The Man Who Almost Killed Hitler

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Georg Elser was someone in history that attempted something very few had tried, assassinate Adolf Hitler. Elser had figured out everything there was to know about Hitler’s speech that was coming up down to the minute. However, he did not account for the fog delay Hitler was facing and missed his target by thirteen minutes, though he had killed several people in the massive blast, he had failed his primary objective. Elser’s bomb was a failure in his mind, although he did kill several people and injure many others, he was not happy with the explosive’s outcome, and was killed for his mistake. (9)

Elser was born on January fourth 1903, in Hermaringen Germany. He had ended up completing elementary school and then found and apprenticeship as a lathe operator. He would soon quit two years after because of health conditions. In 1922 after he then completed an apprenticeship as a carpenter, he later started working in a watch factory for about four years. Those four years working in the watch factory may have helped him with the making of his time bomb. (9) He later started working as a carpenter for a Swiss company where he gathered skills for carving into the column that would soon hold his time bomb. Around the same time he had also joined a workers club. In between his jobs Elser had a child in 1930 whose name was Manfred. He however, did not marry the mother to the child and the two of them had soon stopped seeing each other. Elser also enjoyed playing a zither, a stringed instrument. Later on in his life he joined a musical club where he played along with others. (10)

Elser’s political view was different than most in 1930’s Germany compared to most. Elser supported the Communist Party mostly because he wanted to help support his job. Though his opinion wasn’t very popular he voted on the Communist Party. When Hitler took power Elser refused to take part on the Nazi parties elections. Elser also refused to do the Nazi salute even
though he was told to. This hate for the Nazi party and everything it stood for most likely helped push Elser to attempt to assassinate Hitler.(9)

Elser’s plan was to plant a time bomb in the Bürgerbräukeller set to blow when Hitler was doing an annual speech. Though Elser only had an elementary level of education he had the plan set out from the start. First, he would to cut into a column at the Bürgerbräukeller near the podium where Hitler would perform his speech. The bomb making process took place at his parents orchard mostly because it was in a secluded area far away from anyone in the area. Elser would also collect parts from his various jobs. According to Atlas Obscura, “He’d already been working at an armament factory in nearby Heidenheim, where he’d started systematically stealing explosives. He eventually amassed 105 blasting cartridges and 125 detonators.” He was also working at a metal factory at the time and stealing parts from there as well. Elser, during a span of a couple of months, created over 250 explosives and soon after he was testing timed explosives on his family orchard. (10)

Elser’s plan for cutting into the column was going to be an exhausting process for him in the months leading up to the speech. He would often go to the Bürgerbräukeller and eat, but he would stay after hours and hide until the staff left and then begin to cut into the column. This process took a toll on his sleep schedule since he would be working all night until the staff came in the next morning. Then after working all night he had gone to work on making and perfecting his time bomb leaving little to no time for him to sleep. Elser would store his debris in a briefcase in an attempt to leave no trace of him hollowing the column out. He had also installed a secret door to conceal his plot. Though hollowing out a column was hard work Elser ended up carving out a space big enough for the bomb in about a three month time span. His knees were
also extremely scratched and bruised because of the way that the hole was forming in the column. His strategy of staying hidden and doing work through the night was never noticed and he placed his bomb inside the column three days before the event was going to unfold.(7)

Elser’s idea has been a triumph in terms of not being noticed, meaning he had all of the timing right as well as building a functioning time bomb. His bomb did in fact blow up, but he missed his target by thirteen minutes. Though he didn’t kill Hitler, he did kill seven with the blast and injured sixty-three others. The blast also destroyed the Bürgerbräukeller completely and nothing of it stands there today except for a plaque in memoriam for the lives that were lost in the explosion.(7)

The downfall of Elser’s plan started before the bomb even went off. When he was exiting Germany into Switzerland he was stopped by border police thinking he was a smuggler. Though they discovered that he wasn’t a smuggler they did find a postcard from the Bürgerbräukeller in his pocket. This occurred around the same time the bomb went off, so the suspicion of Georg being involved skyrocketed. Once the rubble was cleared at the Bürgerbräukeller Nazi officials discovered that the bomb was placed in a low area. This detail pushed Elser’s chance of being involved to almost guaranteed because of the scratches discovered on his knees. Elser was then sent to Munich Germany to be interrogated by the Gestapo, or the Nazi secret police.(7)

