



Disobeying Hitler: German Resistance After Operation Valkyrie

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Both horrifying and life-affirming, *Disobeying Hitler* tells the untold story of German revolt against the dying Nazi tyranny.

Anyone with even a passing interest in the Second World War knows about the plot to assassinate Hitler in 1944. There was even a Tom Cruise movie. But the story of the great wave of resistance that arose in the year that followed--with far-reaching consequences--has never been told before.

Drawing on newly opened archives, acclaimed historian Randall Hansen shows that many high-ranking Nazis, and average German citizens in far greater numbers than previously recognized, reacted defiantly to the Fuhrer's by then manifest insanity. Together they spared cities from being razed, and prevented the needless obliteration of industry and infrastructure. *Disobeying Hitler* presents new evidence on three direct violations of orders made personally by Adolf Hitler: The refusal by the commander of Paris to destroy the city; Albert Speer's refusal to implement a scorched earth policy in Germany; and the failure to defend Hamburg against invading British forces.

In gripping, story-driven style, *Disobeying Hitler* shows how the brave resistance of soldiers and civilians, under constant threat of death, was crucial for the outcome of the war. Their bravery saved countless lives and helped lay the foundations for European economic recovery--and continued peace

Disobeying Hitler: German Resistance After Operation Valkyrie Details

Date : Published May 20th 2014 by Doubleday Canada (first published September 22nd 2013)

ISBN : 9780385664639

Author : Randall Hansen

Format : Hardcover 480 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, War, World War II, Cultural, Germany



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Randall Hansen**

From Reader Review Disobeying Hitler: German Resistance After Operation Valkyrie for online ebook

Matti Karjalainen says

Randall Hansenin "Disobeying Hitler: German Resistance in the Last Year of WW2" (Faber & Faber, 2014) tarttui mukaan paikallisesta kirjakaupasta. Luulin, että se keskittyisi enimmäkseen heinäkuun 20. päivän salaliittoo, mutta von Stauffenbergin ja kumppanien edesottamukset muodostivat teoksesta vain pienen osan.

Suuret ja historian lehdille jääneet nimet kuten Albert Speer, Erwin Rommell ja Pariisin säätämisen kanssa tasapainotellut Dietrich von Choltiz nousevat odotetusti esille. Speerin ponnistelut estää Saksan teollisuuden ja infrastruktuurin tuho kolmannen valtakunnan viimeisinä päivinä ovat osin totta, mutta ministeri osasi myös jälkikäteen ylikorostaa omaa rooliaan - ehkä vähän siinä uskossa, että hänellä olisi jonkinlainen poliittinen rooli sodan jälkeisessä hallituksessa.

Sotamarsalkka Rommel ei kirjoittajan mukaan puolestaan ollut aktiivisesti osallisena Hitlerin salamurhahankkeessa. Sotamarsalkalla oli kuitenkin yhteyksiä salaliittolaisiin ja hänen nimensä nousi riittävän usein esille attentaattia seuranneiden pidätysten yhteydessä, eikä hänen osakkeitaan parantanut se, että hän oli ollut vuosien varrella osoittanut riittävän monta kertaa vastustavansa eri tavoin Hitleriä.

Hansenin kirjan kiinnostavimmat ja ainakin minulle eniten uutta tietoa tarjonneet osuudet käsittelivät kuitenkin edellämainittua alempiarvoisten sotilaiden, virkamiesten ja siviilien ponnisteluja toisen maailmansodan viimeisinä päivinä. En ole varma, olenko aikaisemmin esimerkiksi lukenut düsseldorfilaisen sankarillisista ponnistuksista estää kaupungin muuttuminen rauniokasaksi.

Saksalaisissa kaupungeissa vastustettiin Hitlerin poltetun maan vaatimusta useammin länessä kuin idässä, mikä on sinänsä ihan ymmärrettävää.

Lopputulos on varsin kiinnostava tietokirja, johon on lähdeluetteloon pituudesta päätellen käytetty runsaasti tutkimustyötä, mutta joka ei siitä huolimatta ole mitenkään kuivan akateeminen tai vaikeaselkoinen.

