Telex Message by the Conspiratorial Stauffenberg Group to the Holders of Executive Power (July 20, 1944)

Abstract

What is probably the best known and broadest conspiracy against the Nazi regime was headed by Claus Graf Schenk von Stauffenberg (1907–1944), who attempted to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944, and then led the subsequent, failed coup. Stauffenberg had initially supported the military goals of the Nazis, but when Hitler's aggression and his methods of warfare came to light later in the 1930s, he shared in the increasing alienation felt by some other high-ranking Wehrmacht officers. Since the Gestapo and the Security Service (SD) of the SS could only penetrate the Wehrmacht to a limited extent, it was the only organization that had at its disposal the instruments of power for a potentially successful coup. Nonetheless, earlier attempts at assassination and sabotage that had come from various resistance groups within the Wehrmacht had failed. It would appear that only Germany's imminent defeat prompted many of the co-conspirators, who were also recruited from the ranks of the police and the state administration, to engage in active resistance.

On Thursday, July 20, 1944, Stauffenberg, in his capacity as chief of staff to the Commander of the Reserve Army [*Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres*, BDE], flew to a briefing at the Führer's East Prussian headquarters, the Wolf's Lair [*Wolfsschanze*]. He set off a bomb there and fled. On his way back to Berlin, Stauffenberg believed that the assassination attempt had been successful, but Hitler, in fact, had only been slightly injured. Thus, Stauffenberg was operating under the assumption that the coup would be completed according to the so-called Valkyrie Plan [*Walküreplan*], whereby the military would assume executive power and eliminate the party's most important sources of power—the Gestapo, the SS, and the SD.

As the following proclamation by Stauffenberg reveals, the conspirators were hoping to blame Hitler's assassination on a fictitious clique of party functionaries as a way of justifying the takeover of power by the Reserve Army. In the absence of official word about Hitler's death, the follow-up actions of the co-conspirators were too slow and uncoordinated, and the attempted coup was quickly quashed by supporters of the regime. Stauffenberg was shot that same night. In the wake of the extensive Gestapo investigation, which lasted until the end of the war, about 1,500 people were imprisoned and 200 killed.

Source

The Führer Adolf Hitler is dead!

I. An unscrupulous clique of party leaders without frontline service have exploited this situation to stab the fighting front in the back and to seize power for their own selfish ends.

II. In order to maintain law and order in this situation of acute danger, the Reich Government has declared a state of martial law and has transferred executive power to me, together with the supreme command of the Wehrmacht.

III. 1. I hereby transfer executive power with the right of delegation to the territorial commanders, in the home territory to the Commander of the Reserve Army, while simultaneously appointing him Supreme Commander in the home territory […].

2. The following are subordinated to the holders of executive power:

a) All Wehrmacht offices and units in their area of command, including the Waffen SS, the RAD, and the OT.
b) All public authorities (of the Reich, the states, and local government), in particular the entire order police, security police, and administrative police.
c) All officials and formations of the NSDAP and its associated leagues.
d) The public transportation services and public utilities.

3. The whole of the Waffen SS is to be integrated in the army with immediate effect.

4. The holders of executive power are responsible for the maintenance of law and order. They are to ensure in particular:

a) The security of the communications networks.
b) The neutralization of the SD.

Any resistance against the military authorities is to be ruthlessly suppressed. In this hour of the greatest peril for the Fatherland, the unity of the Wehrmacht and the maintenance of discipline is the most important requirement. I therefore make it the duty of all army, navy, and air force commanders to support the holders of executive power with all means at their disposal and to ensure that their directives are obeyed by the agencies subordinate to them.

The German soldier is faced with an historic task. It will depend on his energy and behavior whether or not Germany will be saved.

[The same thing is true] for all territorial commanders, the supreme commanders of the sections of the Wehrmacht and the subordinate commanders of the army, navy, and air force.

Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht
Field Marshal von Witzleben

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