the long arm of politics, the *Wehrmacht*, stepped into action. That is how it came to war." That the war was justified arose from Frießner's "conviction, that even today the soldier must obey when the state leadership orders military operations." Frießner, in a paper labelled "Wechmar," BAMA N528-37.

⁸⁹General Frießner, in his own, typed version of events of the press conference, in BAMA, N528-37.

⁹⁰Johannes Frießner, "Auszug aus den Erklärungen des Gen. Oberst a.D. Frießner vor der ausländischen Presse in Bad Godesberg 22.9.1951," in BAMA N528-37.

⁹¹There are countless examples among the letters of former officers on the subject. Apart from Frießner and Hagen, former General Traugott Herr expressed the same sentiment in a letter to Vize-Admiral a.D. Gustav Kleikamp, 22.6.1951, BAMA N222-198B as did Werner Fuchs in his letter to Hansen, 15.12.1955, BAMA N222-201. One loyal former Nazi, August Cordes, was even willing to grant that those committing high treason still maintained their honor, but only up to a point at which they became "dishonorable assassins and tried to slink away after planting the bomb!" Cordes to Rollmann, 15.5.1951, BAMA N222-198B.

⁹²Generaloberst a.D. Kurt Zeitler wrote, "Ihre ersten Äusserungen vor der Presse habe ich mit grossere Freude gelesen. Sie waren mir aus der Seele gesprochen," Zeitler to Frießner, 25.9.1951, BAMA N528-57.

⁹³Bundespresseamt, "Mitteilung an die Presse," 2.10.1951, in BAMA N528-39.

⁹⁴General Frießner collected many of the articles and personal letters critical of his interview in a folder entitled, "Angriffe," BAMA N528-37

⁹⁵Peter von Zahn, "Von Nah und Fern," 25.9.1951, 1-2, transcript in BAMA N648-7.

⁹⁶"20. Juli 1944," in the Nachrichtenblatt of the VDS Landesverband Südweststaat, NB #20 Juli/August 1954, BAMA MSg3-269/1 among other places. The Hansen declaration became a standard among soldiers, especially after the Frießner debacle, and even found its way into the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung's 1964 collection, 20. Juli, 1944, 305. For more on Hansen's declaration (though not much has been written on it) see Meyer, "Auswirkungen des 20. Juli," 490, Wiggershaus, "Zur Bedeutung," 211, and Krafft Freiherr Schenck zu Schweinsberg, "Die Soldatenverbände in der Bundesrepublik," in Georg Picht, ed., *Studien zur politischen und gesellschaftlichen Situation der Bundeswehr* (Witten, 1965).

⁹⁷The Gesellschaft für Wehrkunde in Bonn, for example, issues a statement in 1954, the language of which is almost identical to the Hansen declaration.

⁹⁸Johann Adolf Graf von Kielmansegg, "Gedanken eines Soldaten zum Widerstand," in MGFA, *Der militärische Widerstand gegen Hitler und das NS-Regime 1933-1945*, 24.

⁹⁹Adolf, Heusinger, *Befehl im Widerstreit. Schicksalsstunden der Deutschen Armee 1923-1945* (Tübingen, Stuttgart, 1950). Cited in *Deutsche Soldaten-Zeitung*, July 1954, "10 Jahre: 20. Juli 1944," 1.

¹⁰⁰Frießner to Mosbach, 6.10.1951, BAMA N528-50. Norbert Wiggershaus reminds us that in the work, *Deutsches Soldatentum im europäischen Rahmen* (1952), Günther Blumentritt, who was also very active in postwar veterans' organizations simply refused to even mention the coup or its implications. Wiggershaus, "Zur Bedeutung," 215.

¹⁰¹Boehm to Hansen, 1.7.1951, BAMA N222-198.

¹⁰²Boehm to Hansen (as chairman of the VDS), 6.8.1953, BAMA N222-199A

¹⁰³See Werner Fuchs to Hansen, 15.12.1955, BAMA N222-201. At least three entire volumes (198-200) of Admiral Hansen's papers at the Militärarchiv in Freiburg are devoted to his correspondence with comrades concerning the twentieth of July and related issues, such as the soldier's oath.

¹⁰⁴The prisoner-of-war issue remained current in Germany throughout the early 1950s thanks to the fact that the Soviets continued to hold thousands of German soldiers captive until 1955. The example of those captive soldiers and the experience of many former officers in Soviet captivity was a central element in insuring their anticommunism. See Chapter 3 of my dissertation, *Soldiers as Citizens* for more on this subject.

¹⁰⁵The same volume of Hansen's papers which contains his correspondence with Boehm also includes a number of newspaper clippings regarding the John case.

¹⁰⁶Rollman to Kleikamp, 17.6.1951, BAMA N222-198B.

¹⁰⁷Major a.D. Neder to Frießner, 9.10.1951, BAMA N528-57.

¹⁰⁸Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, "Auflehnung gegen den Helden," *Die Zeit*, 17.Juli.1952, in BAMA N222-198B.

¹⁰⁹General der Panzertruppe a.D. Heinrich Eberbach, cited in the minutes of the Tagung at Bad Boll, BB1950, 16.

¹¹⁰H. Selle, "Über die Grenzen des soldatischen Gehorsam," typed sheet on which is noted "veröffl. i.d. Schweiz," no date, in BAMA N222-26, 3. I believe this is Herbert Selle, though it is attributed only to "H." Selle was an officer in the Wehrmacht, who fought, among other places, at Stalingrad. Selle was introduced to Hansen by a Herr Zollenkopf. See 25 April 1949, Zollenkopf to Hansen BAMA N222-26.

¹¹¹H. Selle, "Über die Grenzen des soldatischen Gehorsam," typed sheet on which is noted "veröffl. i.d. Schweiz," no date, in BAMA N222-26, 2. Eberbach reached a similar conclusion. The United States-sponsored *Neue Zeitung* called Eberbach the only former general present at Bad Boll in 1950 who spoke "menschlich" because he maintained that the Rechtsstaat was the "precondition" for a soldier's oath. *Neue Zeitung*, "Diskussion um Soldateneid und Verantwortung," 30. November 1950.

¹¹²Georg von Sodenstern, "Der Fahneneid des deutschen Soldaten," 1947, in BAMA N594-11.