Jim Gallen says

"Disobeying Hitler" tells the stories, great and small, of resistance to Hitler and the German war machine by both the military and civilians in the latter stages of World War II. The book begins with the status of the war, primarily in the East, leading up to 1944. It uncovers the threads of opposition to the regime that existed in the military, the churches and political parties. It then turns to the attempt on Hitler's life on July 20, 1944.

Author Randall Hansen examines the assassination attempt in the context of the plans for a coup in the aftermath of its success. He talks about the officers who were, or who might have been involved, those who sat on the fence until word of Hitler's death or survival was received and those who remained loyal to the regime. He reveals a more extensive web than I had realized and a gamut of motivations for the resisters. Some had been opponents of Hitler and National Socialism from the beginning who were looking for an opportunity to install a more liberal government. Others gradually shifted allegiances as the results of Hitler's policies became apparent and there were those motivated by sheer pragmatism. When it became

apparent that Germany would lose, work out the best peace possible. On the “Jewish Question” resisters ranged from those horrified by the “Solution” to enthusiastic participants in it.

A big question for any student of the German Resistance is the role of Rommel in the July 20 plot. Hansen depicts Rommel Hitler's golden boy, who, like the Fuehrer, came from a lower class background who was a supporter of Hitler and National Socialism until defeat became inevitable. He then supported some sort of an accommodation with the Western Allies, even contemplating ceasing combat in the West to permit the Americans and British to reach Berlin before the Russians. What did Rommel know about the plot? Hansen seems to think that he probably knew of it and gave some support to the plotters but not necessarily the assassination attempt. In its wake, Rommel paid, as did so many others, with his life. This work follows the path of Hitler's revenge after the blast.

The July 20 attack at Valkyrie occurred as the American and British forces were marching across northern France and Americans would soon invade southern France. Hitler issued his “Nero Order” that every city and position should be defended to the last man and last cartridge. This put every German commander on the spot. Was he to aid the death of the German people who, according to Hitler, had let their nation down and who could have no life after defeat? Of what value were the lives of his men? What of the cultural treasures in harms' way? When the tide of battle rolled into Germany, to whom did the commander owe his duty? His superiors in Berlin, or the people in the towns he was charged to defend and the German nation that would have to rebuild when the war was over? Should all bridges be destroyed, even those carrying water and electricity to the city to be defended? Hansen displays the roles played by the local civil officials who pleaded with the German officers and negotiated with and guided the Allies to take their communities with the least damage. Ultimately, what difference did the cooperation of those officials make? The swift surrender of Marseilles and Toulon aided the Allies in importing the supplies that fueled their march into Germany. The intact bridges carried the invaders into the heart of the Fatherland, and later sped their recovery of the regions they served. Some resisters were executed and others became civic leaders.

The story is an eye opening one that broadens the readers' perspectives on the nature of German attitudes and actions in the final throes of the Third Reich. Being generally unfamiliar with German figures I found the book a bit difficult to follow as it moves from one actor to another. The maps are helpful in keeping track of where the actions took place. I would recommend “Disobeying Hitler” for a reader with a fairly good understanding of the course of World War II but not for one just beginning a study of the war.

I did receive a free copy of this book for review.

Brian says

Disobeying Hitler: German Resistance after the Valkyrie looks at how the internal German military structure with outside influence from German civilians (or local populations in occupied areas) played a role in delaying the delusional commands of Hitler's final days. As the war was becoming lost Hitler believed that those Germans who survived it were inferior and real Germans of the “master race” would fight to the death. A scorched earth policy was to be carried out as armies came towards Germany with the complete devastation of food supplies, local infrastructure and industrial capacity. This book examines the role of both the passive and non passive resistance movements that played upon the German military commands to preserve their towns and not implement the scorched earth policy. It looks at the successes and failures to prevent scorched earth from becoming a reality. In general most German commanders did not follow through on devastating the towns they occupied both outside Germany and within. Even the fanatical SS was held at

bay much of the time and some German high command like Speer and Rommel (until his death) resisted the plan to devastate everything they saw around them. The book is academically written and for those who have an interest in the subject. It can be dry and repetitive at times but overall very well done.

