

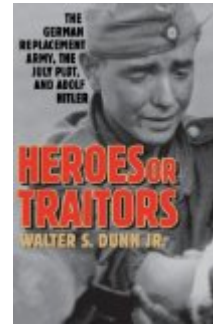
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Walter S. Dunn, Jr. *Heroes or Traitors: The German Replacement Army, the July Plot, and Adolf Hitler*. Westport: Praeger, 2003. x + 180 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-97715-3.

Pierre Galante Silianoff, with EugÖ“ne. *Operation Valkyrie: The German Generals' Plot against Hitler*. New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002. 299 pp. \$17.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8154-1179-6.

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The supply of new books dealing with World War II appears to be almost limitless. My February 2004 search on Amazon.com for books dealing with “World War II” generated a mere 99,152 choices, of which several thousand had been added in the last year alone. Hence, one can be forgiven for expressing delight when a book appears that, if its arguments hold water, would shift dramatically how we interpret the last eighteen months of the war in Europe.

Walter S. Dunn Jr.’s *Heroes or Traitors: The German Replacement Army, the July Plot, and Adolf Hitler* is such a book. Dunn’s thesis is that some of the individuals who attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler on July 20, 1944 deliberately withheld approximately 600,000 troops from the front lines in the first half of 1944 so that these troops could be used to buttress the plotters’ coup. Dunn argues that “the formation of at least sixty new divisions would have been possible before June 1944” (p. xi) and that the destruction of Army Group Center in summer 1944 and the defeat of the Germans in Normandy might well have been averted, had these troops been made available. “The catastrophes in July and August 1944 were not mere coincidences” (p. xviii), argues Dunn, nor was the seemingly miraculous recovery of the Wehrmacht in Fall 1944.

Dunn asserts that except for the withholding of approximately 600,000 Replacement Army troops, the war “might have been prolonged for many months” (p. xviii) and, “with an additional twenty-eight divisions, Rundstedt could have halted the Allies short of Paris and lengthened the war by at least a year” (p. 111). Moreover, he suggests, the lives of approximately 765,000 German sol-

diers would not have been saved because rather than having been taken prisoner, they would have died in a prolonged war. Additionally, tens of thousands of concentration camp inmates would not have been rescued; the first atomic bomb might have been dropped on a German target; the wholesale destruction of additional German cities would have occurred; and hundreds of thousands of additional Allied troops would have died.

Dunn also argues that the actions of the Replacement Army changed the military outcome in such way that it allowed the Russians to occupy and dominate Central and Eastern Europe. Since “the astonishing victories on both the Eastern and the Western fronts in July and August were not solely the result of the brilliance of Allied commanders” (p. 157), Americans, British, and Russians as well as Germans “owe a debt of gratitude to the men who plotted to kill Hitler in July 1944” (p. 156). Here, he is not referring to the idealism the plotters exhibited, but rather to the life-saving consequences of their actions. These are strong assertions and are subjected to additional analysis below.

In contrast to Dunn’s perspective-challenging work, Pierre Galante’s version of the July 20, 1944 plot against Adolf Hitler treads familiar territory, oft-described. Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, a Wehrmacht veteran, who had been badly wounded in North Africa, and Chief of Staff of the Wehrmacht’s several million man Replacement Army, placed a bomb underneath a table in the briefing room of the Fuehrer in Rastenburg, East Prussia, on July 20, 1944. Hitler was present and was badly shaken by the explosion, which killed several oth-

ers in the room. Had the bomb not been repositioned by an unsuspecting individual shortly before its explosion, then perhaps Hitler would have died as well. Further, had the briefing been held in the usual enclosed bunker, it seems likely everyone in the room would have perished. But Adolf Hitler survived, and after some disorientation, emerged with the notion that Providence had spared him. Later that day, he hosted the visiting Benito Mussolini and set in motion a cycle of revenge that was to claim the lives of at least two thousand individuals.

Many historians already have written about these events. A particularly readable version is James Duffy and Vincent Ricci's *Target Hitler: The Plots to Kill Adolf Hitler* (1992). However, Hans Bernd Gisevius's *To the Bitter End* (1947), Fabian von Schlabrendorff and Gero v. S. Gaevernitz's *Revolt against Hitler* (1948), Constantine FitzGibbon's *20 July* (1956), Wilhelm Schramm's *Conspiracy among Generals* (1956), Gerhard Ritter's *The German Resistance* (1958), Hans Rothfels's *The German Resistance to Hitler* (1962), Terence Prittie's *Germans against Hitler* (1964), Fabian von Schlabrendorff's *The Secret War against Hitler* (1965), Joachim Kramarz's *Stauffenberg* (1969), Hans-Adolf Jacobsen's edited volume, *July 20, 1944* (1969), Harold Deutsch's *The Conspiracy Against Hitler in the Twilight War* (1968), James Forman's *Code Name Valkyrie* (1973), Ger van Roon's *German Resistance to Hitler* (1971), Pierre Galante's *Hitler Lives* (1982), and Peter Hoffmann's *German Resistance to Hitler* (1988) previously mined this material, most quite extensively. Consequently, there is very little new that one can write about the assassination plot unless one has discovered new research sources. Galante does not make that claim.