Elser had triumphed throughout the last week, carving out a column and planting a time bomb inside of said column, but things were about to get extremely tragic for him. Elser would deny that he had planted the bomb for a long time, going through extensive interrogations and then tortures over and over again until finally he cracked. He had admitted to planting the bomb alone with no one else's help. The Gestapo didn’t believe on bit of his story however.
Their thoughts were that no one with an education of an elementary student could pull off a stunt that big. A bomb of that magnitude with a plan that thought out was almost unthinkable for the Gestapo. They soon attempted to get more out of Elser, like who were his accomplices via more interrogations and torture. Soon Elser had given up all of the knowledge they had wanted and was promptly sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.(3)

Elser spent the rest of his days on Earth in the Dachau and Sachsenhausen concentration camps. Many still had believed that he was working with accomplices however, most thought the British secret service, and Elser was still put up to torture and interrogations extremely often. The Nazi’s refused to kill Elser until there was a trail as well. Though they did not want to risk the slim chance of him being ruled innocent they would attempt to rig a trail for him. Though this trail never happened, Elser would end up being executed near the Dachau concentration camp, on the execution wall. Hitler ended up giving the order in the end due to the Nazi’s starting to collapse. Elser was shot and killed by a bullet to the back of the neck, which was shot by SS Oberscharführer Theodor Heinrich according to the website World War Two Gravestone. Elser was killed only a couple of weeks from the end of World War Two. The body of Elser was then buried in a mass grave in the Leitenberg cemetery located near Dachau. Elser’s story however, was not heard until the 1960’s when the Gestapo’s records had been released for the public eye.(2)

Elser’s motivation behind the assassination was to stop the way his country was going. He knew that Hitler was going to bring the country down into a state of war. Elser said, “… that the situation in Germany can only be changed by eliminating the current leadership.”(2) Elser also said, “I wanted to prevent the war,”(2) in regards to the assassination attempt.
Elser’s bomb was not a success in his mind but his story not only showed his triumph in learning the many intricate details of the Nazi parties and their public celebrations, but also showed the tragedy that was his last few years where he was tortured and interrogated by the Gestapo and killed a few weeks before the war was over. Sure his bomb failed, but he had still gotten his point across, that he had the potentiality to kill Hitler and that he wanted him dead. Though his bomb had missed his target by thirteen minutes and was a tragedy in his mind, but in the eyes of the Nazi party he had triumphed in his over all goal.
Endnotes

Primary Sources

(1) the Charley Project. "1945: Johann Georg Elser, Dogged Assassin."
  Accessed a picture of the ceremony that was held for the victims of the bomb as well as background information on Elser's childhood, where he had grown up and who his parents were as well as a slight background of his parents' lives.

  Accessed a quote from Elser as well as information on the interrogations and accessed a picture of the damage.

  Accessed a letter to the commandant of the K.L. as well as a picture of Elser in the Dachau Concentration Camp, and some more information on the time that Elser spent in the Concentration Camp.


Accessed 22 Feb. 2019. Accessed background on Elser's carpentry career as well as the political view of Elser and multiple perspectives on the blast’s damage.

Secondary


Read up on how the public was getting for information on the topic of Elser's bomb.


(9)Hopmans, Rob. "Elser, Johan Georg." World War II Gravestone, Disqus, ww2gravestone.com/people/elsner-johan-georg/. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019. Accessed where Elser was born, where he got supplies for his bomb and how he built it, how he was caught by Nazi officials, interrogation details, and lastly how he was killed and where he was buried

(10)Inscoe, Michael. "Denkzeichen Georg Elser." Atlas Obscura, www.atlasobscura.com/places/denkzeichen-georg-elsner. This website got me some extra background information. It also gave me the process on how Georg Elser had made the bombs and planted them