Michael Samerdyke says

It is hard to make up my mind about this book.

On the one hand, Hansen is a very fair-minded historian, and his judgments about Rommel, Speer, and the Paris uprising strike me as very well-reasoned and accurate.

On the other hand, once the book moves beyond the Paris uprising in August 1944, (and Hansen makes the case that you can see the German response to the uprising in Paris as a sequel to the July 20th Bomb Plot), there doesn't seem to be a through-line to this book. We leap from one city to another city to another city as the authority figures there plan to surrender to the Allies or not. It is interesting, but it is very disjointed. There is no "big picture" that emerges.

Of course, one could say that in the chaos of the German collapse in Spring 1945 there was no "big picture" and everyone was acting in a confused situation. Yes, but history is supposed to make the past clearer.

(One minor point. The book is focused on the German resistance/disobedience in regards to the Western Allies. There is no mention of the Free Germany Committee, a Soviet-backed group, except when one character is identified as a member of the Committee, something that is never mentioned again. A book that talks about "German Resistance after Valkyrie" ought to discuss the Free Germany Committee in more detail.

There is good material in "Disobeying Hitler," but Ian Kershaw's "The End," which covers the same era and looks at why the regime held on, is more to my taste.

Sarah (East of the Sun & West of the Moon) says

DNF - Just couldn't finish it! I don't want this to speak badly for the book, though, which is why I've given it a star rating, and a so-so one at that. I didn't finish it because I realised the book wasn't for me and I wanted to free up time to read other things, but I could identify its merits and pitfalls well enough. For what it is, it's a solid book; but when I picked it up some years ago it wasn't with an intention or awareness that it would be so focused on the martial aspects of disobeying scorched earth orders (among other things). For me, some of the strongest parts of the book were the breakdowns of personages, military actions, personal actions, exchanges, and outcomes using key battles as focal points and case studies, such as the brilliant account of the Liberation of Paris. Where there were blow-by-blow accounts of larger actions, such as the chases through southern France or the Battle of the Bulge, it was very hit-or-miss. I wasn't that keen on most of them in the context of the book, as it often seemed to detract from the central theme of disobedience of orders. In any case, I can recommend this to any WWII buff with a particular interest in looking at some of the political and economic decisions of the later war years through a distinctly martial perspective. If you're like me however, and prefer something a little more personal and gritty, I'd consider giving this a pass.

Bret Kinghorn says

This was a well written and researched account of the many ways (some small, some big) that members of the German Military or those appointed to run cities, resisted in the waning year of the war. There were many instances that I had never heard of, each that showed that not all in the German Hierarchy fully supported, or trusted, Hitler and his final plans for Germany.

Aside from the plot to kill Hitler (operation Valkyrie), many others did acts that would have, and did in some cases, result in their own death. All to prevent the destruction of cities, municipal works, food sources, or the lives of the citizenry.

Definitely an enjoyable and educational read.

Pedro Lucas says

A good book with lots of details on the subject. The writing can be very heavy with names and locations, but otherwise it is acceptable. A nice read.

Carlos says

This book deals with scattered refusals by German generals to prolong a defensive war against the Allies in the last months of the Second World War. The failed Valkyrie attempt to kill Hitler in 1944 is used as an example of open defiance by the German military against the authoritarian leader of the Nazi party, it is this book argument that the refusal of so many German commanders entrusted to hold a "scorched earth" policy against the city they were defending in such a case as when defeat was inevitable was an extension of that spirit. The book also recognizes that not only the military made such an attempt, but also the civilian population which in some

Cities turned against the German army and surrendered willingly to the American in an effort to save their city. I think this is a stretch of imagination, I think that the only thing these people were trying to save was their own skin, and disobedience knowing there would be no retribution is not heroic at all, of course there were cases where these people faced retribution but that was rare towards the end of the war where logistics and communication failed. I see these as isolated cases of self serving officials and civilians to put an end to a horrible war, but I don't think the argument of the book holds true, these people were trying to save themselves rather than actually be "disobedient" to a government that had ceased to actually be a government as soon as WWII became a two front battle. Sorry for the long review.

