

Eine Broschüre der
Georg Elser Gedenkstätte Königsbronn
über das Attentat vom 8. November 1939



Georg Elser –

Adolf Hitler's most dangerous opponent

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**Erinnerungs- und Forschungsstätte Georg Elser
Königsbronn**

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Georg Elser and his younger brother Leonhard (on the left)

Home and Origin of a Resistance-Fighter

The native region of Johann Georg Elser, the peace-loving lone fighter against Nazi-Tyranny in the early years of Adolf Hitler's rise, shows a fascinating cohabitation of quiet countryside and the hustling and bustling of industrial centres. The eastern part of the Swabian Alb, a high plain just north of the Danube river, is crossed by the Autobahn from Würzburg to Ulm. The postcard-countryside is marked by extended forests, sloping fields and the typical rolling juniper hills. In the valleys industrial firms settled, some with a world-wide reputation, others of local and regional importance. They are home to the proverbial Swabian tinkers who take pride in finding solutions to the seemingly impossible mechanical task.

The typical worker in a mechanical factory who has some cows and is tilling the land after hours is waning. But the spirit of the time when this live-form was prevailing on the Alb is alive. It ties people to the soil, then and now.

From this corner of Germany hails the laborer Georg Elser who tried to alter history all by himself in dire times. Others were to follow, some, like Claus Graf Schenk von Stauffenberg, the father of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Scholl-siblings, had roots in the same region – perhaps not just a coincidence.

The small river Brenz winds through the region and merges with the Danube in the swabian part of Bavaria. At the source of the Brenz, one of the most beautiful springs in the Alb, lies Königsbrunn. It is the hometown of Georg Elser and one of the oldest industrial settlements in Germany. Back in the 14th century Cistercian monks who first settled at the source of the Brenz in 1306, began smelting iron ore. The tradition has not been broken since. The Schwaebische Huettenwerke are continuing the tradition until today. Small wonder that this environment spawned a man who was regarded as a technical perfectionist – and who subsequently put his technical abilities into service to plan the assassination of Adolf Hitler before World War II and the holocaust reached their murderous peaks.



Interior view of the Georg Elser Memorial

An Invitation to Accompany Georg Elser

Let's follow this man to the most important sites of his life, – and his after-life. Let's follow him through the heights and depths. Let's follow him to gayety in the clubs he frequented, and to the moments of darkest loneliness in the months planning and preparing the assassination of Adolf Hitler.

The memorial exhibition at Königsbronn has focused on the respective times in Elser's life in three rooms. It gives practical guidance to understand backgrounds and motives. The following chapters will give a short insight into the stages of a highly unusual fate of a 20th century personality.

At the end, there will be open questions, enigmas even, concerning the actions of Georg Elser. He was a quiet man, a man of few words as he worked clandestinely. He did not want to endanger his plans nor other person's lives by taking them into confidence. And at the end, there is the fascination surrounding the myths of a man, who was by no means the proverbial "simple man" as who he is often portrayed but who was a mechanical wizard instead, a man with political insight, a social conscience and an unwavering sense for justice.

These characteristics remain vivid and they cast Georg Elser as a role model for future generations. This is what makes the memorial site at the source of the Brenz an attraction for young people, not only from Germany. They come to pay tribute to an honest man who acted, when others chose to remain silent and be followers of a murderous idea instead of their conscience. They come to honour a man who knew from the start that he would pay with his life for what he was convinced to be right.



The family of Georg Elser in front of their home. Foto was taken around 1910.

From the left an unknown girl holds Ludwig Elser (deceased in 1915), Maria Elser, Georg Elser, Friederike Elser, mother Maria Elser holding Anna Elser

"During the war we did not have much. Despite our farming we often went hungry at the end of the year."

This quote, like all other quotes not marked otherwise, are taken from the interrogation records. These records were published as Volume 7 in the publications of the Georg Elser Memorial..

A Childhood in Poverty

Georg Elser was born on January 4th, 1903 in Hermaringen, a village south of the regional centre Heidenheim, also located on the river Brenz. Hermaringen was then an agricultural village and today belongs to the so-called "Elser Communities". It was essential in the rehabilitation efforts after Elser was for a long time ignored and by some even falsely accused to have been a henchman of the Hitler regime. In 1984, already, a street was named after Elser in Hermaringen.

A year after Georg's birth his family moved to Königsbronn. He grew up in difficult family surroundings. He had three younger sisters, Friederike, Marie and Anna, and a much younger brother, Leonhard, who was born ten years after Georg. The family toiled the land in a desperate effort to survive. Georg's father, who drank more than would have been healthy, tried his hand as a lumber dealer but with little success.

During interrogation following his arrest Georg describes his youth: "My father did little work as a farmer. He moved logs from the woods and later tried his hand as a lumber dealer. My mother had to do most of the farming. I and my sisters had to work in the stable, on the fields and in the house very early on. Being the oldest, I was also the babysitter for my younger siblings."

He as the oldest went to grade school in Königsbronn for seven years. The school bears his name today. He considered himself an average pupil, but his mother insisted, "He had always excelled". In 1917 he started an apprenticeship as a turner in a metal factory but had to give this up for health reasons. He joined the carpenter's workshop of Robert Sapper and proved to be a gifted cabinet maker. He passed his journeyman's exam in 1922 at the top of his class in the Heidenheim vocational school. Georg Elser had found his calling.

"The discontent within the working class, which I noticed since 1933, and the suspicion of an imminent war, which I had since fall 1938, was prominently on my mind."

" My observations brought me to the conclusion that the situation in Germany could only be changed by doing away with the current leadership. By leadership I mean the brass, like Hitler, Göring and Goebbels."

" My reasoning led me to the conviction that by doing away with these three men other men could come into the government, who would not make unacceptable demands of other countries, who would not usurp foreign countries and who would work for a betterment of the social conditions of the working class."