An endemic challenge for writers such as Galante is assessing the worth of the stylized versions of events offered by German leaders who survived the war. While these renditions can provide valuable insights and perspective to the Third Reich's activities, many constitute sanitized apologies for the authors' conduct. Where the assassination plot against Adolf Hitler is concerned, Albert Speer and Heinz Guderian provide instructive examples. Both individuals were in contact with the plotters, though both declined to participate. Even so, Speer was penciled in as the Minister of Armaments in the prospective post-coup government. After the plot, both condemned the plotters. Speer commented soon after the coup that it would have been "an utter disaster" for Germany, and both issued conspicuous protestations of their loyalty to Adolf Hitler and their faith in ultimate victory, though they later recanted.[1] Speer offered advice to the Reich's elite on how best to put down the generals' re-

bellion, while Guderian transmitted strong statements to German troops underlining the need for absolute loyalty, support of National Socialism, and faith in the Fuehrer.

In the very different atmosphere after the war, Speer (and to a lesser extent Guderian) joined many other German military figures in expressing their underlying sympathy for the plotters or their motives. Further, they provided lengthy descriptions of their frustrations with Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. Speer's *Inside the Third Reich* (1970) quickly became a best seller and led to two other major efforts, *Spandau: The Secret Diaries* (1976) and *Infiltration* (1981), each of which further developed an intricate layer of explanations for numerous pieces of embarrassing evidence. Both Speer and Guderian may have been genuine in the interpretations they promoted for their own actions before and after the 1944 coup. Nonetheless, the pictures they paint have struck many historians as self-serving distortions of what actually occurred. Speer's motives and actions have been especially subject to critical analysis and the reputation he sought to establish as "the good Nazi" emerged badly battered.[2] Matthias Schmidt, for example, heaped ridicule on Speer's report that he planned to assassinate Adolf Hitler with poison gas in April 1945, but lacked (inter alia) a ladder.

These discussions illustrate why one must be cautious in accepting the reminiscences of those who survived the attempted assassination on Adolf Hitler in July 1944. Just as victors usually inherit the privilege of writing the initial military histories of conflicts, the defeated have a strong incentive in their writings to mold and sweeten the victors' perceptions of them. Speer wanted to avoid the gallows. Guderian wished to stay out of jail and resume a more normal life, perhaps even being called upon for military consultations by the Western allies. Most other survivors who were party to the plot had postwar motives as well.

There is a prima facie case to be made that anyone close to Adolf Hitler, who did survive the July 1944 plot, either was not significantly involved in the plot (despite their postwar statements), or was exceedingly clever and duplicitous in his dealings with the Gestapo after that date. Two highly placed German officers who were party to the plot and did survive, despite intense interrogations, were General Adolf Heusinger (who actually was present in the briefing room when the bomb exploded), and Hans Speidel, the Chief of Staff to Erwin Rommel, and who later became commander of the land forces of NATO, 1957-63. Yet, most others who were involved at

any significant level were swept up in the blood rage unleashed by the Nazis after the plot and were executed or, like Rommel, forced to commit suicide. Very few genuine plotters escaped and, on occasion, their family members were jailed or executed as well. Even individuals such as the noncommittal head of the Replacement Army, General Friedrich Fromm, ultimately were destroyed. Fromm attempted to distance himself from the assassination attempt by disowning the coup within hours after the bomb exploded and arresting several of the participants for treason. It was for naught, and he was executed in March 1945.

Thus, if someone did survive, it is likely he was not at the core of the plot and therefore probably could not have been party to the word-for-word conversations authors such as Galante report. Of course, some transcripts do exist and some individuals did survive. That said, much of the writing about the July 1944 assassination attempt against Adolf Hitler is based upon second-hand recollections. In a court of law, such conversations would be regarded as impermissible hearsay. In written history, they are interesting contributions that must be checked with great care (and often with skepticism) against other available evidence.

