

THE WHITE ROSE MOVEMENT



In 1942, a group of university students wrote leaflets to try to start a movement among the German people to expose the crimes of the Nazi Party and remove Adolf Hitler from office. The group wrote four leaflets in the summer of 1942 focused on the atrocities of the SS with the mass murder of the Jewish people and the high number of deaths of the Polish civilians.

From the 2nd Leaflet of the White Rose Movement

Why do German people behave so apathetically in the face of all these abominable crimes, crimes so unworthy of the human race? ... The German people slumber on in their dull, stupid sleep and encourage these fascist criminals....[The German] must evidence not only sympathy; no, much more: a sense of complicity in guilt....For through his apathetic behavior he gives these evil men the opportunity to act as they do.... he himself is to blame for the fact that it came about at all! Each man wants to be exonerated ...But he cannot be exonerated; he is guilty, guilty, guilty!... now that we have recognized [the Nazis] for what they are, it must be the sole and first duty, the holiest duty of every German to destroy these beasts.



In February 1943, **Hans and Sophie Scholl** went to the University of Munich to place leaflets at various spots throughout the university, hoping that the students would read them and rise up. However, when Sophie threw a stack down from the top floor into an atrium, a janitor saw them and had them taken into custody by the **Gestapo** or Hitler's secret police. Soon, the group members were also arrested, including **Christoph Probst**, the father of three very young children.

The three were put on trial on February 22, 1943, with **Roland Freisler** serving as the judge. However, Freisler was a judge of show trials where the verdict was already determined before the accused entered the courtroom. The legal defense team did nothing to support their clients. During the trial, Freisler screamed at the students for their actions and sentenced all three to death by guillotine that day. When Hans entered the room and was placed on the guillotine, he yelled out, "long live freedom!"

Other members of the group were arrested in the days and weeks to come. **Willi Graf** was executed in October 1943, and **Alexander Schmorell** and their professor, Kurt Huber, were also sentenced to death. Eleven others would eventually be sent to prison for assisting the White Rose movement. Shortly before Professor Huber was executed, he wrote, "I died for Germany's freedom, for truth and honor."

The group penned six leaflets and wrote on walls throughout Munich, "Down with Hitler" and "Freedom" when they were active. However, their most significant presence happened after their death. One of the leaflets was able to get out of Nazi Germany via Sweden. The Allies got a hold of it and printed millions of copies of it and dropped them over Germany via bombers. Their message was finally reaching the masses, which was difficult to attain within Germany due to the Gestapo's work to restrict any opposition.

The members of the White Rose movement are seen as heroes during a dark chapter of German history. The group has been featured on postage stamps, schools have been named after them, and numerous universities worldwide have their own White Rose organizations on campus.

OPERATION VALKYRIE JULY 20TH PLOT

On July 20, 1944, a blast went off while Adolf Hitler was hosting a meeting in the Wolf's Lair in Eastern Prussia. Although the room was destroyed, Hitler survived. From there, the *Führer* sought to find anyone who was associated with the plot to kill him as **Operation Valkyrie** not only sought to take out Hitler; it also had a plan to overthrow the entire government and pull Germany out of the war.

Various members of the German military, military intelligence, and civilians were concerned about where Germany was headed under Hitler's leadership in the 1930s, and small groups started to form with the focus of overthrowing the government. One group wanted to either kill Hitler or put him on trial in 1939, but the start of the war disrupted the plan.

In 1942, Colonel Henning von Treschow and Major General Hans Oster rebuilt the resistance network and brought in more members who started to become shocked at the atrocities that were happening. One of those new members was Colonel **Claus von Stauffenberg**, a patriotic member of the military that had become disillusioned and came to realize that Hitler was a monster.



Stauffenberg carried a suitcase into the meeting room in the Wolf's Lair on July 20th, 1944, and set it under the desk. He then excused himself for a phone call and left before the bomb went off. After Stauffenberg left, an officer moved the briefcase to see the map better. That move saved Hitler's life as the large and thick desk, and desk's leg took the majority of the



blast; however, Stauffenberg did not know that the bomb had failed. He got on a plane for Berlin to start the next phase of the plan and overthrow the government. Yet news of the attempted assassination reached Berlin before he did. Confusion lasted for a time when Stauffenberg showed up in the capital city and stated the Hitler was dead. However, when it was indeed proven that Hitler survived, Stauffenberg was arrested and executed that night.

Other members of the plot that were in the war office in Berlin were shot. From there, arrests and execution continued for months and focused on gathering up anyone with even the remotest connection to the actual plot or the other earlier plots that were discovered while the Gestapo conducted their investigation. Eventually, over 7,000 people would be arrested, with 4,980 executed. Some of those executed were not connected to the events of July 20th but were critics of Hitler or had shown opposition in some other facet.

Hitler became more emboldened after surviving the explosion. He felt that he would now win the war; however, the German military could not stop the allied powers. On April 30th, 1945, the same day when Hitler would commit suicide, the Wolf's Lair was blown up by the Soviet Army.

In Germany today, new recruits to the military are sworn in on July 20th and are told that they are citizens in uniform.