"I also reckoned that because of the Sudetenfrage things would run afoul and a war was imminent. After the Munich conference the working class was pacified and a war was seen as off the agenda."

Against Hitler from the Beginning

At a closer look Georg Elser shows a multi-faceted character. For a long time he was seen as a loner and what today would be called a nerd. But it was mostly he himself who created that impression in the months prior to his deed. He withdrew to keep his plans strictly secret and not to endanger any potential confidant.

Until then, the young handyman was a very sociable chap. With his concertina or playing the bass fiddle – in later years with a chorded zither – he would entertain at dancing events. He would take hikes with his peers and he had a certain appeal to women. The rather slight man with dark bushy hair largely abstained from alcohol and did not smoke. He was taciturn and thus furthered the impression of a loner. But it was widely known that he was good with his hands and had a knack to professional perfection.

Contrary to his Swabian fellow-countryman Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg with whom he had certain things in common his opposition to the Nazis never wavered. His deep regard for justice played a role in that. He was an individualist and championed human rights. He voted communist, but he would never have fitted within a strict party collective. It is obvious that he figured Hitler a tyrant and warmonger early on. Unlike the so-called elite he showed foresight and clarity of judgment.

His contemporaries report that Elser would leave the room when Hitler's speeches were transmitted via radio. He turned his back on the swastika flags and occasionally dropped remarks that clearly showed his contempt.

All this added up to the motives that spurred Georg Elser to his deed. At the center of this was a deep-rooted fear of a new war with all its horrors and suffering, which he wanted to prevent by all means.



Georg Elser taking a walk in the attire of the times.

Formative Years at Lake Constance

In the year 1925 Georg Elser started his peregrination, which was mandatory after the journeyman exam. It took him to Lake Constance. For poor Swabian country folks the lake was some sort of Shangri-La. Elser's time at the lake should turn out to be imprinting his life. His biographer Hellmut Haasis comments: "While his mother only knew him as a work-addict who would toil in his shed even on Sundays, he should now discover personal freedom and the sweetness of loafing. For an industrious Swabian it was an inconceivable reversal of traditional values. The chains of his depressed and confrontational origins started to become undone."

Via Friedrichshafen he finally ended up in Constance, a city that would become his fate. He found employment after being unemployed in between. He socialized and played music with the band "Oberheintaler" and at clubs and he sharpened his political awareness in the intercourse with his colleagues and acquaintances. Part of this was the reflection on the situation of common workers. He considered membership in a union a natural. Following the advice of a colleague, he joined the "Rote Frontkämpferbund", the armed wing of the German communist party.

And the young cabinetmaker found love in Constance. Apparently he had more than one affair during his stay, and in 1930 his son Manfred was born here. Manfred's mother was a seamstress named Mathilde Niedermann. Both met making music at a culture club. But the romance did not last. They split and Manfred later had a stepfather and took on another name. He never got his embittered mother to tell him more than a few words about his biological father. It was not before the 1990 years that Manfred Bühl went public as being the son of the resistance fighter Georg Elser. But from then on he worked hard to further the reputation of his father. Manfred died 1997 aged 66.

"In fall 1936 I quit my job at Grupp (a Königsbronn carpenter) because on one side the salary was very low but also because he always wanted to teach me things even though he did not have the same abilities that I had."

"I nearly lost the little finger of my right hand in total when I was 7 years old, because I got caught in the cogwheels of my father's grindstone."

Interlude: Flexible Working Hours

There is an episode about Elser's time at Lake Constance, which in a nutshell shows more about the character of the self-reliant and capricious handyman from the Alb than many academic interpretations do.

When Swiss police started interrogating witnesses on request of the German authorities after the November 1939 assassination attempt, because Elser was supposed to have had ties with Switzerland, they questioned the young cabinet maker Schönholzer from Bottighofen near the German border at Constance. Elser had worked for some time for the elder Schönholzer. The son described Elser as an industrious, quiet and solid worker. Then he added: "What struck me as strange was, that he left his work some afternoons to go swimming. The time he missed he more than made up during the rest of the week."

Apparently Elser's idea of personal freedom led him to work flexible hours. Someone like him would view this as a simple human right. He was an enemy of any totalitarian structure or regime.



Munich Conference

Late September 1938 the rulers of Germany, Italy, Britain and France meet.

(from the left Mussolini, Hitler, translator Schmidt, Chamberlain)

The Munich accord of September 30th, 1938, sealed the fate of Czechoslovakia and was a set-back for Hitler's adversaries. Central Eastern Europe is handed to Hitler with the consent of other European powers..

"Last year around this time I was already convinced that the Munich accord would not be the end, that Germany would table demands to other countries and annex other states and that therefore a war was inevitable. "

