

sans on the Russian front and suspected by the Gestapo of involvement in Walkyrie, disappeared, thus avoiding a Nazi trial. He was later tried by the Nuremberg International Tribunal and sentenced to life imprisonment for war crimes. In 1952 he was released on the grounds of declining health and lived in peace and comfort for another nineteen years.

Colonel General Franz Halder was arrested by the Gestapo the day after the Walkyrie plot in which he was implicated, but somehow evaded the death sentence and spent the rest of the war in the VIP prison within the Dachau concentration camp run by the SS. Afterwards, Halder served for the rest of his life as director of the German section of the historical division of the United States military government in occupied Germany. He contributed greatly to America's understanding of Germany at the time, topping the list of William Shirer's sources for *The Rise and Fall of*

*the Third Reich* (Simon & Schuster, 1959). In 1961 he received the Meritorious Civilian Service Award, the highest American civilian medal for services to the United States.

The former Leipzig mayor, Carl Gördel, was brought before the "people's court" set up by the SS, found guilty of treason, and executed on February 2, 1945.

Field Marshal Rundstedt knew of Walkyrie, but did not take part because, as he told his colleagues, it was not right to assassinate the head of state to whom he had sworn "unconditional obedience." [interview with CIA officer James Critchfield, who knew Rundstedt, and the consensus of historians] Still, ever faithful to his pledge of obedience to the Führer, Rundstedt later accepted Hitler's invitation to preside over a makeshift "court of honor" that transferred officers accused of complicity in Walkyrie from the jurisdiction of a traditional Wehrmacht court to a merciless SS kangaroo court.

because Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's troops looked up to him and trusted his battlefield expertise. Familiar with the Ardennes woods, the site of his earlier victorious campaign in 1940, he commanded up to twenty-eight divisions—some half a million men—including several of the toughest Waffen-SS units as well as large numbers of teenagers and grandfathers ordered into uniforms a few weeks earlier. Up to the last moments of his army's disintegration in the midst of a total collapse of German forces, Rundstedt applied smart military tactics and added the inventive touches for which he was admired. In the end, his troops were defeated—about 120,000 killed, wounded, or captured—but not before inflicting a heavy death toll on Allied forces, an estimated 16,000–19,000.

#### Was Rundstedt's role in the 1943 plot ever revealed?

No. It was not brought up at the Nuremberg tribunal, where the prosecution



**FORMER LEIPZIG MAYOR CARL GÖRDELER**, shown here before the "people's court" set up by the SS. He was found guilty of treason (for a later conspiracy against the Nazi state) and executed on February 2, 1945. Count von Moltke suffered the same fate on January 23, 1945.

## **"THE GERMAN CONSPIRATORS WERE UNITED BY THE BELIEF THAT THE WAR HITLER HAD BEGUN RECKLESSLY AND MICROMANAGED DISASTROUSLY WOULD END IN THEIR NATION'S DESTRUCTION."**

#### So Hitler never suspected Rundstedt of treason.

That's right. In fact, in early September 1944, as the Allies closed in on Germany, the Führer asked Rundstedt, by then no longer in active service, to command a counteroffensive designed to push back the invading Anglo-American armies to the sea. According to documents cited by the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal, the general replied: "My Führer, whatever your order, I shall do to my last breath."

#### Did he live up to this promise?

He did. Ironically, the last German counteroffensive in the war, the Battle of the Bulge, was initially successful largely

charged Rundstedt with war crimes in Poland, the Soviet Union, and on the Western front. He was detained until 1949, but not tried because of ill health. Following his death in 1953, a handful of Wehrmacht officers in civilian clothes and top hats followed the horse-drawn hearse to the grave.

#### So the top men on "Moltke's List" took action on or knew of the plot to kill Hitler.

Yes. This gives great credence to Moltke and the others' intentions to support U.S. military operations to end the war.

#### What united these conspirators?

I agree with the historian Joachim Fest, who wrote in *Plotting Hitler's Death*