

Who Determines What Becomes History? A Witness' Reflections

George Wittenstein

The Munich-based White Rose consisted of a group of friends, predominantly medical students, who appealed to the German people to defy both Hitler's dictatorship and the apathy of their fellow citizens. It was the only German group specifically to condemn the extermination of European Jews. Six members convicted of high treason were executed.

Already a member of the German armed forces, George Wittenstein escaped apprehension by the Gestapo by volunteering to serve on the front line—the only place the German secret police would have no jurisdiction over him. He was assigned to the Italian front to serve as a physician.

There he collected the weapons of wounded soldiers and contributed them to a secret arsenal maintained by Freedom Action Bavaria, a resistance group of military officers in Munich.

Wounded in 1945, Wittenstein immigrated to the United States a few years later and continued his surgical training at Harvard University, the University of Rochester, and the University of Colorado. A Santa Barbara resident for almost 50 years, he has worked in private practice, as a professor of surgery at UCLA, and as chair of the Department of Surgery at the UCLA-Olive View Medical Center.

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Memories of the White Rose
by George J. Wittenstein, M. D.

Introduction and Background

Fifty-four years ago three German students were arrested. A few days later they were hauled before the Volksgerichtshof ("People's Court"), sentenced to death and executed by beheading the same day. Within a few months many more arrests were made, and, in a second trial, three additional death sentences were handed down. (The "People's Court," I should add, existed outside the German constitution. It was created by the NSDAP, the National Socialist Party, in 1934 for the sole purpose of eliminating Hitler's enemies.)

How can one explain that after ten years of Nazi rule, with its incessant political indoctrination beginning as early as in preschool, and in the midst of a "great patriotic war," these students, who had largely grown up under the influence of this regime, resolved to take a stand against Nazi tyranny? To accomplish this it will be necessary to expand somewhat on the historical background.

It is my firm belief that no one raised in the United States can fully comprehend what it is like to live under an absolute dictatorship. For it is quite different from what we generally associate with this term as it relates, for example, to the typical Latin American situation. Never before has there been such absolute control, except for Soviet Russia, which Hitler actually emulated to a large degree. The government - or rather, the party - controlled everything: the news media, arms, police, the armed forces, the judiciary system, communications, travel, all levels of education from kindergarten to universities, all cultural and religious institutions. Political indoctrination started at a very early age, and continued by means of the Hitler Youth with the ultimate goal of complete mind control. Children were exhorted in school to denounce even their own parents for derogatory remarks about Hitler or Nazi ideology. My own teenage cousin, for instance, threatened to denounce his father; and I was barely able to deter him by pointing out to him that he himself might end up destitute, if his father were arrested and incarcerated.

Organized resistance was practically impossible. One could not speak openly, even with close friends, never knowing whether they might not be Nazi spies or collaborators. So well organized was the control and surveillance by the party, that each city block had a party functionary assigned to spy on his neighbors. This "Blockwart" was ostensibly responsible for the well being of the residents of his city block, but in reality had to monitor, record and report on activities, conversations, and remarks of each person, as well as on their associations. Even the privacy of one's home was not assured: a tea cozy or pillows placed over the telephone were popular precautions against eavesdropping by bugging. Nor did one ever know what mail had been secretly opened.

I remember only too well an incident in a cinema: someone sitting a few rows in front of me was led away by the Gestapo. Apparently he had made a derogatory remark to his companion about

Hitler during the preceding news reel. Whoever had overheard him must have, as a patriotic duty, tipped off the secret police.

Sure, there were individuals, and small, local groups who were opposed to the regime. As a matter of fact, we now know that there were over 300 of them; but because of the conditions described above, it was nearly impossible to establish contacts, let alone to maintain communications. Thus the existing groups were small, isolated, and did not know of each other. Any successful resistance could only have come from the Military; they tried, very late, on that fateful July 20, 1944 - and bungled it badly.

With that, I am coming back to the question: how was it possible that a group of university students defied this powerful regime - and, against all odds, called for open resistance?

