

Peter Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg: A Family History, 1905-1944*, second edition, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003). Pp. 424, photos and maps b&w, paperback.

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McGill historian Peter Hoffmann is the godfather of resistance study. So definitive is his work, that his 853 page *magnum opus* is entitled *The History of the German Resistance* (1996), with emphasis on the article. Perhaps it is in homage to Hoffmann's reputation for exhaustive research that *Stauffenberg: A Family History, 1905-1944* (2003) has been reprinted in a second edition. It must be noted, however, that since the book's first printing in German under the title *Stauffenberg: Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg und seine Brüder* (1992), virtually no new sources relevant to this topic have been released. Hoffmann points this out, mentioning the scant, newly uncovered Russian materials only in his preface (xiii). In fact, this second edition matches the first page for page, leading one to wonder why this edition was issued just eight years after its first appearance in English.

Given that this edition of *Stauffenberg* is virtually identical to the first, it obviously maintains the strengths and weaknesses it had on its first run. One of the former includes the tremendous readability of the work. Hoffmann delves into intellectual history, biographical material, and military history with great ease, and his relatively short chapters pass quickly. Furthermore, true to reputation, *Stauffenberg* is extensively researched; some of the contributing interviews were conducted as early as 1965. The bibliography stretches fifty-five pages, occasionally citing such obscure references that other historians would be hard-pressed to find any new material to consult. Hoffmann's exhaustive research is an obvious by-product of an entire career devoted to the German resistance.

The name Claus von Stauffenberg is virtually synonymous with the German resistance movement of the Second World War. Few military history aficionados are unaware of the 20 July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life, or that the bomb was planted by the Führer's own staff officers. Stauffenberg was not unique in resisting Hitler, but his cell has received the most attention for its actions after Claus, a battle-wounded colonel, meticulously planned and conspired for two years, and then ultimately planted the bomb himself as time ran short and details came undone.

The question driving Hoffmann's study focuses on the fate of two of the three Stauffenberg brothers. "What road brought Claus... to the sandpile in the courtyard of the Berlin War Ministry where he was shot, and his brother, Berthold, to the hook on which he was strangled in the execution hut of Plötzensee Prison? What is the meaning of these sacrifices?"(xiii.) Hoffmann answers the first question most satisfactorily, as he focuses more directly on Claus, the ringleader in the failed attempt on Hitler's life. Also included in the "family" were twins Alexander and Berthold, born in 1905. Two years

later, another set of twins, Claus and Konrad, followed, the latter dying a day after his birth. It is in that first section of the book covering the boys' childhood outside Stuttgart that Hoffmann's work comes closest to truly being the family history his title suggests, for as the story progresses, Alexander all but disappears and Berthold passes in and out of the spotlight cast upon Claus.

The Stauffenberg boys were raised in the typical aristocratic manner of the era, focused on their studies with private tutors and governesses, all the while being primed for a future career serving the state. In their late teens and early twenties, the boys were brought into poet Stefan George's circle and from then on, Hoffmann argues, they lived their lives with the goal of rescuing George's "Secret Germany," a vague notion of some greater German state uncorrupted by modernity and purer than the reality. The Stauffenberg link to George is unique to Hoffmann's work, not having been uncovered by past biographers, and as the author delves into the Stauffenbergs' devotion to their "Master," this work turns into intellectual history.