Eliza says

Very detailed. Easy to understand.

Paul says

Disobeying Hitler – Some did!

Disobeying Hitler by Randall Hansen is an excellently researched and written account of those few senior German officers who disobeyed Hitler's orders and could have faced execution themselves. This book accounts for the German resistance in the final years of the war after the executions of von Stauffenberg and Rommel in July 1944.

When the Russians started turning the tide of the war and pushing back the German Army Hitler gave orders that not an inch of ground was not to be given and a scorched earth policy was placed up on the command and mayors. Nowhere was this example truer than the destruction of Warsaw after the uprising when not a building was left standing and human suffering was the highest.

Some officers and citizens saw that this plan was utter madness and this book gives their account. Some of the opposition was to save some of the cities of Germany from complete destruction with the withdrawal of the army and the coming allies. A common sense approach one could say.

There are three chapters given over to General Choltitz and his actions in saving Paris from being levelled to the ground. Hansen makes it clear that was not due to ideological difference he was as anti-Semitic as other German officers. He did put up some sort of resistance towards the defence of Paris, enough to convince Hitler he was doing all he could to hold the city. More practically Choltitz did not have the men or equipment to hold or destroy Paris.

Hansen also examines the German Army's willingness in the murder of Jews that it was not all down to the SS. He is trying to make people understand that the SS were not alone in anti-Semitic actions.

We also see Albert Speer's actions examined, the munitions minister who wanted to preserve as much as he could. Hansen also points out that this was probably more down to his own self-preservation.

Disobeying Hitler has been well researched and highlights the much forgotten story of the very few who actually ignored Hitler's ranting orders. He does show that there were fanatics in both in the SS and army who were willing to destroy everything and everyone as they pulled back to Berlin. This is about those who for varying reasons did the opposite. Hopefully this book will remind people that there were others who opposed Hitler other than the participants in the July plot of 1944.

This is an excellent history well written and well researched giving us a glimpse at some of the morally hazy individuals who were making decisions to save what they could for after the war. This book brings their stories to life and is a reminder that it is sometimes the decisions we make not to do something can be as important as what we decide to do.

Stephen says

this book was given to me free by net galley for a honest review.. very detailed and interesting book looking at german resistance in the latter part of WWII and how this may have helped the creation of the post war

german economy and culture. learnt a lot though how little things became the greater whole and how women played a huge part in saving their cities

Probe1 says

It was good enough for it's topic. The author took particular caution in stressing that many stories were colored by post war hand washing by the defeated. Some are specifically discredited through other sources the author introduces and the reader is left to interpret them in that context. Others were more plainly offered without any contextual analysis of their character.

It was fun to read but it's not something to take to the bank I believe.

Jess Zimmerman says

Disobeying Hitler: German Resistance After Valkyrie

RANDALL HANSEN

Oxford University Press

480 pp. \$29.95/Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-19-992792-0

My previous knowledge of resistance during World War II was limited to the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and its American counterpart – the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The main priority of both covert organizations was to gather intelligence through espionage in order to carry out sabotage and assist in local resistance efforts. I had studied many different facets of those groups but from the viewpoints of the Allied Forces. Sure, I had heard about Operation Valkyrie which was, arguably, the closest attempt on Adolf Hitler's life by members of the German Army. [Actor Tom Cruise portrayed Claus von Stauffenberg, one of the organizers of the infamous failed plot, in the 2008 film Valkyrie.] Additionally, I knew a little about the Jewish resistance when it came the Bielski partisans thanks to another 2008 film, Defiance. However, my knowledge of German resistance in general was almost non-existent, which makes Randall Hansen's *Disobeying Hitler: German Resistance After Valkyrie* an interesting read.

Hansen, a Canadian historian and Professor of Politics at the University of Toronto, has previously written about World War II. He is the author of five other books, including a well-received monograph on the Allied bombings of Germany called *Fire and Fury*. The topic of German resistance is not one that is discussed much as Germans, in general, get lumped together. There were actually Germans (both everyday citizens and highly appointed members of the government and military) who did not agree with Hitler and the Nazi policies. Operation Valkyrie on July 20, 1944 may have failed in its purpose to assassinate Hitler. It did, however, proclaim that not only were some Germans against Hitler, some were actively resisting or in open disobedience to the Führer.