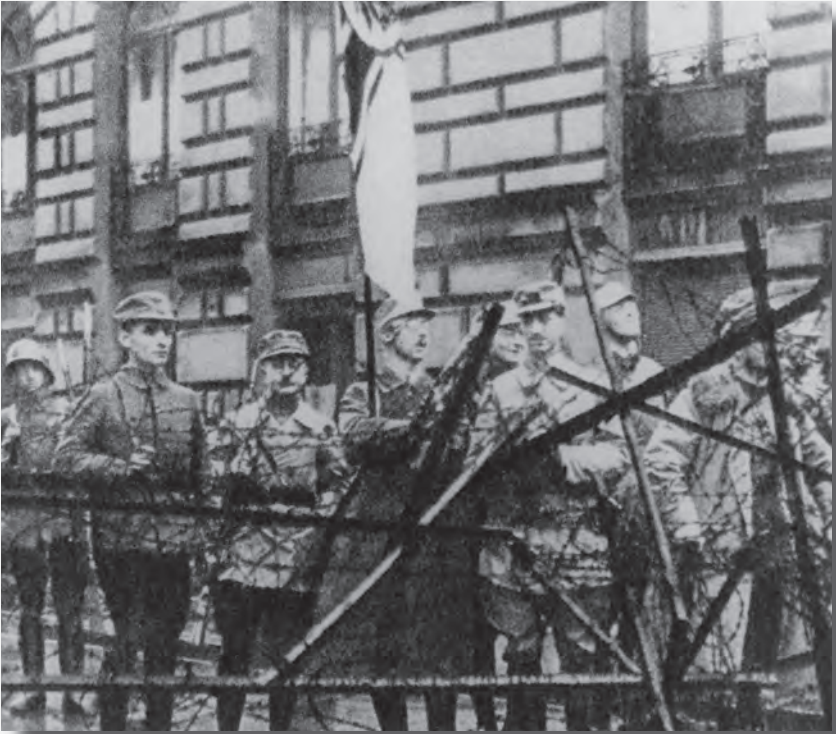
Resolved to Act

In 1932 Georg Elser returned to Königsbronn. His mother was in dire straits and had summoned him back. His father drank more and more and "sold lot after lot to pay his debt". But Georg could not stop the erosion of his family home. His parents split and the family broke up fighting. Georg lived in a furnished room and started an affair with his landlady Elsa Härten. He worked as a cabinetmaker and took up music once more. "I tried to distract myself from our family affairs by playing music."

Towards the end of 1936 Elser took employment as an unskilled laborer at the Waldenmaier fitting factory at Heidenheim. This was his first concrete step on the path to become a resistance fighter. He advanced to a job in the shipping department and got knowledge of a "special unit" within the factory that produced for the armed forces. The "special unit" pressed powder and manufactured fuses for grenades. The war, which Elser feared and loathed, threw its shadows.

It was a long and tenacious and certainly a painful process that led Elser to his assassination plans. He himself commented during interrogation: "The final decision for my deed fell in autumn 1938." And from thereon he moved with the consistency that was his nature. For a full year he was immersed in his plan. He withdrew from the world and worked in leaden solitude on his bomb, which he himself always referred to as the "device".

Using his practical sense and utilizing his planning genius he found the right time and the right place for an attack on the "Führer" during a trip to Munich: The yearly traditional Nazi gathering in commemoration of the failed Hitler-Putsch in November 1923.



Heinrich Himmler carrying the flag during the Hitler Putsch on November 9th, 1923.

The Hitler Putsch 1923

November 8th was a special day for the Nazis. On this day in 1923 they staged the so-called "Hitler Putsch" at Munich. Adolf Hitler tried to seize power for the first time. During a speech by Bavarian State Governor Gustav von Kahr at the "Bürgerbräukeller" beer hall Hitler led an armed horde of Stormtroopers into the venue and declared a "national revolution", dismissing the governments both in Munich and Berlin. The next day the self-styled revolutionaries marched through downtown Munich. At the Feldherrnhalle, a 19th century monument at the Odeonsplatz honoring the Bavarian Army, state police confronted them and a firefight ensued. In all 19 people were shot dead, 16 revolutionaries and three policemen. Hitler fled but was arrested shortly thereafter and put on trial for high treason. But owing to the spirits of time his sentence was lenient.

After seizing power in 1933 the Nazis ceremoniously celebrated November 8th. Part of the ceremonies was Hitler's annual speech to "old fighters" at the "Bürgerbräukeller" and a re-enactment of the march to the Feldherrnhalle. In 1938 Elser saw with an unerring instinct that the yearly gathering at the "Bürgerbräukeller" would be the ideal occasion for his assassination attempt.



The employees of the Vollmer quarry (front row second from the left is chief ordnance handler Kolb. Fourth from the left is quarry owner Georg Vollmer)

"It was often so that Kolb would bring more dynamite from the concrete house than was needed for the blast. How much dynamite was exactly needed could often only be determined when the blast preparation was under way."

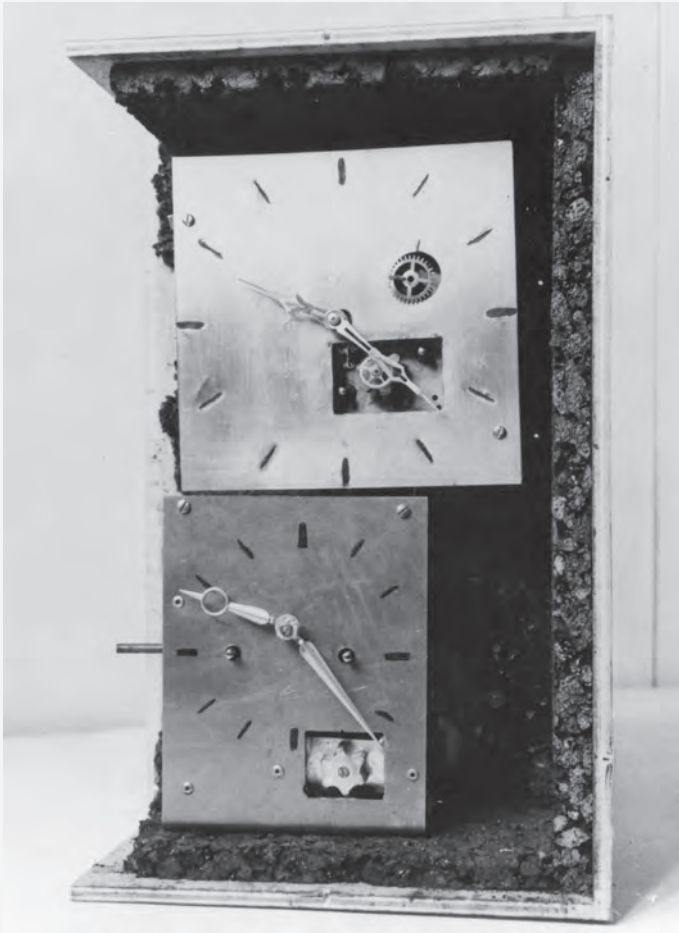
Building an "Infernal Machine"

In November 1938 Elser reconnoitered the "Bürgerbräukeller" with a knowing eye. Here the "old fighters" and nearly all dignitaries of the Third Reich would gather. Only Hermann Göring, who would become "Reichsmarschall" (Marshall of the Empire) in 1940, stayed behind in Berlin. Elser soon found out that the large beer hall was unguarded prior to the event. He chose a column behind the speaker rostrum as the place for his bomb. It would thus have the greatest possible destructive power, he foresaw.

