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Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC  
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# Profiles in Christian Courage

## 6. Henning von Tresckow



# Henning von Tresckow

- Born in 1901 to Prussian military family with 300 years of martial heritage. Also a strong Christian family.
- In World War I, served as the youngest officer in the German Army
  - “You, Tresckow, will either become chief of the General Staff or die on the scaffold as a rebel.”
- Disliking the Army, he left to study economics, becoming a stock broker.
- Was touring England, France, and the US when his family needed him to come back to the estates.
- Married Erika von Falkenhyn, Chief of the Army General Staff.
- Reentered the Army in 1926



# Opposition to the Nazi Regime

- ▶ In 1934, von Tresckow was attending the Staff College in Berlin and became alarmed by what he saw of the Nazis, particularly its violence against Jewish people.
- ▶ Began trying to persuade military officers to take a stand against Hitler.
  - ▶ “Both duty and honor demand from us that we should do our best to bring about the downfall of Hitler and National Socialism to save Germany and Europe from barbarism.”
- ▶ Planned to resign his commission in 1938, but was persuaded that he would be needed in a future crisis.
- ▶ Was dismayed that professing Christians were able to support Hitler:
  - ▶ “I cannot understand how people can still call themselves Christians and not be furious adversaries of Hitler’s regime.”



# Outrage During the War

- ▶ In 1940, von Tresckow was on the Army staff during the invasion of France. In 1941, he was chief of operations for Army Group Center
- ▶ Was incensed by barbarous orders and rallied other officers to resist.
  - ▶ Reaction to the Commissar Order:
    - ▶ “Remember this moment. If we don't convince the field marshal to fly to Hitler at once and have these orders (Commissar Order) canceled, the German people will be burdened with a guilt the world will not forget in a hundred years. This guilt will fall not only on Hitler, Himmler, Göring, and their comrades but on you and me, your wife and mine, your children and mine, that woman crossing the street, and those children over there playing ball”
  - ▶ Learning about mass shootings of prisoners and Jews, he called on the general to revolt:
    - ▶ “Never may such a thing happen again! And so we must act now. We have the power in Russia!”
- ▶ By September 1941, von Tresckow concluded that Hitler must be assassinated and that he must take the lead.



# Assassination Attempts v. Hitler

- ▶ At the height of German's success in 1941, von Tresckow made it known that he was "prepared to do anything to stop the atrocities. He would make the following attempts:
  - ▶ Mar. 13, 1943: Hitler inspected troops on the Eastern Front. Tresckow had arranged for a group of officers to shoot Hitler simultaneously during mess. Field Marshal von Kluge intervened to persuade him to wait.
  - ▶ Mar. 14, 1943: Tresckow plants a bomb on Hitler's plane with a fuse to blow it up over Minsk. The fuse does not work.
  - ▶ Mar. 21, 1943: Hitler planned a visit to a military museum. Tresckow recruited an accomplice to blow up a bomb in front of Hitler. Hitler's plans changed.
- ▶ In April 1943, the Oster conspiracy was discovered (including Dietrich Bonhoeffer). After which Hitler's security dramatically improved.
- ▶ Tresckow visited the leading field marshals on the Eastern Front to organize a military revolt, but the field marshals refused.



# Operation Valkyrie

- The generals on the Eastern front having failed him, von Tresckow turned to the Home Reserve Army, where he had Christian friends.
- Developed “Operation Valkyrie,” a complex operation that included a bomb in Hitler’s headquarters and the Reserve Army’s arrests of the Nazis. Planned to appeal to the Allies for peace.
- Tresckow began to doubt the success:
  - “It is almost certain that we will fail. But how will future history judge the German people, if not even a handful of men had the courage to put an end to that criminal?”
- On July 20, 1944, Col. Claus von Stauffenburg exploded a bomb in Hitler’s HQ: Hitler survived.
- After the failed assassination, the rest of the plot unraveled and the conspirators were arrested.





# “When I Go Before God”

- ▶ On July 21, 1944, von Tresckow committed suicide, seeking to make it appear as a death in combat.
- ▶ After his role was made known, his wife and daughters were arrested and his remains were exhumed and burned.
- ▶ He died seeking mercy from God for Germany:
  - ▶ “The whole world will vilify us now, but I am still totally convinced that we did the right thing. Hitler is the archenemy not only of Germany but of the world. When, in few hours' time, I go before God to account for what I have done and left undone, I know I will be able to justify what I did in the struggle against Hitler. God promised Abraham that He would not destroy Sodom if only ten righteous men could be found in the city, and so I hope for our sake God will not destroy Germany.”

# Von Tresckow's Legacy

- Principled Patriotism
  - *"We have to show the world that not all of us are like him. Otherwise, this will always be Hitler's Germany."*
- Christian Outrage
  - The ends do not justify the means.
- Failed Pragmatism
- Trust in God and Heaven.