Disobeying Hitler

As Communism rose to power, there was resistance and sabotage – from spies passing on information to Nazi enemies to anti-Communist groups launching leaflet campaigns in an attempt to educate those in and outside of Germany. However, both leading up to WWII and during the war, Nazi police (Gestapo) crushed the resistance. Like weeds though, when you pull one, more pop up. While Hitler was at war with the Allies,

he was also facing the constant threat of internal resistance. The book begins by setting the European stage.

In 1943, after facing off against the Soviets, the German army retreated out of Russia. Under Hitler's order, the army burned and destroyed everything in its path – what is called a scorched earth policy. While this policy was done numerous times by multiple forces over history, Hitler decided he wanted to apply it against all his enemies. He wanted European cities (such as Paris) to be reduced to rubble, historical monuments were to be torn down, and every German person was to defend – to the death – every part of Germany against enemy advancement. In a September 7, 1943 editorial piece, Hitler exclaimed, "Not a German stalk of wheat is to feed the enemy, not a German mouth to give him information, not a German hand to offer him help. He is to find every footbridge destroyed, every road blocked – nothing but death, annihilation and hatred will meet him" (p. 1-2). As we know now, Paris still stands as do historical monuments around the continent. So, what happened? Military officials, soldiers, everyday citizens disobeyed Hitler's orders.

In that context, Disobeying Hitler is more about blatant disobedience than actual resistance, something that Hansen does point out. War in and of itself is a brutal thing. During WWII, the tactics used by Hitler and the German commanders (such as the scorched earth policy) took on a new form of brutality. From using starvation tactics against Leningrad, complete destruction and mass killings in Poland, and the systematic murdering of Jews. Hansen points out that the brutality shown by the SS and German Army did two things, "they radicalized the majority and alienated a minority of the German officer corps" (p. 17). While the majority of military officials approved of the brutality and actively engaged in it, a minority of officials were ashamed of the actions.

I especially enjoyed reading about Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel and his disobedience against Hitler. Even though the two had many similarities – childhood backgrounds, World War I experience, desire to spread Nazi interests, and even "vain, ambitious, and self-promoting" personalities – they were also very different (p. 48). Rommel inspired great loyalty from his men as he took an egalitarian approach. A smart, cunning military man, he knew when to stay and when to pull out. At El Alamein, Rommel encountered British General Bernard Montgomery. Rommel's men were outnumbered, retreat was the logical step. Hitler ordered Rommel's men to stay and either win (stay alive) or lose (die). Rommel tried one last effort to appease the order before retreating – in direct disobedience to Hitler. This was not the only time Rommel ignored or "cherry picked" Hitler's orders. According to Hansen, there is no proof that Rommel interrogated or mistreated civilians or Allied POWs. Hitler's policy on civilians and POWs was harsh and the SS in particular were known to engage in torture and mass executions. However, Rommel would not have none of that – which also earned the respect of Allied officials and soldiers.

Book Structure & Content

Disobeying Hitler is composed of 26 chapters, all of which are given various titles such as "To Destroy Germany: Hitler and Scorched Earth" (chapter 15), "A Citizen's Revolt: Augsburg" (chapter 21), and "Saving Caspar David Friedrich's City" (chapter 24). The chapters tended to be sectioned together based on location and topic. If you wanted to read about Paris during WWII, you could just read chapters 3-10. As a compilation, the chapters creates an engaging monograph, but each section could very well be read separately and individually based on the reader's interests.

Hansen does more than discuss the disobedience and resistance, he also addresses legends and tall tales. One being the story of how one man – General Dietrich von Choltitz – single-handedly saved Paris. Hansen quickly points out that Choltitz did not have the resources to ruin Paris. Although one man saving such a famous city makes for a good story, it was not necessarily the entire truth. In actuality, it was the disobedience of several German officers (Hitler wanted Paris or, if the city was lost to the Allies, he wanted it destroyed). Though it should be noted that Choltitz's role, although smaller than the sensationalized story,

should not be discounted.

