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The Memoir of an Anti-Nazi Conspirator:

Fabian von Schlabrendorff’s Narrative Gives Insight into German Military Resistance to Hitler

Schlabrendorff, Fabian von. “Account of the Military Conspiracy to Assassinate Hitler, 1944.” In

Robert G. Moeller, *The Nazi State and German Society: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedfort/St. Martin’s, 2010.

This source is an excerpt from Fabian von Schlabrendorff’s memoir titled *Offiziere gegen Hitler, nach einem Erlebnisbericht von Fabian v. Schlabrendorff*, originally published in German in 1946. The first English translation was published in 1947 under the title *They Almost Killed Hitler: Based on a Personal Account of Fabian von Schlabrendorff*. In 1948, another English translation came out under the title *Revolt Against Hitler: The Personal Account of Fabian von Schlabrendorff*. This book has been cited as the original English translation, but it was really another English version of the 1947 book published under another title for the British market. The 1947 version, *They Almost Killed Hitler*, is available at the UC Berkeley, UCLA, and UC San Diego libraries. The UC Santa Barbara library has the first edition under the newest title, *The Secret War Against Hitler*, published in 1965.

A Wikipedia page on Fabian von Schlabrendorff offers a brief biographical summary, explaining that Schlabrendorff was a lawyer who joined the German army. Once in the army, he got involved with a number of coup d’état plans. ExecutedToday.com offered information about how he was saved from a death sentence by a bombing raid that struck the courthouse he was in, killing the judge who was about to preside over his case, and causing him to be re-imprisoned without trial or sentence until the end of the war. The excerpt is from Fabian von Schlabrendorff’s memoir of his time in the army during the war and his involvement in various resistance efforts against Hitler, especially the assassination attempt of 20 July 1944. It has been cited in a few essays about German resistance to Hitler. Schlabrendorff must have started writing as soon as the war was over, as the first German version of his memoir was published in 1946. In the aftermath of World War II, Schlabrendorff’s story about resisting Hitler and attempting to kill him was socially relevant and may have offered a refreshing change in the conception of common Germans, especially those in the military.

The event described in the excerpt from Schlabrendorff’s memoir was widely reported in newspapers directly after the incident. Circulation of the memoir itself, which gave a first-hand account of the incident, began shortly after it was published in German in 1946, as English translations came out in the United States and in England in 1947 and 1948, respectively. After the English versions were released, some scholars cited the 1947 version in essays and reviews in the late 1940s. I didn’t find any citations of the memoir in the 1950s, but citations picked up again in the mid-1960s, many of them reviewing the updated version of the memoir published in 1965 under the title *The Secret War Against Hitler*. The opinions of the scholars who cited it varied. Some valued the memoir for its first-hand perspective, but others criticized it for its lack of references. The sources I found also did not always agree on which English version was the original English translation (see notes), but before the updated edition came out in 1965 scholars most often cited the U.S. version from 1947.

Annotated Bibliography

"HITLER A TARGET OF SIMILAR PLOTS." *New York Times (1923-Current File),* Jul 21,

1944. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/107029615?accountid=14522>.

This news article was published in the *New York Times* the day after the July 20 assassination attempt Schlabrendorff described in the excerpt from his memoir. It glanced at the fact that an assassination attempt was made on Hitler’s life and went on to describe multiple reported assassination attempts from 1932 to 1939, suggesting that this might be just another report without a factual basis.

"NAZIS NAME THREE IN HITLER BOMBING." *New York Times (1923-Current File),* Jul

28, 1944. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/107019823?accountid=14522>.

This article, published a week after the previous one, had more information about the assassination attempt on Hitler based on who the Nazis were blaming. It contained news of General Olbricht being executed in Berlin and of General Beck shooting himself after the plot failed.

GRUSON, SYDNEY By Cable to THE NEW,YORK TIMES. "Hitler Sets 'Ruthless Purge' of

Army, Ordering 12 Tried." *New York Times (1923-Current File),* Aug 05, 1944. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/106863620?accountid=14522>.

Here the *Times* gathers more information about who was involved in the plot. It mentions

that Col. Count von Stauffenberg, who Schlabrendorff named as the man who placed the bomb that was intended to kill Hitler, had been shot along with other military officials.

Schlabrendorff, Fabian von, and Gero von Gaevernitz. *They Almost Killed Hitler Based on the*

*Personal Account of Fabian Von Schlabrendorff*. New York: Macmillan Co, 1947. <http://books.google.com/books?id=7DJoAAAAMAAJ>

This is the first English book by Schlabrendorff that I found reviewed and cited by

scholars on Jstor. It is regarded as the first English translation of *Offiziere gegen Hitler* (1946), Schlabrendorff’s memoir about his experience with the resistance movement inside the German military. However, the Melvyl catalog does not show any relation between this book and *Offiziere gegen Hitler*, or between this book and the more recent versions under the title *The Secret War Against Hitler*.

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Schlabrendorff, Fabian von, and Gero von Gaevernitz. *Revolt against Hitler; The Personal*

*Account of Fabian Von Schlabrendorff*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1948.