The bottom line is that Galante's contribution reads well and will be useful to readers who have not encountered this material elsewhere. However, it does not present new research or innovative interpretations and a nontrivial portion of the book's content is based upon conversations of participants who wanted to improve their position in history. This is hardly a new phenomenon to historians, but is especially relevant to World War II Germany because of the attempts of many individuals to distance themselves from the undeniable evil of the Nazi regime.

Walter S. Dunn Jr.'s provocative hypotheses concerning military events in Europe in 1944 present interpretations fundamentally different from the conventional wisdom on these matters. Using data relating to the activities of the German Replacement Army, he argues that the plotters deliberately withheld 600,000 troop replacements from the front lines and that this resulted in the Wehrmacht's summer 1944 debacles on both the Eastern and Western fronts. Consequently, he says, the Wehrmacht lost more men in July and August 1944 than it did for the entire period of June 1943 through May 1944, and its ground forces were thrown back to the borders of the Reich.

Germany's Replacement Army consisted of new re-

cruits being trained for combat roles, occupation troops, certain prison camp guards, troops in divisions being refitted and restored, and wounded veterans returned from convalescence. In June 1941, there were 1,400,000 men in the Replacement Army, including 1,000,000 training and 200,000 recuperating from wounds. By June 1944, however, the number of individuals in the Replacement Army had leaped to 2,500,000 (pp. 71-72), up from 1,500,000 in June 1943 (p. 28). These troops, Dunn argues repetitively, were retained by the conspirators in the Replacement Army and denied to the front line divisions. Thus, replacements "dwindled to a trickle" in the first seven months of 1944 (p. 67). For example, only 10,000 replacements were sent to Normandy in the first six weeks after the invasion even though German forces had sustained 110,000 casualties (p. xvii). This is because the Replacement Army "was hoarding a large number of men in its training battalions" (p. 7).

In support of his hypothesis, Dunn reports that fifty-four new German divisions quickly were created in the six weeks after the coup from the bulging surplus of Replacement Army troops (p. 78). Thus, after the failure of the coup, and after Adolf Hitler and the General Staff had reasserted their control over the Replacement Army, Germany was able to produce a surprisingly large number of troops to stabilize both the Eastern and Western fronts.

In the year ending October 1943, Dunn reports, the Eastern Front alone received an average of 100,000 replacements per month (p. 46). He believes the Replacement Army was capable of providing 1,500,000 replacements per year (p. 47). But, he says, nothing close to this occurred in the first seven months of 1944 because the plotters intended to use Replacement Army troops to support their coup. Under the guise of putting down rebellion, Replacement Army Troops were to be used to capture and imprison major Nazi leaders, control communications and media, neutralize and, as necessary, fight the few Waffen SS troops inside Germany, and put down any civil insurrections that might occur after Adolf Hitler had been assassinated.

A model for this activity already existed. In summer 1941, the head of the Replacement Army, General Fromm, had devised a program code-named *Walkuere* (Valkyrie) to utilize the Replacement Army in case of an internal crisis. The Reich's leaders worried about the possibility of civil disruption because of the increasing presence of foreign laborers, *Hiwis* (*Hilfswillige* or volunteers, though many *Hiwis* were not true volunteers), and pris-

oners of war inside Germany. Further, the increasing intensity of bombing might devastate the ability of local governments to react and thus require a quick infusion of troops to avoid looting, provide food and water, and maintain order. Indeed, some Replacement Army troops were utilized to restore order and provide critical services after the fire bombing of Hamburg in July 1943.

Walkuere orders were highly secret and few individuals knew of them. No Nazi party or SS organizations were included in the plan, which focused upon providing an immediate military response. Hence, the conspirators could mobilize the Replacement Army and move it about without party knowledge or approval. The problem was that General Fromm personally had to issue appropriate orders to the various Replacement Army districts to activate *Walkuere*. While Fromm was at least somewhat knowledgeable of the plotters' plans (Dunn skirts this issue), he never signed onto the conspiracy and, on July 20, 1944, would refuse to issue appropriate orders to initiate *Walkuere*. As soon as he learned that Adolf Hitler had not been killed, he turned on the conspirators, arrested several, and trumpeted his loyalty to the established order.

The Replacement Army conspirators (whom Dunn never really identifies, other than Stauffenberg and a few others) were able to engage in their subterfuge, he argues, because of the inherent flux in the Replacement Army's activities. The Replacement Army was organized and operated on a decentralized, *Laender* basis, and this prevented easy monitoring. Further, some of the personnel streams into the Replacement Army (such as the recuperated wounded) were necessarily unpredictable. (There were 700,000 members of the *Wehrmacht* in hospitals in June 1944.)