Choltitz did not have the men or the materiel [sic] to destroy Paris. He could, however, have seriously scarred it and killed many more people in the process. but the central point is this: Choltitz made no effort to try. . . . Before Choltitz arrived in Paris, preparations for the sabotage of gas installations, power plants, and telephone exchanges had begun. Choltitz made no effort to continue them (p. 118).

At 480 pages, *Disobeying Hitler* seems like a lengthy read. In actuality, the book concludes on page 332. After that page, the author includes additional sections: "Notes on Approach, Sources, and Acknowledgements", "Notes", "The Defense and Surrender of German Cities in 1945", "Glossary", "Works Cited", and "Index". The "Notes" section is over 115 pages of detailed chapter notes, adding to the overall reading experience. In the center of the book are also a handful of photographs. I would have preferred more as they aid in visualizing the story.

Overall Impression

As I am not all that familiar with the hierarchy of the German government or military personnel, there were a few times I had to stop and remember exactly who the person being discussed was and their role in the events. Additionally, a few moments in the book that felt weighed down by 'extras' when it could have been simplified a bit. This also caused those same sections to read on the drier side. It is without doubt that Hansen put considerable research and work into *Disobeying Hitler* as the detailed chapter notes and cited sources clearly indicate.

I liked the flow of the chapters and how he discussed one area/person completely before moving onto the next. I could see how easily this method could make the text choppy but Hansen carefully constructed a well-rounded book. *Disobeying Hitler* gave interesting insight, backed by extensive research, into topics I knew very little about prior to reading. I would recommend this book to those who enjoy reading about World War II, military history, and perhaps even general history buffs.

Originally posted on HistoryByZim.com

Debbie says

This book covered the fate of civilians and German troops in German-occupied territory from July 20, 1944 to May 9, 1945. From the title and description, I was expecting a focus on "human interest" stories...individual's stories and what made them disobey. Instead, much of the book was a series of "this person did this action at this place and this time" overviews of various military battles and related actions. If you're familiar with the battles of the war, this listing of military actions might help tie the other events together in your mind. However, I'm not a WWII buff. I'd have found the book more interesting if the battle movements were even more briefly summarized as they usually added little to the "disobeying Hitler" aspects of the story.

The tone of the writing was scholarly and attempted to set the record straight--based on actual evidence--on some claims of heroic disobedience by German leaders. The author pointed out what they did and didn't do, and what others (civilians) contributed to the outcome.

The first 72 (of 332) pages covered a brief summary of WWII events that lead up to Valkyrie and a description of the events of the July 20, 1944 assassination and coup attempt against Hitler. After that, we're told stories--connected by battle reports--of various cities being saved. Hitler had commanded that the cities would be essentially left in rubble as the German army died in heroic last stands. Not everyone thought this was a good idea (especially the civilians living in these cities). They risked their lives to save the civilian populations and the city itself, and this often also involved the surrender of German troops. We're also told of cities that were destroyed. The stories were often described as an overview of the action rather than going in-depth into the details, personalities, and motives. Perhaps these details do not exist in many of the cases.

I thought that the more civilian-focused view of the defeat of Germany was interesting, but the viewpoint was more distant and action-focused than I expected. It was interesting, but not as interesting as I expected it to be.

I received this review copy from the publisher through Amazon Vine.

Erik Graff says

There were very many serious plots against Hitler, the most serious being the officers' plot of July, 1944. By this point it was clear that the war was unwinnable, German conquests being rolled back on all fronts by the Russians, Canadians, British, Americans and Free French. This book details, usually by city, opposition to Hitler's 'Nero' order of total war entailing no surrenders and destruction of all infrastructure, actions which would have caused massive 11th hour casualties. This opposition was not wholesale, many cities did resist, resulting in Allied bombings followed by shellings and house-to-house street fighting. Most military commands, especially SS commands, followed, at least, Hitler's directives to stand firm, though many moderated his orders to destroy utilities and historic monuments. Yet some did capitulate, often under civilian pressure and despite deadly German reprisals.