The answer is twofold:

1. We were students, and students, throughout history, have been idealistic, rebellious, and willing to take chances: rebellious against existing order, against old and empty conventions (the United States and Europe experienced their share of it in the Sixties). Most of our group had been members of the "Bündische Jugend." These were youth organizations (somewhat similar to the Boy Scouts,) which had come into being around 1908 in Europe and were particularly strong in Germany. In essence they grew out of a disillusionment of young people with the old established order, and with schools, which had failed them badly, as well as rebellion against overbearing parents. They were infused with typically German romanticism. Their ideals and stated goals were: personal freedom, self-imposed discipline, and strict adherence to highest moral and ethical principles.
2. These students came from bourgeois families. Their parents were opposed to Hitler, which must have influenced them to a large degree.
3. Most of us were medical students, except for Sophie Scholl, who majored in biology and philosophy. We shared a common interest in and a deep love for the arts, music, literature, and philosophy. Most of us had Jewish friends or classmates, who were evicted or deported or who had suffered in the "Crystal Night" pogrom.

It all began, if you will, in the winter of 1938/39: Those who served their compulsory two year army service and planned to enter medical school were consigned to a "Sanitätskompanie," a training school for medics, for their final six months. This is where I met Alexander Schmorell: he was multi-talented, a gifted sculptor, deeply interested in literature and music; he was born in Russia, to a German father, a physician, and a Russian mother. We soon discovered our similar political leanings, and became close friends. Some of you may have read in one of the books about the White Rose, what Alex Schmorell said to me, pointing to the door of our room in the barracks: "Maybe ten years from now there will be a plaque on this door which will read: 'This is where the revolution began'."

By the following spring (1939) most of us enrolled at the University of Munich. There were two days of required political indoctrination, which no one took seriously. Although fraternities had

been dissolved and incorporated into the National Socialist Student Organization, we felt exhilarated by the degree of freedom one enjoyed as a student, compared to what lay behind us: namely six months of "Arbeitsdienst" (a compulsory paramilitary work service in uniform), followed by two years of military service. Yet, most kept their opinions to themselves in view of the palpable sense of oppression, of being watched, and the ever looming threat of concentration camps.

Still, student unrest was smoldering. For example, at the end of the summer semester, the leader of the Nazi student organization (for the state of Bavaria) ordered a convocation, in which he informed us that we were ordered to spend our summer vacation bringing in the harvest, otherwise we would not be permitted to re-enroll for the fall semester. There were demonstrations, students at the chemistry department set off stink bombs, and the Gestapo (secret police) was brought in.

Shortly after World War Two was unleashed by Germany's invasion of Poland (in Sept. 1939) most medical students were drafted, housed in barracks, and required to attend classes in uniform. In the beginning, this was carried out in typically Prussian manner: students were crowded into barracks, up to ten to a room, which made studying extremely difficult; marching to class in columns in the morning, returning the same way in the evenings. Eventually the absurdity and impracticality of this became obvious, and more freedom was permitted; we were allowed to live in private quarters, and to even wear civilian clothes during our senior year. Only Saturday morning roll call and drill remained mandatory. Many of us would not show up, and friends would respond for those missing during roll call, shouting "here" when their names were called.

In this student company I introduced Alex Schmorell and Hans Scholl to each other.

The Leaflets

Section Two of Four

Hans Scholl's evolution - was perhaps typical for many young Germans: In 1933, in a spell of youthful enthusiasm, he had joined the Hitler Youth, as had his older sister, who even became a leader. In due course, he became disillusioned when the organization's true aims became apparent, and formed a separate group within the Hitler Youth, based on the principles of the aforementioned Bündische Jugend. (For this he was briefly arrested in 1937.) Though Lutheran himself, in 1940/41 he met two important Catholic men of letters: Carl Muth, and Theodor Haecker, who gave his life a new direction, to the point where he began to neglect medicine and immerse himself in religion and philosophy; as a matter of fact, Scholl, for a while, even considered converting to Catholicism. At that time he and his friends initiated "Leseabende," where they read relevant modern and classical literature to each other which they then discussed until late into the night. Concurrently, but unknown to each other, I started my own circle, to which we invited well known writers, playwrights, performers, poets, and musicians, to share their work with us, and where we read our own poetry to their critique. In both groups the

discussions never touched on politics, rather, they were centered on our consuming interest in all aspects of art, music, and philosophy. All of us frequently attended concerts and important plays.

