

Germany's anti-Nazi resistance movement

by William Jones

Berlin Diaries 1940-1945

by Marie Vassiltchikov

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The publication of the *Berlin Diaries* of Marie Vassiltchikov may undoubtedly be of greater importance here in the United States than the original publication of the *Diaries* in German in 1985. Literature of this nature, reflecting not only the psychological experience of the war from the German side, but also giving a closer picture of the German Resistance Movement which went down in history as the July 20th Movement, is much more profuse and well-known in the Federal Republic of Germany than in the United States. One reason for that is, of course, that the July 20th Movement represents for most Germans in the postwar period the most profound embodiment of heroism and courage in the face of an evil and oppressive tyranny. Much of this experience has, of course, been communicated to the American public through the publication of the prison letters of Pastor Dietrich Bonhöffer or the writings of Father Alfred Delp, both of whom were executed in the mass purges immediately following the July 20, 1944 assassination attempt against Hitler.

Another, more devious reason for the relative scarcity of material in English on the July 20th Movement, is the fact that any thorough examination of the development of that movement—and its failure—would point an accusing finger at the Allied leaders, whose continual refusal to accept the legitimacy of the German Resistance Movement from 1938 on, effectively condemned it to failure. The victims, some of whom were ordered executed by Hitler by being hung up on meathooks, had been, in effect, earlier condemned by the great troika of Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin, who had continually refused to recognize any German government which might be formed in the wake of a successful coup against Adolf Hitler.

Two decisions, in particular, undermined the ability of the men of the 20th of July to mobilize a determined resistance within the only organization which by 1938 had any realistic possibility of defeating Hitler—the German Wehrmacht.

Among the old Prussian officer corps there existed a clear political opposition to Hitler, whose most eminent representative was German Chief of Staff Gen. Ludwig Beck. Prior to September 1938, there was also a general recognition within a very broad segment of the Wehrmacht that Germany could not win a two-front war. Even officers who were not openly anti-Nazi could be mobilized to move against Hitler, if they thought that he was indeed preparing such a no-win war. After the September 1938 sellout of Czechoslovakia by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, Hitler was able to present a rather strong case to the wavering elements that a two-front war could indeed be won, since the enemy was obviously not going to put up much of a fight. After Munich, Beck had to leave his post as chief of staff.

The second critical blow to the German Resistance Movement was the announcement at Casablanca in 1943 that the Allies would accept nothing less than an unconditional surrender from the Germans. The Resistance Movement wanted to have assurances that a government resulting from a successful rebellion against the Nazis would, in fact, be recognized by the Allies as a legitimate representative of the German nation and that the German nation would neither be occupied nor dismantled. When Churchill and Roosevelt proclaimed their demand for unconditional surrender, the German patriots knew that their nation would be occupied and possibly dismantled. Their rebellion against Hitler's tyranny would thus also assure that Germany would be occupied by a foreign power. This presented them with an added moral dilemma, making their ultimate decision to move against Hitler even more difficult.

Churchill's fear of a strong German nation, under any political regime, and Roosevelt's general anti-German bias, served to prolong the war and contributed significantly to the failure of the operation. In the purges which followed the July 20 assassination attempt, over 10,000 German patriots were sent to their deaths in prisons and concentration camps.

Most of the historical events mentioned here appear in the *Diaries* primarily as footnotes written for the book by Marie's brother, George Vassiltchikov. Marie Vassiltchikov was a member of a White Russian aristocratic family which had emigrated to Germany after the Bolshevik Revolution. Marie's friends comprise the leading aristocratic families of Germany—the Metternichs, the Bismarcks, the Thurn und Taxis, etc. A number of these were also engaged in the German Resistance.