Back at home Elser started work on his "infernal machine". He drew several plans. He gathered the necessary material. At his job he had stolen 250 chunks of pressed powder, which he hid in his closet.

Now he took a job as an unskilled laborer at a quarry near Königsbrunn. There he stole 250 detonator capsules, which he carried unchallenged in his knapsack. At Heidenheim he bought ammunition. His parent's orchard served as a proving ground. He proved to himself that it was possible to ignite the detonators using the cartridges. And he solved the "problem to ignite at a certain time" by utilizing a clockwork.

He then transported everything in a wooden box to Munich, where he rented a furnished room. Needless to say, that the wooden box for transporting the "infernal machine" was self-made. From there on he dedicated his time to installing the bomb at the pre-destined location, something he persistently called his "work" during interrogation by the police.



Side view of a replica of Elser's bomb showing the double clockwork mechanism.

During interrogation Elser drew a detailed plan of the bomb and later during his internment he modeled a minutely detailed replica. The in-line connection of two clockworks enabled Elser to set his mechanical timer days in advance of the attempt on Hitler. The picture shows in the lower part the cogwheel Elser built by his own hand.

"As I would not depend on the reliability of a single clock for my plan to work I have installed the same devices I described within the first clock, into a second clock."

Installing the Bomb

According to Elser's testimony during his interrogation the following happened in the ensuing nights: "During my stay at Munich from August 5th until November 6th (1939) I visited the Bürgerbräukeller between 30 to 35 times at night ... On the days I worked in the Bürgerbräukeller at night, I went to the restaurant of the Bürgerbräukeller between 8 and 10 p.m. to have dinner. I regularly sat in the center of the room and was served by Fräulein Berta. I chose from the menu and had a glass of beer each time."

Around 10 p.m. Elser would ask for the bill. Then he slipped out through the cloakroom to the unlocked great hall. Here he entered the gallery and hid in a closet where empty cardboard boxes were stored. An emergency light sparsely lit the hall. After the beginning of World War II, when air raid police was stationed at the Bürgerbräukeller, there was no more light. Elser waited until the attendants locked the hall. This was usually around 10.30 to 11.30 p.m. He then would sneak to the column he had chosen. There "I started the installation of the device," he told interrogators. He ended this drudgery between 2 and 3 a.m. and returned to his hide-away. There he dozed and vanished after the doors to the hall were unlocked in the morning.

Every once in a while he would be disturbed during his nightly chore. But nobody ever got suspicious. And so the crafty cabinetmaker prepared part of the paneling with a little door, behind which he could break stones from the column. In the ensuing cavity, not visible from the outside, he would later place the bomb.

Bürgerbräu-Keller

Rosenheimerstraße 29



Größter und Schönster Saalbau Münchens
Hochburg der N. S. D. A. P.

Postcard with a view of the Bürgerbräukeller
Proprietor: Andreas Payerl
(Bavarian Economic Archiv F2/8095)

“My Workplace”

It took Elser three nights to finish the door in the paneling. With a certain pride he relayed his nocturnal activities during his interrogations, an attitude often noticeable in his encounters with the police. “I could start my work right away after opening the door. And after finishing my nightly task, I only had to close the door to hide my activities inside the column. Even if anyone had taken a closer look at the column during the day, he would not have noticed any changes.” And all of this he called “my workplace”.

With a chisel, a brace and a shovel Elser would chip away inside the paneling in the light of an electric torch. It was a tedious work. He broke the bricks from the column. To avoid unnecessary noise he tied a piece of cloth around the back of the brace and pressed hard against the stone. “I had to go about my work very carefully. This is why the work took so long.” The deeper he dug into the column, the slower became the progress.

Elser put the debris into a sack that he had crafted from a towel. He emptied the refuse into a cardboard box inside his hideaway. Once the box was full Elser would get a suitcase and carry the rubble to the nearby Isar River. “This way I have removed the debris from the Bürgerbräu two or three times.”

The canny craftsman thought of everything. He mounted a two-millimeter thick iron plate on the inside of the panel door. If anyone should knock on the paneling there should be no treacherous sound to give away the hollow space. And later he put his two clockworks into a box lined with cork. No ticking should be heard on the outside.



Hitler shortly before the explosion during his Bürgerbräukeller speech on November 8th, 1939, commemorating the failed uprising of 1923.

"I had to avoid any sound, if possible, whenever a stone broke and the drill turned. The loudest sound was the loosening of stones. So I waited until the silence was broken by an outside noise. What helped was the automatic flushing of the public toilet every ten minutes."

"I noticed that both clockworks could be clearly heard through the paneling. So I mounted them within a double-walled wooden box fitted with a one centimeter cork lining."

Twice and Thrice – On the Safe Side

During the day Elser would work on his “device” as he could only determine its size after knowing the exact measurements of the cavity in the column. He found plausible explanations for his nightly absence, when asked by his landlords.