What later developed into what is now known as the White Rose, began as an ever deeper personal friendship between young people who shared profound interests within and beyond medicine. For sure, all were of the same political conviction: against Hitler and the Nazi Regime. But, in a way typical for millions of Germans at the time, we withdrew into our own private sphere, in our case the arts, philosophy, our circle of friends. This was a course taken by many, who were unable to emigrate and it was aptly called "INNERE EMIGRATION" (inner emigration).

However, as the brutality of the regime became more and more apparent, when deportations of Jews began, and the remaining ones were forced to wear the yellow Star of David, when German atrocities in occupied Poland and Russia became known, and when the copies of Bishop Galen's sermon, condemning the killing of inmates in insane asylums, were circulated in secret, for us this detachment gave way to the conviction that something had to be done; that it was not good enough to keep to oneself, one's beliefs, and ethical standards, but that the time had come to act.

Thus, during early summer of 1942, Alex Schmorell and Hans Scholl wrote four leaflets, copied them on a typewriter with as many copies as could be made, probably not exceeding 100, and distributed them throughout Germany. These leaflets were left in telephone books in public phone booths, mailed to professors and students, and taken by courier to other universities for distribution. All four were written in a relatively brief period, between June 27 and July 12. As far as is known today, Hans Scholl wrote the first and fourth leaflets, Alex Schmorell participated with the second and third (the third and fourth were edited by me). All leaflets were also sent to the members of the White Rose, in order that we could check whether they were intercepted. Significantly, of the first 100 leaflets, 35 were turned over to the Gestapo. That does not necessarily mean that the recipients were Nazis. Being recipients of such highly dangerous material, one had reason to fear that one was on the sender's mailing list, which, if intercepted by the secret police would invariably place one in serious jeopardy. By turning the leaflets over to the secret police one hoped to be beyond suspicion. It might even have entered one's mind - and it certainly would not have been unthinkable - that such leaflets could have actually been produced and mailed by the Gestapo in order to test one's loyalty to the party and state.

Producing and distributing such leaflets sounds simple from today's perspective, but, in reality, it was not only very difficult but even dangerous. Paper was scarce, as were envelopes. And if one bought them in large quantities, or for that matter, more than just a few postage stamps (in any larger numbers), one would (have) become instantly suspect. Taking leaflets to other cities carried great risk, because trains were constantly patrolled by military police, who demanded identification papers of any male of military service-age. Anyone traveling without official marching papers was AWOL - and the consequences predictable. Some of us traveled in civilian clothing, hoping for the best, some with forged travel orders, I myself used false identification papers (my cousin's with whom I shared a certain resemblance). We left the briefcases which contained the leaflets in a different compartment, for luggage was routinely searched. Mostly, however, leaflets were taken by female students who were not subject to such scrutiny.

By now Hans Scholl's sister Sophie had enrolled at the University of Munich to study biology and philosophy. When she discovered the secret activities of her brother, she begged to participate, which he refused in order to protect her. Upon her insistence Hans eventually relented. Thus Sophie became an active co-conspirator.

The leaflets bore the title: "Leaves (leaflets) of the White Rose." (To this day the origin of this title is unclear, although we know that it was probably coined by Hans.) All four leaflets carried the same message: They mentioned the mass extermination of Jews and Polish nobility, as well as other atrocities committed by the Nazis and the SS. They called for action against National Socialism, for passive and later, active resistance. They were suffused with idealism, almost ecstatic enthusiasm, and were laced with quotations by Goethe, Schiller, Lao Tse, Novalis, Aristotle and others. They called for "self-criticism," - "liberating German science," - "freeing the spirit from the evil," - a "rebirth of German student life to make the university again a living community devoted to the truth." In other words, the leaflets were directed at the intellectual elite, students and university faculty. The leaflets even contained comments on how Germany had to be reconstructed "after the war" and re-integrated into Europe.