The Melvyl database lists this book as an earlier edition of the later publication by

Schlabrendorff, *The Secret War Against Hitler* (1965). The 1994 version of *The Secret War Against Hitler* also lists this book as the original English translation of Schlabrendorff’s memoir. However, most of the scholarly publications I found on the subject of German military resistance to Hitler cited the 1947 version of Schlabrendorff’s book, *They Almost Killed Hitler*. In fact, this is the same book as the 1947 translation, but was given a different title for publication in Britain.

Bottom of Form

Mason, John Brown. 1948. Review of *Germany's Underground.; They Almost Killed Hitler*. *The*

*American Journal of International Law* 42 (1). American Society of International Law: 248–50. doi:10.2307/2193631.

In this review Mason says that *They Almost Killed Hitler* offers a colorful historical perspective because of the fact that it was written by someone who was actually involved in the conspiracies. He says it adds a good level of personal detail, but his complaint was that there were no citations in the book for further exploration, which decreased its value as a historical source.

DeWeerd, Harvey A. 1949. “The German Officer Corps Versus Hitler”. *Military Affairs* 13 (4):

199–208. doi:10.2307/1982736.

In 1949, not long after the first English versions of Schlabrendorff’s memoir were published, Harvey DeWeerd cited *They Almost Killed Hitler* in an essay about German military resistance to Hitler. The author relies on Schlabrendorff’s source in explaining various assassination and coup d’état attempts, including one in which Schlabrendorff planted a bomb on Hitler’s plane that failed to detonate. However, he does not reference the memoir when discussing the 20 July bomb assassination attempt that the excerpt recounts.

ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLL FORT LEAVENWORTH KS, and

Hardesty, George D., Jr. 1964. *Impact of German Military Resistance Movements Upon Field Commanders of the German Army, 1933-1944*. <http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?&verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA371239>.

This text, published in 1964, is a master’s thesis about resistance to Hitler and Nazi Germany. The author cites Schlabrendorff’s 1947 book *They Almost Killed Hitler* multiple times, covering a number of different assassination attempts as well as background information. Notably, he cites the book when discussing the aftermath of the failed July 20 assassination attempt. Schlabrendorff’s account gave a quote from General Tresckow, who had been involved in the plot, after the attempt had failed and conspirators were being purged.

Epstein, Klaus. 1966. Review of *The Secret War Against Hitler*. *The Journal of Modern*

*History* 38 (3). University of Chicago Press: 330–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1877383>.

In this article, Klaus Epstein reviews the 1965 edition of Schlabrendorff’s memoir, *The Secret War Against Hitler*. This is where I found discrepancies in which book is regarded as the original English translation. Klaus writes, “This book is an enlarged and revised version of the author’s *They almost killed Hitler*, originally published in 1947.” This is in contrast to the information inside the front cover of Google Books’ version, which states that the original English translation was published in 1948 under the title *Revolt Against Hitler*. The review praises the value of this text as a memoir and gives a nice biographical summary of Schlabrendorff.

Mother Mary Alice Gallin. 1968. *The Catholic Historical Review* 54 (3). Catholic University of

America Press: 524–25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25018275>.

In this review Gallin also refers to *They Almost Killed Hitler* as the original English translation of Schlabrendorff’s memoir. She notes that this updated edition didn’t include any new information except for in the appendices. This review suggests that little new information was added in the latest editions of the memoir. She also disliked that there were no citations for direct quotes or references.

Notes

* In searching Jstor, the 1948 version of Schlabrnedorff’s memoir, *Revolt Against Hitler*, yielded only results for the 1947 edition, *They Almost Killed Hitler*, and the latest title *The Secret War Against Hitler*. Google Books has a portion of *The Secret War Against Hitler* (the latest edition from 1994), which says that the 1948 book is the first English translation. The literature, however, suggests that the 1947 book *They Almost Killed Hitler* is really the same book as the original German memoir, *Offiziere gegen Hitler*, and the first English translation. Every scholar I found who reviewed or cited Schlabrendorff’s work before the newly titled editions became available after 1965 used *They Almost Killed Hitler*. The Melvyl catalog lists the 1948 book as the first English translation. It has information on *They Almost Killed Hitler*,but it is not linked to *Offiziere gegen Hitler* (1946), *Revolt Against Hitler* (1948), or *The Secret War Against Hitler* (1965).A Google Scholar search for *Revolt Against Hitler* yielded only two book citations, one from 2009 and one from 2011.
* There seem to be varied opinions on Schlabrendorff’s book among scholars who have reviewed it. Epstein and Mason, for instance, praised the book for its unique personal perspective on the events surrounding the July 20 assassination attempt. Mason valued the perspective of Schlabrendorff, who “prepared a bombing attack on Hitler and miraculously lived to tell about it.” At the same time, however, Mason disliked the fact that there were no references. Gallin expressed the same sentiment, though more strongly, in a harsh review of the book. She seemed to have problems with the lack of references because it made the text subject to Schlabrendorff’s personal bias, without much factual basis to back up his claims.