Police protocols show a minutely detailed manual of the “infernal machine”. It is a precise description of how springs and bolts interacted, how the primers fused and how all finally ignited the explosive powder. As the Swabian perfectionist did not trust a single clockwork, he installed a second one. And he went even further: “For the same reasons of double and threefold safety I did not pack the explosive material into a single container and fuse it with a single capsule and primer. I used three firing pins on three primers to ignite three explosive capsules.” The timers could be set to a span of several days.

During the nights of November 1st and 2nd Elser placed the explosive material into the cavity within the column. “At the end the entire space right over the ignition mechanism was filled with explosive material, except the space needed for my timer.”

In the night of November 3rd Elser set the timers on the evening of November 8th and thus “let the events take their course”, as he put it. He sent his few belongings to his favorite sister Marie Hirth living in Stuttgart and followed with his suitcase. The following events are typical for Elser: On November 7th he returned from Stuttgart to Munich driven by his obsession for control and a near manic desire to check and check again. He entered the “Bürgerbräukeller” opened the door at the column and made sure the clockworks were working faultlessly. Of course, they did. He had “nothing to adjust”, as he stated to police. Only now he started in the direction of Constance and the Swiss border.



The Munich Bürgerbräukeller after the explosion of November 1939

On November 11th Hitler personally visited the crime scene. He had Nebe explain every detail ... with tense interest he inspected the column in which the masterpiece (the bomb) had been installed. As usual he had stood directly under it during his speech. The column was broken, the steel beams were bent. Nebe eyed his visitor closely: „ Right here most of the debris came down. Anybody standing here would have surely been fatally injured. “

(Hans Bernd Gisevius, a friend of senior chief inspector Arthur Nebe, in his book "Wo ist Nebe? - Where is Nebe?)"

The Explosion

The bomb at the “Bürgerbräukeller” exploded on November 8th 1939 at exactly 9.20 p.m. and turned the hall into a gigantic pile of rubble. It not only tore the column behind the speaker’s rostrum into pieces but also shattered the surrounding and brought down the ceiling. In all, eight people died – seven members of Hitler’s Nazi party and a waitress. Another 63 persons were injured. Maria Henle, the waitress, was a notably tragic victim. If Hitler’s speech had lasted as long as in the years before - and as Elser had counted on - Maria Henle would have survived. During the “Führer’s” speech, service at the tables was not allowed. Maria Henle would have been in another room.

But after verbally attacking the British, Hitler ended his speech at 9.07 p.m., much earlier than one could have guessed. Flanked by dignitaries from the party and the government he exited the hall to the sound of the national anthem. This early demise had nothing to do with providence, as the Nazi party speculated. It were practical reasons that cut Hitler’s appearance short: The “Führer” wanted to return to Berlin as soon as possible to put the finishing touches on the German attack plans on the Western front. The Wehrmacht was already on the advance against Poland in the East. Because a dense November fog shrouded the skies, he could not fly to Berlin but had to take his special train, which took much longer.

During a stop at Nuremberg Hitler learned of the attempt on his life. Without hesitation the German leadership blamed the British Secret Service. An especially diehard lie was born that for a long time cast a dark shadow on the memory of Georg Elser.



Location of Elser's arrest, the Wessenberg Garden in Konstanz

„After thinking about it for some time I also had the intention to write to the German police and explain at length that I alone was guilty of the attack, that I had had no confidant or accomplice. I wanted to send a detailed description and a drawing of my device.“

“I also took into account that I might be extradited to Germany from Switzerland. To guard against this I took certain materials which I thought could be of interest to Swiss military circles. ”

Arrested

A tree-lined lot at Constance directly on the border to the Swiss town of Kreuzlingen holds one of the great enigmas in Georg Elser's life. Instead of continuing his flight with a courageous jump over the border fence in the backyard of Villa Wessenberg he rests under a tree and thus draws the attention of two customs officers. At 8.45 p.m. they arrest him. At this time the rally at "Bürgerbräukeller" was still under way. From an open window one could hear Hitler's speech blaring from the radio.

With dubious excuses Elser tries to get out of the tight spot. The customs officials regard him as a deserter on his way to Switzerland. They hand him over to the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police. Commenting on his ill-fated flight he later says: "If asked what my first thought was, I have to admit that I was furious with myself and my carelessness."

The criminal investigation team at Munich, working under high pressure to find answers to the obvious questions, took some time to draw a connecting line to the man in Gestapo custody at Constance and the explosion. They learned that the arrested man bore a resemblance to a regular guest at the "Bürgerbräukeller" who, like Elser, spoke Swabian dialect. Elser was carted to Munich and interrogated. One officer had a fatal idea. The assassin, so he reckoned, had to work on his knees to dig the cavity into the column. He asked Elser to roll up his pants. Bloodstained and pussy knees were the final giveaway.



During interrogation Georg Elser and Arthur Nebe, head of the criminal investigation office, view a drawing that Elser has provided.

*„Take, for instance, this Elser – what a guy!
He was the only one who had grasped the situation and acted accordingly. He is a hero in our time. And therefore the Nazis, better still the entire upper class, will do everything to eradicate his memory. “
(Senior Chief Inspector Nebe talking to Gisevius)*

Confession, Imprisonment and Death

During interrogation by Senior Chief Inspector Artur Nebe at Munich Elser finally confessed. His confession was added to the investigation record, two volumes strong and bound in red covers. The record vanished and has to this day not reappeared. In the confession it was clearly stated that Elser had no accomplices. The cabinetmaker from Königsbronn acted alone.

The Gestapo, dreaded for torturing its detainees, took over from the Munich police and kept its search for instigators alive. Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, like Hitler would not accept the theory of one man acting on his own. "What idiot drew up this report", he remarked with green ink on the side of the Munich findings.