To forestall any suspicion that the White Rose was somehow financed by Germany's enemies, the Allies, instead of being a purely German movement, the fourth leaflet states:

"...We emphatically point out that the White Rose is not in the pay of any foreign power. Although we know that the National Socialist power must be broken by military means, we seek the revival of the deeply wounded German spirit. For the sake of future generations, an example must be set after the war, so that no one will ever have the slightest desire to try anything like this ever again. Do not forget the minor scoundrels of this system; note their names, so that no one may escape...We shall not be silent - we are your bad conscience. The White Rose will not leave you in peace..."

Soon, Christoph Probst was included in this circle of friends, although he did not participate directly in the writing of the leaflets, having been transferred to the University of Innsbruck. He was the only one among us who was married - most unusual in those days - and had three children. He was, perhaps, the most apolitical of all of us: Literature and philosophy being his main interests next to his love of medicine. Of all the members of the White Rose, he was my closest friend.

To live under the Nazi system was extremely taxing and frustrating. One never knew when the Party would next transgress into one's personal life or education. A popular professor of philosophy was Fritz-Joachim von Rintelen whose lectures were attended by students from many different disciplines. One day he did not appear for his appointed lecture and rumors were rife that his right to lecture had been revoked. We all agreed to meet again for the next scheduled lecture the following week. When von Rintelen did not show up, the entire class marched to the office of the president of the university to demand an explanation. After a while, the president, pale and obviously shaken, opened the door a slit and said: "I refuse to give any information," and slammed the door shut. Headed by a painter friend of mine, Remigius Netzer, and myself, we then decided to go to Professor von Rintelen's apartment for a sympathy demonstration. Thus it happened, that in the middle of the war, in broad daylight, some eighty odd students, some

even in uniform, marched along the main boulevard of Munich to the utter amazement of the bystanders.

The Russian Front

Section Three of Four

By the summer of 1942 the authorities were faced with a dilemma: What to do with thousands of medical students in uniform during the long summer vacation. The obvious solution did not occur to them until much later: namely to change the semester system to trimesters, thus continuing the education during the entire year. Hence, the time required to produce a new physician for the armed forces would have been shortened. Instead they hit on the concept of "Frontbewährung." The idea was to send all medical students to the Russian front for a period of three months, in order for them to experience rendering medical care under fire, and to work as physician assistants in field hospitals.

With us on the train to Russia, on July 23, was Willi Graf, a medical student, who, unlike us, had not had the good fortune of having been placed into a medical student unit, and thus had not been able to continue his medical education until the summer of 1942. He was a deeply religious person, having joined a Catholic youth organization early in life. He had distanced himself from National Socialism to such a degree that he had crossed out in his address book the names of those who had joined the Hitler Youth. In Russia he befriended Hans and Alex, and, upon our return to Munich, became an active member of the group.

The experiences of the long journey and the months in Russia left a deep impression on all of us. On the way to the front we spent a few days in Warsaw. Warsaw had been declared an open city by the Polish government in order to save it from destruction, but in total disregard of the Geneva Convention it was partially destroyed by bombing and artillery fire. I will never forget visiting the Warsaw Ghetto which consisted of several walled off city blocks guarded by Ukrainian soldiers. I was horrified to discover that, for a pack of cigarettes, these Ukrainians would shoot for pleasure anyone looking out of a window, to whom one pointed. The inmates of the Ghetto were permitted to work outside the enclosure, and upon returning to the ghetto their burlap sacks were searched. I witnessed SS officers horse-whipping and kicking many Jews without provocation, and managed to take pictures of that.

Thanks to Alex Schmorell, who spoke Russian fluently, we made direct contact with Russian peasants. Alex reprimanded a guard, who beat a Russian worker bloody, and was almost court-martialed for this. Hans Scholl gave his entire tobacco ration, an extremely valuable commodity, to a Jew in a forced labor column. We felt a profound compassion for and outrage on behalf of those suffering under this ruthless oppression. In Russia, our conviction grew that more had to be done, and we came to realize the terrible truth., that Germany could only be saved by losing the war: a difficult and painful realization for someone who loves his country, his fatherland, which we most certainly did.

