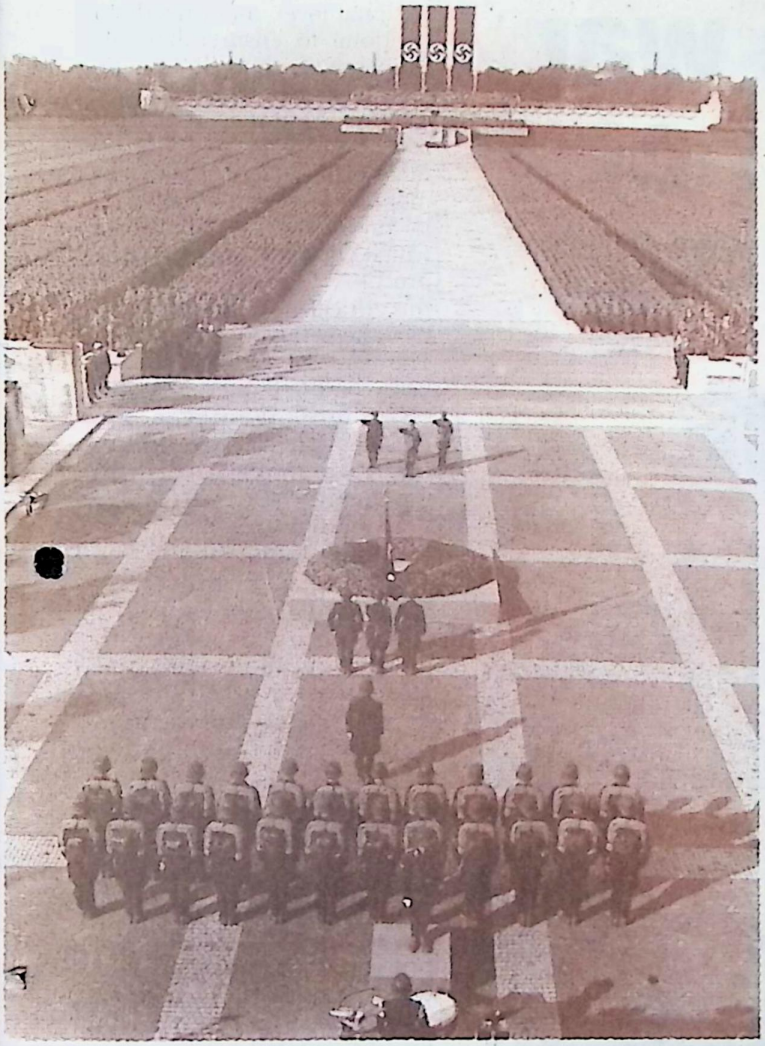


Nuremberg rally, 1934

and Olbricht, in a deceptive move, suggested to Hitler that in order to quickly deal with possible civil insurrections due to destruction, privation and fear of imminent defeat, Berlin should be organised into military district commands. Fortunately, Hitler agreed. This plan, named Valkyrie, would in fact allow the senior army conspirators to issue general orders to the army as well as to the SS, thus forestalling any possibility for a counter-coup by the SS. But the most important part of the plan, the actual killing of Hitler, had yet to be devised in complete secrecy.

Stauffenberg volunteered to attempt this daring and dangerous task by himself. He had obvious physical deficiencies, with only one arm and one eye. Hence, it was decided to use a bomb in an attaché case to assassinate Hitler. Stauffenberg practiced the handling of the bomb for many days. However, an occasion had to be found and an excuse for him to go near Hitler at the Wolf's Lair. That was provided by a conference Hitler had called for military planning, to which Stauffenberg was to go to deliver some papers. On the fateful day of July 20, 1944, he went by air and landed at the Wolf's Lair. A staff car met him on arrival and he was driven through heavy security to Hitler's conference room. Even though there were two security rings around that site with check points, because of his charisma and being a highly decorated army hero, neither Stauffenberg nor his bag with the bomb in it were searched. It was a dangerous risk he had deliberately taken and got away with.

Sitting in the car, he charged the bombing device, which was to go off after a few minutes after he would enter the conference room. He found a chair to sit only six chairs from the Fuehrer, who had arrived on time and bent over a large table looking at campaign maps. Stauffenberg kept the attaché on the floor to his right and pushed it with his feet as close to Hitler as he could. He then made an excuse to the officer sitting next to him that he had to make a telephone call to his office in Berlin and left the room. Instead, he straight went to his waiting car and drove back to the airport and from there to Berlin.

A little later, the bomb exploded transforming the conference room into rubble. Due to thickness of the table on which Hitler was leaning, he escaped death-only his ears and one hand were injured. SS immediately conducted a hunt for the conspirators and easily identified Stauffenberg as the main culprit-it was so obvious. He was found in his office, tortured and executed the same night. He died with the words "Long live sacred Germany" on his lips. 80 plotters were executed within a short time, some because of association-some on suspicion. Many children, including Stauffenberg's, were taken from their families and put in orphanages. Field Marshal Rommel who was a suspect could not be tried publicly for treason as he was a genuinely popular war hero. This would have demoralised the nation and its war efforts. Instead, he was offered the choice of swallowing poison, which he accepted. He was promised good treatment for his family and a state funeral. Ironically, Hitler sent a large wreath to Rommel's funeral.

The question arises as to what kind of Germany the rebels envisaged, if the coup had succeeded. An idea can be had from the plotters' oath, which in part was: 'We want a new order which makes all Germans responsible for the state and guarantees them law and justice; but we despise the lie that all are equal and we submit to rank ordained by nature.' That was not the Germany that the allied powers would have liked in a post-war Europe!

After the war, the road in front of the War Ministry in Berlin was named 'Stauffenberg Strasse.' A fine movie, named Valkyrie, was produced in 2008 featuring Tom Cruise as Col. Stauffenberg in which the conspiracy, attack on Hitler and execution of the plotters in the aftermath were vividly enacted. ■