The Vassiltchikov diaries give a rather graphic picture of the gradual physical destruction of Berlin during the bombings, which became ever more frequent as the war proceeded. Her uncanny ability to “soar far above everything and everyone” as her section chief at the German Foreign Department, Adam von Trott zu Stolz, described it (von Trott was one of the key plotters in the July 20th plot), gives to her portrayal an even starker character. Missie (as she was called) was not herself active participant in the July 20 plot, but she was

strongly anti-Nazi, and knew of the involvement of her own section chief and friend, Adam von Trott, in the evolving script.

The picture she gives of the developments in Germany before, during, and after the failed assassination attempt is one of quiet bravery and resolute determination to eliminate a tyrannical regime. After the assassination plot had been exposed, von Trott's main concern was to assure that people like Missie, who knew of and supported the plot, not be exposed, in order to guarantee that there would still be people around who could make another attempt. (The July 20th assassination attempt was just one of several attempts which had been tried since the beginning of the war.)

Despite the often lighthearted manner and day-to-day reminiscing of much of the material, the *Berlin Diaries* of Marie Vassiltchikov is worthwhile reading for Americans today, both as a means of setting the record straight on the question of "German collective war guilt," but, more importantly, to take a measure of what people did under extremely difficult and dangerous conditions in the fight against Nazism in Germany itself.

Being patriotic in war or in some other endeavor, behind which stands the authority of the government, or of popular opinion, is one thing. Fighting for the survival of one's nation when the nation's own representatives are the main enemy, requires a higher sense of patriotism and a more profound concept of duty.

The stuff that Rambo's made of

by Edward M. Corpus

America's Wars and Military Excursions

by Edwin P. Hoyt III

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Journalist Edwin Hoyt's work, in which he purports to trace continuity in American military policy from colonial conflicts with the Indians to the 1986 bombing of Libya, provokes more interest by what it systematically leaves out, than by what it contains.

While stating its purpose to be "preventing some of the

blunders in the future and offering the hope that United States military policy ought really to serve the nation's needs rather than the perceptions of the moment," Hoyt's attitudes toward the American Revolution and Douglas MacArthur are paradigmatic of why it fails in this.

For Hoyt, the "American Revolution was the result of a basic and growing misunderstanding among Englishmen," i.e., no more than King George III's bullheadedness over defense expenditures and taxes versus the propagandizing of hotheaded radicals.

This snail's-eye view must be set against the reality, well-known among Americans until the present century, that the military history of the United States is about its struggle for existence as a nation *unique among nations*. The American Revolution is a watershed in that conflict between the republican and the oligarchic, since the New World was the battleground for a global conflict centuries in the making. At stake was the individual's inalienable right to advance the condition of mankind through mastery of science and industry, under the auspices of the nation-state.

The benchmark of historiography was set by Friedrich Schiller in the 19th century. In his concept of *universal history*, events have significance as they affect *all history for all time*. As paradigms, Schiller drew upon classical Athens and Sparta—one representative of republican nation-building, the latter representing the oligarchic empire—two ultimately irreconcilable views of the state and of the individual.

Schiller, a contemporary witness who ardently supported the American Revolution, referred to it as "the favorite subject of the decade." Is it, then, out of ignorance or deliberate lying that Hoyt asserts, "While the Americans were winning their freedom from England the world was scarcely watching"?

"With trade, and the opening of Canton to American vessels, came consular relations . . . [and] American marines. . . . We simply followed the French and the British," declares Hoyt.

His conclusion? "The essence of it all is that times change, and wars change, and military excursions take on different faces and even different meanings." American military policy has been and still is the result of "political evangelism." That America *may actually have a mission* in the world is an anathema to him.

Admittedly, gross injustices were committed against the American Indian. Americans did participate in the opium and slave trade. But these were examples of the parasitic imposition of oligarchic policies upon America by a traitorous elite—a faction Hoyt barely mentions as such.

It was at the behest of European elites and their junior partners in Boston and New York, that the Anglophile Theodore Roosevelt virtually guaranteed the Spanish-American War and perverted the Monroe Doctrine, originally drafted to stop further European colonialism in the hemisphere, with the "Roosevelt corollary," which turned the United States