Upon our return from Russia on November 6, 1942, the main emphasis was to enlarge the small circle and to find and encourage activists at other universities. By now the public mood had begun to change: the setbacks at the Russian front and the heavy allied bombings of German cities had taken their toll.

Around this time, one more person joined the movement: Kurt Huber, age 50, professor of Philosophy, Psychology and Musicology. He did not become actively involved until November 1942, when he was shown a draft of the fifth leaflet by Hans Scholl which he rejected as too communist.

Professor Huber was an extraordinary human being and teacher. He happened to have a physical handicap, which made it difficult to understand him at times, but when he got carried away in his lecture, he spoke beautifully and in a most eloquent and inspiring manner. He somehow managed to weave into his lectures sarcastic remarks on censored and forbidden topics, books and authors, eventually showing them to be superior to the ruling Nazis and their ideology. In a lecture on Leibniz for instance, he gave a perfect example of linguistic disguise, contrasting the philosophers anti-absolutist concept of state with the reality of National Socialism. I even remember a one hour lecture on the Jewish philosopher Spinoza. Professor Huber had a difficult life: he was never promoted to full professorship despite exceptional achievements, and therefore had to subsist on the meager income of 300 Marks a month with a family of four. One of the reasons given for denying promotion was ".....we can only have professors who can also serve as officers. □."

On Jan 13, 1943, the Gauleiter of Bavaria (a post akin to governor, but a non elected party-appointed Nazi-position) addressed all university students at a specially called convocation at the famous German Museum in Munich. He chided female students for wasting time and funds by being students, "which they had no right to do." Instead they were obliged to do their duty by giving a son to their beloved Führer. He offered them the services of handsome studs, if they were not alluring enough to attract one themselves. When many female students attempted to leave the hall in protest, under general applause from the other students, the Gauleiter had them arrested. Thereupon, male students, many of them in uniform, rushed the podium and took the student leader hostage, until all women were released. As you can imagine, news of this spread like wildfire through Munich. It also strengthened Scholl and Schmorell in their belief that the time had come to call for action, that the people were now ready to revolt against their oppressors. At about the same time the fifth leaflet was written and distributed - for the first time in an edition of 5000 to 6000, because Alex Schmorell had managed, with great difficulty, to procure a duplicating machine. This leaflet had taken a different tone and was now entitled: "Leaflets of the Resistance Movement in Germany."

Then came the great turning point in the war with the fall of Stalingrad in February, 1943. It inspired Huber to compose a leaflet at the request of Hans Scholl, which was accepted by the group, who made only minor changes. It was mailed between February 16 and 18. Interestingly, neither Scholl nor Schmorell received the copies mailed to themselves, which they had always done to test whether mail would be intercepted. This, and the fall of Stalingrad were the stimulus for more audacious actions: During the nights of February 4, 8, and 15, they painted huge slogans on the walls of Munich's main thoroughfare at 29 sites, including the university.

"Freedom" - "Down with Hitler," and crossed out Swastikas, using black tar and stencils for most of them. With police patrols during the nights, this was an extremely risky undertaking. It was my job to write similar slogans in the restrooms of the university.

This sixth leaflet turned out to be the last one written: In the morning of February 18, 1943, Hans and Sophie Scholl entered the University with a large suitcase filled with leaflets, placing stacks of them outside each lecture hall. As they left the building, they realized there were many leaflets left in the suitcase. They turned, climbed the stairs to the top landing of the glass roofed inner court, where Sophie dumped the remaining content of the suitcase into the court.

They were observed and immediately apprehended by a senior janitor. Within a few days over 80 people were arrested all over Germany, among them Christoph Probst, whose draft of a leaflet, written on January 31, was found in Hans Scholl's pocket at his arrest. Had it not been for this unfortunate oversight, Christoph Probst would likely be alive today for lack of evidence against him.

It will never be known what drove Hans and Sophie to this action, which, according to statements made by them during their interrogation, had not been planned. It has been speculated that they knew that the Gestapo was hot on their trail, and that they, encouraged by what had happened a month earlier at the German Museum, believed that this last desperate act would result in a general uprising in Germany. Certainly none of us knew about it, Alex Schmorell for instance learned about their arrest while in a street car on the way to the university.