During the night of November 15th Elser was brought to Berlin and further interrogated by three officers at the Gestapo headquarters for five days. The result of this interrogation are the minutes, which still exist today. Elser drew plans, which were added to the record. His claim to have acted alone was not disproved during the investigation.

From Berlin Elser was brought to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and finally moved to the Dachau concentration camp. He was a "special prisoner" and had some privileges. His cell was larger than those of others. He had a workbench and could work on some carpentry. He was also allowed to play the zither. But otherwise he was in solitary confinement. His only contacts were his SS-guards, which were with him day and night. At the end he was a physical wreck. His health was ruined.

It was a forgone conclusion that Elser would be put to a show trial once Germany had won "final victory". When the breakdown of the Nazi Reich was imminent, he lost his value to the regime. On April 9th 1945 Elser was liquidated. His body was cremated. There is neither a grave nor an epitaph for Georg Elser.

"The man Elser touched me right away. I also am the kind of person who does everything on his own, acts quietly and goes public only when it is necessary or the time has come ... His deed fascinated me: One person trying to alter the course of history ..."

"Georg Elser has endured the tragic fate of a man, who all by himself and believing to do the right thing, unswervingly continued on his path. He became guilty and finally sacrificed his life without gaining the well-deserved recognition. We should not forget that he endured this fate for us, too."

(Dr. Lothar Gruchmann of the Munich Institute for Contemporary History who discovered the interrogation protocol)

A Protocol

A protocol by the Gestapo is the key to understanding the life and deed of Georg Elser. It is from the hands of three Gestapo officers, but there are no other minutes in which the resistance fighter had a chance to voice himself. No other written or verbal records exist.

Lothar Gruchmann, a historian from Munich, discovered the protocol in the 1960s. Together with his colleague Anton Hoch he examined the records and published them at the end of 1970 under the title "Autobiography of an Assassin". All quotes from Georg Elser in this pamphlet were taken from this protocol.

His reasons for his deed can be read here. He stated that the situation of the working class deteriorated after the "national revolution", as the Nazis euphemized their take-over. He meticulously noted the loss of income in Mark and Pfennig. He cites basic human rights when saying, workers could no longer chose a job at their own discretion and were no longer masters and educators of their children.

Georg Elser describes that even after the Munich conference of 1938, during which Great Britain and France gave Hitler a free hand to occupy the Sudetenland, an area with an ethnic German majority in Czechoslovakia, he did not believe that peace was at hand. He feared that matters would not be settled with the Munich accord. "Germany will ask more concessions from other countries und will annex other countries, which makes a war inevitable". The war was well under way during the time of his interrogation. Elser emphasizes: "I wanted to stop further bloodshed with my deed."

Elser reiterates that in his view the situation in Germany could only be changed by "abolishing the current leadership". He was convinced, that after his attempt on Hitler's life "other men will take the reigns, who will make no unacceptable claims to foreign powers, who will not annex foreign countries and who will seek betterment of the situation of the working class".

"Then I witnessed something which only later became clear to me in its entirety. In Sachsenhausen and Dachau I was incarcerated in the same cell block with the man who 1939 executed the assassination attempt at the Bürgerbräukeller on Hitler's personal order: SS-Junior Squad Leader Georg Elser. This man was earmarked to stand a phony public trial like the one surrounding the Reichstag blaze."

(Protestant clergyman Niemöller to students at Göttingen on January 17th, 1946, as published in volume 3 of the Georg-Elser-Booklets "The Niemöller Case")

Letter by Elser's mother to Niemöller, published in the same booklet):

"My son, until his arrest Nov. 39, was never a member of the S.S. (sic) leave alone a Junior Squad Leader. I know nothing of this, and a mother should know better than any outsider. The entire village was outraged over this report. Can you prove where he supposedly was a Squad Leader and at what time? Until his arrest 1939 I know for certain that he was not a member of any of Hitler's formations, and if you need any proof you can ask the entire village. Maybe you fell victim to a misapprehension. The only thing that is of interest to me is never reported, is he still alive or not. In the Third Reich we were prosecuted and jailed, the entire family, and now there are all these contradictions. Who can see clearly, who speaks the truth and who is lying und who has been lying."

A Quagmire of Lies and Legends

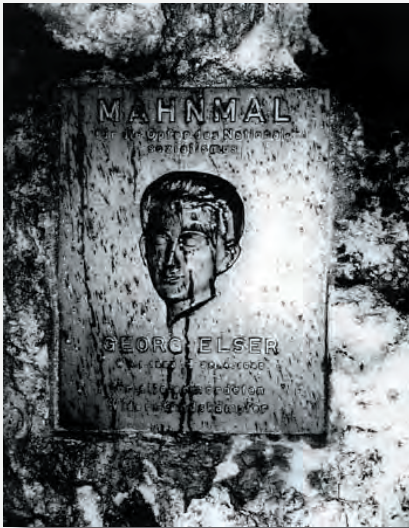
After the war the memory of Georg Elser drowned in a quagmire of lies and legends. In other words: The man who came close to eliminating Hitler long before Graf Stauffenberg and the conspirators of July 20th 1944, seemingly was swallowed by a black hole. People who researched and investigated the truth about the lone resistance fighter from Königsbronn, e.g. an examining magistrate from Munich or Erwin Roth, the editor in chief of the "Heidenheimer Zeitung", found deaf ears.

There were persistent rumors, spread by Nazis AND their opponents. One rumor saw Elser as an agent of foreign powers, especial of the British Secret Service. Others contended the Nazis themselves had staged the attempt in order to give Hitler a halo of being a protégé of providence.

An especially ominous role played Pastor Martin Niemöller, an outspoken opponent of the Nazis who was interned at a concentration camp himself. His word had particular weight. This prominent resistance figure, who was imprisoned longer than Elser, after the war publicly declared his co-inmate to have actually been a tool of the SS. Even a heartbreaking letter from Elser's mother could not make the Lutheran cleric change his mind. He had publicly vocalized what many tended to believe.

