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(v. Kluge)

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WAR DEPARTMENT HISTORICAL COMMISSION
WAR DEPARTMENT GENERAL STAFF, G-2
HISTORICAL BRANCH

Institut für Zeitgeschichte AFCHV	
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HISTORICAL COMMISSION REPORT

SUBJECT : Field Marshal Von Kluge and the Plot of 20 July 1944
 DATE : 28 October 1945
 PREPARED BY : Lt. Col. O. J. Hale

I. INTRODUCTION

The following sworn statement on the death of Field Marshal von Kluge was made by Capt. Dr. Udo Esch, of the German Army Medical Corps and son-in-law of the Field Marshal, to Montford H. Schaffner, Special Agent of the CIC, on 27 July 1945. Only the parts pertaining to von Kluge's participation in the July 20 Putsch and his subsequent suicide are here reproduced. Slight textual changes in the somewhat awkward English have been made without in any way altering the original meaning.

II. Statement by Capt. Dr. Udo Esch

On December 15, 1938, I married Marie-Luise von Kluge, daughter of the late Field Marshal Gunther von Kluge. From my father-in-law's assertions and actions I have always taken him for an opponent of Nazism.

In the spring of 1943 my father-in-law informed me for the first time of the movement to destroy the Nazi regime.He asked me for my assistance in the event that it should be needed. I participated in a conference in Bismarck at which General von Treschow, Goendeler (?) and a District President were present. The aims were the overthrow of the government, the ending of the war by negotiations with the Allies, the execution of all high-ranking Party members and Nazi generals (e.g. Schmundt, Jodl, Keitel), and the formation of a democratic government without the military element, which should help in the overthrow, being predominant.

It was not until June 1944, when my father-in-law succeeded Von Rundstedt, that I again heard of the plot. At that time I was stationed at a general hospital in Paris and saw my father-in-law almost daily. I learned from him that the plot was maturing after a conference in which General Stulpnagel participated. My father-in-law asked me to provide poison for him and the others in case the plot miscarried. Through him I got a furlough to Germany and in the laboratory of the University of Leipzig produced waterless acid cyanide -- a quickly acting poison. There were seven ampules, one of them received by my father-in-law, the others by Colonel Frick and General Stulpnagel. I do not know to whom they distributed the others. On 19 July my father-in-law, after a discussion with Field Marshal Rommel, told me that the action would take place on the following day. On 20 July I stayed in my hospital. During the night of 20-21 July my father-in-law ordered me to come to him and told me about the failure of the plot and the rash arrest of the SD in Paris by General von Stulpnagel.

After this failure my father-in-law considered surrendering the Western Front to the Allies on his own authority, hoping the overthrow the Nazi regime

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with their assistance. This plan he only discussed with me, at first, and I doubt that even General Speidel, his chief of staff, was informed about it. He very much doubted the conduct of the Waffen-SS and Luftwaffe Divisions, but he hoped to succeed by surprise. He went to the front lines but was unable to get in touch with the Allied Commanders. On his return he found Field Marshal Model as his successor and an order to report to the Fuhrer Hq. I did not have an opportunity to speak to him again as my hospital was moving from Paris. In Charleville I received the news that he had died suddenly of apoplexy while en route from Verdun to Metz. I at once realized that he had taken the poison as he neared arrest by the SD when he arrived in Germany. (The real manner of his death and the reason for it were kept secret by the Fuhrer's order.)

I was given leave to attend the funeral and in Metz at the Kommandantur I learned that an autopsy had been performed by order of the SD officials. Potassium cyanide had been found. By the Fuhrer's permission burial took place on 2 Sept at the family estate in Bohne near Rathenow. Only the immediate family was present. On the following day the house was searched by the Gestapo. I myself went to Field Marshal von Mundstedt, who I knew was an accessory to the plot, to ask for his assistance. I secured another leave to Munster, where I was arrested on 12 Sept by a high-ranking official of the Central Court in Berlin, by the name of Hunger.

In Berlin I was handed over to the Sicherheitsdienst and imprisoned in the Prinz-Albrechtstrasse prison. I was shackled and had to sit in the light of a very bright lamp day and night in a small cell. Reading, writing and smoking were prohibited. The food was mostly spoiled and so little that it scarcely prevented starvation. Through one talkative guard I learned that there were about 100 persons in the prison. Only the principal persons involved in the plot were imprisoned there. Many were already sentenced to death but the executions were delayed to get as much information from them as possible. I was in the cell formerly occupied by Marshal von Witzleben. The punishment consisted of permanent shackling of the hands behind the back, shackling of hands and feet and beatings. When washing I saw many comrades with new, deep wounds. Among my fellow prisoners I recognized General Fromm, Major Goerdeler (with chains on his feet), General Speidel, Admiral Canaris and General (JAG) Sack.

From the Gestapo I learned that accessoryship in any degree before the attentat and concealing names after 20 July would mean death of the scaffold.

After several days I got civilian clothes and I was told that I was discharged from the Army. Ten days later I was interrogated for the first time. In the course of the interrogations, which often took place in the middle of the night, I had to admit that I had produced poison, but I never admitted the real purpose or my knowledge of the plot.

After five weeks I was released by the leader of the SD, Gruppenfuhrer Moeller, to the astonishment of all the guards. (I assume through the intercession of v. Mundstedt) The Gestapo officials thought it the first time anyone had been released. I was ordered to report to the German High Command (Oberkommando) where I was told that I was to be reenlisted in the Wehrmacht owing to the lack of surgeons.

When I went to Munster I learned that a cousin, Karl Ernst Rathgens had been hanged, my brother-in-law taken into kin-custody (Sippenhaft) and my wife, who thought me already dead, had had a breakdown. Henceforth I and my family were constantly shadowed and my letters opened.

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I later took over a Wehrmacht hospital at Bonn and after I lost there all my equipment I returned to my family in Munster. On 30 March 1945 I surrendered voluntarily to the 17th Airborne Division in Sender near Munster.

My personal opinion is that if the Putsch of 20 July 1944 had been successful -- besides saving the lives of many thousands would have led very soon to the rebuilding of a peaceful democratic Germany under the influence of the USA and Great Britain, as the capable German collaborators were available. After the failure of the plot, however, nearly all the men known as adversaries of Nazism were extinguished under the pretext of participation. It was maintained that their names had been on a list for leading positions in the new government.

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