Trial and Aftermath

Section Four of Four

Hitler's reaction was swift - the "People's Court" was called into session only four days later; and, in a trial lasting barely four hours, the two Scholls and Christoph Probst were sentenced to death by beheading. Fortunately, I had managed to call the Scholl parents, who lived in Ulm, urging them to come to Munich immediately. I met them at the railroad station and took them directly to the Palace of Justice, where the trial was already in progress. (I don't need to mention that this was a very dangerous thing for me to do). But otherwise they would not have seen their children alive. For the three were executed the same afternoon. According to historical reports, during their last few steps to the guillotine Christoph Probst said: "We shall see each other again in a few minutes," and Hans Scholl shouted loudly: "Long live freedom!"

So fast and brutal was the action of the Nazi officials, so great their haste to erase this danger to themselves, so seriously did they take this threat, that no news of the incident were released until after the executions.

Alex Schmorell was still at large. Under a ruse I managed to leave the barracks to which we had been confined since the arrests, and meet his father in his office, to apprise him that my family could hide Alex on our country estate and perhaps smuggle him into Switzerland. Only much

later did I learn that Alex had tried to escape to Switzerland, but had to turn back because of deep snow. He was arrested during an air raid in Munich, betrayed by a former girlfriend.

A second trial took place on April 19, at which Schmorell, Graf and Huber were sentenced to death, others to forced labor. Professor Huber gave an impassioned speech in his defense before the People's Court. To quote just a few sentences: ".....I demand the return of freedom to the German people□" and, quoting the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte ".....and you must act as though the fate of Germany depended entirely upon you and your actions, and all responsibility were yours alone□.."

These three had to wait a long time for the guillotine. All appeals were in vain. Schmorell and Huber were finally executed on July 13, 1944, and Willi Graf on October 12. Kurt Huber had completed his major opus on Leibniz while in prison.

To illustrate how Huber saw his anti-Nazi activity, let me quote a brief excerpt from a poem which he wrote from prison to his four year old son explaining to him that his father did not die a traitor:

"...I died for Germany's FREEDOM, for TRUTH and HONOR. Faithfully, I served these three until my very last heartbeat□."

The brutality of the Nazi regime is illustrated by the bill for 600 Marks which Mrs. Huber received for "wear of the guillotine." When she told the official that there was no way she could get such a sum, which amounted to twice her husband's erstwhile monthly salary, he replied: "Maybe we can give you a (quantity) discount, after all, we have so many of them these days□"

There were other groups, more arrests and executions of people loosely connected with the White Rose.

I should like to mention the only successful military putsch against the Nazi Regime, called the 'Freiheitsaktion Bayern' (Bavarian Action For Freedom), with which I was also connected. The commander of a training unit for interpreters, Dr. Rupprecht Gerngross, had secretly armed his officially unarmed company, and arranged that virtually all members were opponents of the regime. As the American army approached Bavaria, his troops occupied Radio Munich, appealing to the citizenry to arrest Nazi functionaries, and to display white sheets (which was punishable by death). They arrested the Reichsstatthalter, the Nazi appointed governor of Bavaria. In the ensuing battle there were many casualties. Unfortunately, this important action which saved numerous civilian lives, and saved Munich from the total destruction which Hitler had ordered, is rarely mentioned.

I am often asked how I happened to survive:

Only after the war did I find out details: The Gestapo had suspected me right from the beginning, was hot on my trail, and continued surveillance and to investigate me. My company commander told me after the war that the Gestapo had looked for me and questioned him about me on numerous occasions. He himself suspected by then, that I had been involved in the White Rose

activities because he, of course, knew of my close friendship with the ones arrested and executed. He took it upon himself to deliberately lead the Gestapo astray. To this day I am not sure what his reasons or motivations had been: whether it was on humanitarian grounds, whether he himself was against Hitler, or simply because he was so irate that the authority of the military was subjugated to the whims of the party; for the political arm of the government (the Party) had illegally interfered with the authority of the military by arresting, trying, and executing his men without as much as consulting him. (In fact, after the arrests he gave me explicit permission to use my weapon if the Gestapo tried to arrest me). This, of course, would have been senseless, but it does reflect his indignation. I have often wondered about how intelligent or circumspect he himself had been, for to use my weapon against the Gestapo would have been suicide. This makes me think that this statement was a spontaneous, emotional reaction. Whatever it had been, I was obviously protected while in the barracks under his command. He may well have saved my life.