Dunn ultimately concedes that he has "no 'smoking gun'" (p. xi), because no evidence is available in writing that ordered the Replacement Army to slow down the flow of replacements to the front lines in early 1944. Nor does he provide any evidence that the disposition and alert status of Replacement Army troops changed throughout Germany just prior to the assassination attempt. "I have only a statistical indication that more than 600,000 German troops did not move from the Replacement Army to the field army between February and July 1944" (p. xi). One must agree with Dunn that the statistical evidence is intriguing. However, other explanations could account for much that he reports.

First, and foremost, the quality of the Replacement Army troops had been declining over time and these

troops now required more training and supervision. As the Reich began to scrape the bottom of its manpower barrel, increasingly it drafted many *Volksdeutsche*, some of whom, by the Reich's own measurements, were of doubtful loyalty and did not consider themselves to be German. Further, the native German pool of draftees now was dominated by very young men (sixteen and seventeen year olds) and much older men (forty to fifty year olds) and individuals with health problems (the so-called "stomach troops" because so many had stomach and other physical ailments). Such individuals required more training, especially if they were going to be inserted into new divisions in which up to 15 percent of the personnel might be foreign *Hiwis*. Second, it is possible that the Reich was saving some Replacement Army troops to build reserves in anticipation either of countering Allied thrusts, or of launching an offensive similar to the Ardennes offensive in December 1944. Third, it is plausible that the ranks of the Replacement Army had swelled because Allied bombing had made it necessary for more of these personnel to be used for one of *Valkure's* original purposes—restoring order and public services after particularly severe bombing raids. During the spring and summer of 1944, the Allies pounded Germany from the air, particularly the Ruhr *Gebiet*, and placed severe strains on the ability of local governments to react. Fourth, by 1944, 7,500,000 foreign laborers had been brought to Germany, plus another 2,000,000 prisoners of war, in order to release German men for military duties. Fully 50 percent of Krupp's labor force had been dragooned from such pools. Some in the Reich thought such individuals easily could become a major source of instability if they sensed a breakdown in conventional order and authority. The Replacement Army was seen as an antidote to this and its ranks swelled as more German men moved from civilian jobs to military service. Fifth, it is plausible that the increased size of the Replacement Army reflected the need to replace the substantial losses the *Wehrmacht* experienced in 1943. Among these were Stalingrad, which gobbled the equivalent of more than thirty divisions, and the end game in North Africa, which consumed the equivalent of almost twenty divisions. In summer 1943, the slugfest in and around Kursk may have cost the Germans up to 500,000 casualties. More disasters were to follow in early 1944 in locations such as Cherkassy. These placed unprecedented demands on the Replacement Army to expand its ranks. Sixth, Dunn places considerable emphasis upon the low replacement rate of German front line troops in summer 1944. However, a perusal of other sources, such as Jason Mark's detailed study of the German 24th Panzer Division at Stalingrad in 1942, reveals

that the ratio of replacements this unit received relative to casualties was not much different than the low rates Dunn reports for Normandy in 1944.[3] In fact, in the later years of the war, most German divisions did not have their manpower replenished rapidly, and sometimes hardly at all, until they were withdrawn from the line for refitting.

Do these other possibilities, taken together, account for all of the expansion of the Replacement Army in early 1944? Perhaps not. Do they explain the penurious flow of reinforcements to the Wehrmacht prior to the assassination attempt? Again, perhaps not, but it is difficult to say. Dunn is the first historian to make such extensive use of the Wehrmacht's personnel files in this fashion and deserves kudos for doing so. However, the considerations raised here should inspire caution in our interpretation of his work, while at the same time providing incentive for further research.

Once solved, most good murder mysteries not only have a crime, but also a clear motive and an identifiable culprit. In the curious case of the Replacement Army, the

apparent "crime" is the dramatically reduced flow of men to the front lines. The motives for this, however, are not yet clear. Nor are the identities of the perpetrators transparent. Hence, one can compliment Dunn for opening our gaze to data that previously have been given cursory attention, and applaud the challenge his research poses for World War II history, without necessarily subscribing to all of his theses.

Notes

[1]. Dan Van Der Vat, *The Good Nazi: The Life and Lies of Albert Speer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), p. 211.

[2]. Matthias Schmidt, *Albert Speer: The End of a Myth*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: St. Martin's, 1984); Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995); and Van Der Vat, *The Good Nazi*.

[3]. Jason D. Mark, *Death of the Leaping Horseman: 24. Panzer-Division in Stalingrad* (Sydney, Australia: Southwood Press, 2002).

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