

JAN 25 1956

Sanitized - Approved For Release : CIA-RDP70-00058R000100050084-3

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-10, 3-1

X-Encls 2 B. & P.

BOOK REVIEW

By JOHN K. HUTCHENS

CPYRGHT

20 JULY. By Constantine FitzGibbon. Norton.
285 pages. \$3.75.

HERE is something to be said, Constantine FitzGibbon grants, against the attempt that was made on Adolf Hitler's life at 12:42 p. m. July 20, 1944. If successful, it might have spawned another stab-in-the-back legend to carry another, future tyrant to the top. In failing, it certainly destroyed an anti-Nazi German elite whose post-war service to their country would have been incalculable. Just as certainly, Mr. FitzGibbon believes, here was one of the great moral acts of our time—and, even now, one of the most undervalued and least understood.

The Whole Story

Drawn chiefly from German sources, and from his own research as



Constantine FitzGibbon

an intelligence officer in the United States Army Mr. FitzGibbon's is the most comprehensive account yet to appear in English of the day itself, the years that went into preparing for it and its ghastly aftermath. There is little here that will be new to the expert, the chronicler reticently observes. But how many experts can there be who know their way around this incredible maze of personality, motive and event?

The fact is, Mr. FitzGibbon declares, that Hitler's original propaganda line endures to this day—i. e., that this was the work of "a small clique of ambitious officers." It is clear enough now, or should be, that the truth was elsewhere. Besides the professional soldiers, the conspirators enlisted ministers, wealthy landowners, right-wing politicians, socialists. Nor did they plan their desperate move only when and because German defeat seemed certain.

As early as 1940 Col. Count Claus Schenk von

Stauffenberg, the focal point of the conspiracy, was denouncing Hitler in remarkably unguarded terms and rounding up persons interested in killing him. Henning von Tresckow, one of his chief assistants, the son of a World War I German Chief of Staff, was a determined anti-Nazi by 1938. In that same year Gen. Ludwig Beck was prepared to lead a coup d'état in the event Hitler declared war. The West obligingly presented Hitler with the Munich Pact instead.

By how much did the conspiracy fail? Four persons in the room with Hitler at his East Prussian headquarters were killed. A stout table shielded him just enough. If it had not, the war might have ended in Europe ten months before it did. Even as it was, the plot had a chance until it was lost in bad luck and bungling—or so this version seems to suggest.

Time Ran Out

For reasons not yet entirely clear, the conspirators in Berlin did not go into action until 3:45 p. m., when Stauffenberg, still certain he had killed Hitler, arrived by plane from East Prussia. Through some fatal carelessness the Berlin radio stations were not seized and Joseph Goebbels was not taken in hand. In Paris Field Marshal von Kluge, who might have saved the day by turning the Army of the West against the regime, hesitated until it was too late. By midnight the revolt had ground to a halt, and the first of some 5,000 executions were under way—a terrible toll-taking among a mere "clique."

Mr. FitzGibbon speculates with some bitterness on how much better the German anti-Nazi opposition might have fared had it received help and recognition from the Western Allies. If the unconditional surrender policy was wrong, he is right. Allen Welsh Dulles, head of the Office of Strategic Services in Switzerland at the time, and author of "Germany's Underground" (on which Mr. FitzGibbon draws extensively), believed that the unconditional surrender slogan was indeed a mistake. Pending history's verdict on that, if it ever arrives at one, we have here a finely organized and written story of brave men who acted out of conscience, died for principle, and deserve to be remembered with utmost respect.