During interrogations by the Gestapo and later by a military court (for offering help to a Jewish woman whose son had been executed, offering her refuge and to help smuggle her out of Germany) I was able to deny any involvement. However, when I learned via my connections to the Freiheitsaktion Bayern, that the Gestapo once again were on my trail I realized that I might not have another chance. Since I could not flee Germany, my only possibility to escape the Gestapo was to request transfer to the front, something one usually did not volunteer for. But the front was the only place where the Gestapo did NOT have jurisdiction, thus the ONLY "safe" place for someone like myself. I was wounded at the Italian front.

Let me close by reading the sixth and last leaflet. It was written by Kurt Huber after the fall of Stalingrad and distributed by Hans and Sophie Scholl in the main building of the University on that fateful 18th of February, 1943:

"Fellow Students,

Deeply shaken, our people behold the loss of the men of Stalingrad. 330,000 German men have been senselessly and irresponsibly driven to their deaths and destruction by the ingenious strategy of the WWI private. Führer, we thank you!" ("Führer, wir danken Dir" was the slogan used over and over at all mass rallies and appeared elsewhere on huge banners. The text continues:)

"The German people are in ferment. Do we wish to continue entrusting the fate of our armies to this dilettante? Do we want to sacrifice the remainder of our German youth to the base ambitions of a Party clique? No, never! The day of reckoning has come, the reckoning of our German youth with the most abominable tyranny our people has ever endured. In the name of the entire German people we demand of Adolf Hitler's state the return of personal freedom, the most precious treasure of the Germans which he cunningly has cheated us out of."

"We have grown up under a government which deprived us ruthlessly of free speech. Hitler Youth, SA, SS have done their utmost to force us into uniforms, revolutionize and anesthetize us during the most promising years of our lives, normally devoted to acquiring education.

"Ideological training" they termed this despicable method of stifling in a fog of empty phrases,

our budding ability to think and judge for ourselves. Demonic and narrow minded at once, they train future party bigwigs in "castles of the knightly order" to become godless, insolent and unscrupulous exploiters and murderers, to blindly and stupidly follow their Führer. They think us intellectuals appropriate stooges to fashion bludgeons for them so that they may rule."

"Experienced soldiers are disciplined like school boys by political aspirants, Gauleiters lewdly insult the honor of female students. German female students at the University of Munich gave a dignified response to the besmirching of their honor, and male students defended and stood firm on behalf of those women. That is a beginning of our struggle for self-determination without which intellectual and spiritual values cannot be created. We owe our thanks to the brave comrades, both men and women, who have given us this brilliant example."

He goes on to say that there is only one option: "battle against the Party, leave the Party. Let us boycott lectures given by political stooges. We seek true science and genuine intellectual freedom. None of your threats can mortify us, not even closure of our universities. Every one of us must struggle for our future, freedom, and for a regime conscious of its moral responsibility."

"FREEDOM AND HONOR. For ten Years Hitler and his accomplices have abused, distorted, debased these noble German words ad nauseam, as dilettantes do who cast the most precious values of a nation to the swine. During this ten year destruction of all material and spiritual values they have shown the German people what freedom and honor mean to them. This horrible blood bath which they have caused throughout Europe has opened the eyes of even the most naive and simpleminded German.....The name of Germany will be dishonored forever, lest German youth finally rise to simultaneously avenge and atone, to smash its tormentors and invoke a new intellectual and spiritual Europe."

He then reminds students that the people are looking to them for action to rescue the nation from National Socialism, as an earlier generation of Germans had saved the nation from Napoleon and calls out to them:

"Stalingrad's dead implore us" - "Frischauf, mein Volk, die Flammenzeichen rauchen!"

(Rise up, my people, the fiery beacons beckon!)