Historians by and large settled for the fact, that the backgrounds of the "Bürgerbräukeller" assassination attempt remained shrouded. They preferred to cast a veil of silence over the case. It is in this light, that Erwin Roth's appeal in 1956 must be seen. The journalist published a comprehensive report and publicly demanded: "Give him back his deed."

Actor Klaus Maria Brandauer was instrumental in giving credence to Georg Elser with his film "Georg Elser – A Man from Germany" which opened 1989 in Heidenheim



In 1971 a Georg-Elser-Park was inaugurated in Heidenheim-Schnaitheim. After a lengthy debate the organization of victims of Nazi prosecution put up a stone with a portrait of Georg Elser. It is the first public sign of recognition for Georg Elser and his deed. So little was known about the man who wanted to kill Hitler that even his dying day was wrongly stated on the memorial.

The Georg-Elser-Study-Group, founded in April 1988, has successfully embedded Georg Elser's deed into the common memory of the region by organizing workshops, exhibitions and publishing information of hitherto unknown facts. The Study Group in cooperation with city authorities initiated a memorial plaque which was unveiled at Königsbronn in 1995.

A Change of Mind in the Offing

After Lothar Gruchmann published the protocol of Elser's interrogation, rehabilitation started tenaciously. But it could not be stopped, even though there were setbacks every once in a while. Books and movies about the man from Königsbronn were published. In 1984 the then Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl remembered Elser during a speech honoring the resistance movements against Hitler. Ten years later Kohl likened Elser to the Scholl siblings, whose resistance movement "Weisse Rose" (white rose) also tried to stop the Nazi dictator, but by non-violent means. Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tuchel, the heads of the German Resistance Memorial, noted: "With that, Elser's deed was firmly established in the official memory of the Federal Republic of Germany."

Steinbach and Tuchel advanced matters just like the Georg Elser Study-Group established in the 1980s at Heidenheim. Similar initiatives followed in other cities. At the outset of this development, the British historian Peter Stern wrote in a study about "The Fuhrer and the People": "To find Hitler's true opponents we must look for the common man who came from the same social background as Hitler himself, but who lived and died in a totally different moral setting. His name is Georg Elser." Stern called Elser "Hitler's true antagonist".

Meanwhile, streets and squares in about 50 German cities are named after this common yet outstanding man. Several memorials have been erected. In 2011 an impressive monument called "Denkzeichen" has been put up in Berlin. Elser is honored in literature, theater, movies and the media. He finally arrived where he belongs.



The Georg Elser Memorial from the outside



The Georg Elser statue

Königsbronn at Peace With Itself

During the years of Elser's defamation and disgrace the town of Königsbronn and its citizens were harshly criticized for not doing anything to remember their fellow citizen Elser. But their behavior did not vary from the rest of the country. They also argued, that they were traumatized in the aftermath of events. After the assassination attempt the Gestapo raided the town and put up a terror regime, which had an impact for decades thereafter. The neighboring communities derided Königsbronn as "Attentatshausen" (Assisinationville). A veil of silence settled over the Elser case.

In 1990 the citizens of Königsbronn elected 29-year old Michael Stütz as mayor. He had announced he would campaign for the memory of Elser. On November 8th of the same year, a date of symbolic importance, the city council voted to establish an Elser memorial site. In 1997 the Berlin based German Resistance Memorial drew up a concept and organized its realization. Königsbronn came out of its rigor of silence.

Many Königsbronn citizens attended the opening in February 1998. Baden-Württemberg state secretary Christoph Palmer acknowledged the by now most famous citizen of this community, saying: "The state of Baden-Wurtttemberg is proud of one of its greatest sons."

In 2003 the up to then nameless school was named after Georg Elser. In the same year a memorial stamp was issued. Again, the people of Königsbronn participated vividly. And in 2010 an impressive metal sculpture showing Elser departing for Munich was erected at the railway station. Manfred Maier from the Elser Working Group at Heidenheim had fought stubbornly to have this monument put into place. Friedrich Frankowitsch, a sculptor from Sontheim in the Brenz Valley, modeled it.

"Elser took great care in his testimony to not cast a shadow of suspicion on anyone to have aided and abetted him. Hitler was certainly right when he observed, Elser would only admit what had been found out already. The decisive finding of our examination is the fact, that there are no indications to put Elser's claim into doubt, that he was the sole perpetrator."

(Anton Hoch in his report on the research of the Bürgerbräukeller assassination attempt. This report was a landmark and first published in 1969. Hoch, a historian, was a fellow at the Munich Institute for Contemporary History and evaluated the interrogation protocol discovered by Lothar Gruchmann)

*"It is the voice of the Swabian carpenter who had a delicate sense for the individual human right and the limits of the state's power."
(Hoch in his report on Elser's statements during the interrogation)*

"It was not until the end of the 1970s that Anton Hoch, fellow of the respected Munich Institute of Contemporary History, could publish an Elser lifeline which put the assassination attempt of November 8th 1939 into perspective and validated and rebutted hearsay and innuendo surrounding the assassin who came from the people. The Munich Institute was never limited by a precast opinion, and Hoch was intimately familiar with information on and about the time in question. His essay was a history sensation and undoubtedly an act of redemption for Elser and his family."

(Peter Steinbach, scientific curator of the Berlin Memorial on German Resistance, during a speech at Heidenheim commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Bürgerbräu assassination attempt)

"Elser symbolizes the alternative to the functional obedience of public officials, military men and Nazi leaders and also to the stifling subordination of many contemporaries rallying around the swastika-flag until the final hour. And he lived this alternative to the ultimate consequence."