It is in Hoffmann's exploration of the "Secret Germany" notion that contradictions with the author's later explanation of why Claus went ahead with the assassination attempt at the *Wolfschanze*, Hitler's East Prussian headquarters, first appear. George's circle held ideologies that led Berthold, when interrogated by secret police in July 1944, to attest to his and Claus' support of "most" Nazi domestic policies. He then distanced the family from the Nazis by claiming that the "fundamental ideas of National Socialism have in practice all been perverted into their opposites" (68). Thus, in Stauffenberg's own words, they were not exactly anti-Nazi, and only towards the end totally anti-Hitler. Hoffmann makes a compelling case for Claus' very vocal disapproval of the Führer and his racial policy, the cornerstones of Stauffenberg's decision to rebel. However, if his disapproval of the persecution of the Jews eventually led him to risk his own life, why was there no outcry by any Stauffenberg following *Kristallnacht* in 1938? Furthermore, the "Master's" circle had quite clearly defined racial ideals, with Claus "greatly moved" by the idea that Germany had thus far avoided domination by America's "nationless mixed race of traders," and the "Hunnish hordes" of Russia (51). It leads one to wonder what Alexander Stauffenberg's marriage to a converted Jew did to the brothers' notions of racial purity, but this avenue goes unexplored in *Stauffenberg*. The fact remains that Hoffmann *does* lay persuasive groundwork for Claus' later negative feelings towards the Nazis and their policies; it is just difficult for the reader to be entirely convinced of this conclusion when the author shows cause for question early on.

From their youths, the Stauffenbergs devoted themselves to serving the state, Claus in the military, Berthold as an international lawyer, and Alexander as a professor of classical history. Their dedication to Germany was unquestionable, a crucial sentiment that led to Claus and Berthold's 1942 decision to rise up against Hitler as they began to doubt Germany's ability to win the war. In fact, their national devotion was strong enough to compel Claus to marry in full officer's dress with steel helmet, explaining to his bride that "marriage is service" (127). Here lies another contradiction, however, for when the plot against Hitler began to unravel years later, Claus, by then down to one eye, one hand and two fingers, apparently became the key player in the assassination

scheme for his children's sake. It seems odd that "family" would be the reason why he volunteered for such a potentially suicidal mission when it is explored so briefly in the book. Conversely, Claus' intellectual development is carefully crafted so the reader does not question his devotion to his Fatherland. His dedication to his wife and children is almost secondary, however, which is unsatisfying given that a "family" biography seems the perfect forum for such discussion. In that aspect, the biography loses its shape, having already been interrupted by a lengthy bit of intellectual history. Each section is rigorous, meticulously researched, very readable and of high quality, but so cellular that when Hoffmann sketches the African campaigns Stauffenberg participated in and was seriously wounded in, Claus takes a secondary role to the narrative of military strategies and tactics.

Historians know they are limited by the sources, and that they must write to them. That Hoffmann has done so is abundantly clear in *Stauffenberg*, but to the extent that this is almost three separate books in one. By the time the assassination attempt occurs in the final chapter, it is difficult for the reader to say with certainty that he or she intimately understands what drove Claus, while Berthold and Alexander have been largely absent for chapters. It is even a challenge to say one fully comprehends Claus alone, though there can be little doubt as to his spiritual and intellectual beliefs so carefully explained by Hoffmann. As a biography, a student of resistance literature would do best to read Hoffmann's book alongside others for a more complete picture; as an intellectual history, Hoffmann is skilled in recreating the beliefs of George's inner circle. As a military history, *Stauffenberg* is thorough and solid, though the inclusion of English-language maps might be helpful.

As a whole, perhaps *Stauffenberg* makes its greatest contribution in its research, for to Hoffmann's credit, he prints primary documents in his appendices, including Claus' school essays, letters, and his oath, which lend insight into his motivations approaching the decisive month. One might even go so far as to say that the sum of *Stauffenberg's* parts is greater than the whole, though that should not be taken to imply that this work lacks significantly in anything but structure. Hoffmann provides a vivid image of aristocratic life in southwestern Germany around the turn of the century, and traces the German displeasure over Versailles and its development into National Socialism very convincingly. The intellectual component of this study is riveting and original, and the military section whets the appetite for more. *Stauffenberg* is not quite the family history its title suggests, but it is an important work by one of the most respected voices in German resistance study; ultimately, it does as the cover promises by capturing the tragic and heroic aspects of these three "extraordinary" people in extraordinary times (xiv).

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