(Steinbach in his Heidenheim speech)

„Adolf Hitler was the real traitor of Germany and civilization in general, which was the common basis until 1933. Attorney General Fritz Bauer made this unmistakably clear in the early 1950s. He would have refused to put Elser on trial, perhaps because he knew that resisting a criminal authority was the inevitable consequence of a moral decision long before this concept was included in Germany’s basic law, its constitution. This resistance is the ultimate resort when all other means to change the situation have failed.“

(Johannes Tuchel and Peter Steinbach of the Berlin Memorial on German reference work on Georg Elser)

“The long period of silence surrounding Georg Elser, the decades of rumors, suspicions and contortions have for years prevented that the history of his assassination attempt was properly researched. Chances have been wasted to interrogate Elser’s contemporaries until it was too late. As a result, painful gaps remain in the history of this act of resistance.“

(Ulrich Renz, journalist and fellow of the Elser Memorial at Königsbronn)

“By all means, it must be made clear that picturing Elser as ‘a simple man’ is a crude misunderstanding. Like his adversary Hitler he came from a simple background. But contrary to the deadbeat from Austria Elser was a man of stature. A friend would even use the term ‘Gentleman’ to describe him.“

(Renz in an article for the “Georg-Elser-Newsletter“)

“Why is the Elser case not finally coming to rest, his closest relatives ask ... The answer must be: Because Georg Elser - knowingly or not - put his hand on the wheel of history, in German, if not the world.“

(Erwin Roth in his pioneering research on Elser, published in the newspaper Heidenheimer Zeitung on April 21st 1956 – as documented in volume 2 of the Georg Elser Booklets)

Timeline

Jan 4th 1903	Johann Georg Elser is born at Hermaringen
1904	The family moves to Königsbronn
1910-1917	Elser goes to school at Königsbronn and starts work as a cabinetmaker apprentice
Spring 1922	Elser finishes his apprenticeship at the top of his class
1922-1925	He works at carpenter shops and furniture factories at Königsbronn, Aalen, Heidenheim and helps out in the family business
November 8th/9th	Hitler Putsch at Munich
March 1925	Elser starts his professional peregrination
Until 1932	He works as a journeyman at Lake Constance and does odd-jobs
September 9th 1930	His son Manfred is born at Constance
August 1932	Return to Königsbronn and work in the family business
January 30th 1933	Hitler becomes German chancellor
December 1936 to March 1939	Elser works at the fitting factory Waldenmaier at Heidenheim
Fall 1938	Decision to eliminate the Fuhrer, travel to Munich
September 29th 1938	Munich accord signed by Germany, France and England
April 1939	Elser again travels to Munich and works in a quarry
August 1939	Elser finally moves to Munich. Working more

	than 30 nights, he places the bomb at the Bürgerbräukeller
September 1st 1939	Germany invades Poland
November 8th 1939	At 8.45 p.m. Elser is arrested near the Swiss border at Constance. At 9.20 p.m. the bomb explodes, killing 8 people and injuring 63. Hitler had left at 9.07p.m.
November 13th/14th 1939	Elser confesses to the police at Munich
July 20th 1944	Stauffenberg attempts to kill Hitler but fails
End of 1944/1945	Elser is moved to the Dachau concentration camp. On April 1945 he is murdered
May 7th to 9th 1945	Germany surrenders
January 17th 1946	Pastor Martin Niemöller in a speech to students at Gottingen calls Elser a Nazi tool
February 23rd 1950	Munich magistrate decides to open investigation of the Bürgerbräukeller assassination attempt
April 21st 1956	Erwin Roth publishes the true background behind Elser's deed in the "Heidenheimer Zeitung"
1964	German postal service issues a stamp collection remembering the resistance against Hitler. Elser is not included
November 9th 1969	German public TV airs film "The Assassin" produced by Rainer Erlen and Hans Gottschalk
1969	Anton Hoch publishes his findings about Elser
1970	Lothar Gruchmann publishes the interrogation protocol
July 20th 1984	Chancellor Kohl acknowledges Elser

April 27th 1988	Elser Working Group is established at Heidenheim
October 17th 1989	Film by Klaus Maria Brandauer about Elser premieres
April 4th 1995	First Elser memorial on the occasion of 50th anniversary of his murder
January 25th 1997	A public square at Munich is named after Georg Elser First public appearance of his son Manfred
April 13th 1997	Elser's son Manfred dies
July 7th 1997	Elser exhibition at the German Resistance Memorial Berlin
February 14th 1998	Opening of the Elser Memorial Site at Königsbronn
January 1st 2003	Königsbronn school is named after Elser
January 24th	Stamp commemorating Elser is issued
2010-2012	Around 50 towns name streets and squares after Elser. Sculptures at Berlin and Königsbronn are unveiled

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All quotes not marked otherwise are from the interrogation protocol of Georg Elser. Those were published as Volume 7 in the brochure of the Georg Elser Memorial House.

In this brochure the origins and background of Georg Elser are presented as well as his life and his deed. From Königsbronn in the Brenz Valley the handyman, born in 1903, set out to change the course of history. He failed by just that much. On November 8th he exploded a bomb in the Bürgerbräukeller at Munich, a beer hall used for public events. The target of this assassination attempt, the dictator Adolf Hitler, narrowly escaped the long and meticulously planned and well founded act of resistance by suddenly leaving the site 13 minutes before the explosion. At the end of WWII Georg Elser was murdered in the Dachau concentration camp. Had the Swabian carpenter succeeded with his attempt on Hitler, it could have saved 50 Million lives according to reputable estimates. Today the Georg-Elser-Memorial house at the source of the Brenz at Königsbronn keeps alive the memory of the daring deed of this dedicated yet lonely would-be assassin who was a perfectionist in all technical aspects and a concerned citizen with a political foresight as well.