

Fritz Molden

FIRES IN THE NIGHT

**THE SACRIFICES
AND SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE
AUSTRIAN RESISTANCE
1938-1945**

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The Sacrifices and Significance
of the Austrian Resistance, 1938–1945

Translated from the German
by Harry Zohn

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Preface

On numerous occasions in World War II Austrian and Allied parachutists were dropped over Austria under cover of darkness in order to join groups of the Resistance. Triangular fires served to guide the pilots flying over unfamiliar territory to the receiving stations prepared for the parachutists. The title of this book refers to these long-extinguished “fires in the night.” Fifty years have passed since the dark, cold night of the Hitler regime settled over Austria, and now this book goes beyond mere reportage to document the fact that between 1938 and 1945 the fire of resistance against a criminal regime was never completely extinguished. Like a flaming torch in the darkness of hatred, misery, and death this fire was passed on as faith in a better world of peace and freedom. The main purpose of this book thus is to commemorate the tens of thousands of men and women who in those years gave their lives for Austria and for the victory of humaneness, justice, and freedom over the bestial Nazi tyranny.

Fires in the Night is neither a scholarly study nor an editorial expanded to a few hundred printed pages. This book is a factual account by a man who personally witnessed some of the events detailed here, and it is also based on a variety of sources and documents. The author's own experiences and recollections are contained in his autobiography, *Exploding Star: A Young Austrian Against Hitler* (New York, 1979), but here pride of place is given to documents that have recently become available as well as to reports by other eyewitnesses and accounts by historians.

Die Feuer in der Nacht was first published by Amalthea (Vienna-Munich) in 1988. For the English-language edition of this book the author endeavored to highlight and trace those data and connections that deal with the efforts of the various Allied forces to liberate occupied Austria—to the extent that these forces cooperated with the Austrian

Resistance or individual Austrian freedom fighters. In keeping with historical developments pride of place had to be given to the activities of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and other secret general staffs under the American Supreme Command in London, Paris, Algiers, and Caserta. Hence these units, and in particular the 2677th Regiment OSS and its Detachment A (Austria), are treated in detail. Due attention is given as well to the operations of British commandos who collaborated with the Austrian Resistance (for example, Gaiswinkler's mission) and to the French officers who, in cooperation with the Austrian Resistance groups 05, were active in Western Austria after the summer of 1944. Finally, the various efforts of the leaders of the Resistance (Szokoll, Lemberger, Molden) to cooperate with the Red Army or the Soviet command posts in SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces) had to be detailed. Some new insights were derived from the increasingly declassified documents in American military archives (at the Pentagon in Washington). In recent years the British and the French have also made their archives at least partially accessible, and it is to be hoped that the new Soviet policy of *glasnost* will soon make available Russian documents about this period and aspect of World War II as well.

The author is particularly indebted to books by Hellmut Andics (*Fünzig Jahre unseres Lebens*, Vienna, 1968), Radomir Luza (*The Resistance in Austria, 1938–45*, Minneapolis, 1984), Otto Molden (*Der Ruf des Gewissens*, Vienna, 1958), Joseph Persico (*Piercing the Reich*, New York, 1979), and Carl Szokoll (*Der gebrochene Eid*, Vienna, 1985). An appendix presents the text of an address by Alfons Stillfried, the great Austrian patriot and freedom fighter, that was delivered in 1946, one year after the liberation of Austria. His evaluation of the Austrian Resistance is particularly timely and contains parallels to today's conditions that are nothing short of astonishing.

After almost three years of intensive historical research and soul-searching on the part of Austrians, it is equally astonishing on the basis of the facts assembled in this book that Austria's contribution toward its liberation, as urged by the Allies in the Moscow Declaration of 1943, was far greater than both Austrians and observers around the world had assumed for a long time. This evidence permits the conclusion that the number of Austrian Nazis and their heinous deeds as well as the number of Austrian Resistance fighters and their activities toward the goal of liberation have been considerably underestimated. Today it is important to give a new generation an honest and unvarnished picture of Austria at the time of Hitler's invasion—from the multitudes cheering him on the Heldenplatz to the first transports taking newly arrested Austrians to Nazi concentration camps—as well as an account both of

Austrian participation in Nazi war crimes and the desperate struggle of those who never would and could accept the victory of evil, in the form of the swastika, in their Austrian homeland. One cannot be set off against the other in any way, but reflecting on these two modes of behavior might lead one to the conclusion that in Austria, as in most other countries, there were good people and bad ones, courageous and cowardly ones, indolent people and fellow travelers as well as men and women who were ready to sacrifice their lives for freedom and justice. To demonstrate this is the main intention of this book.

*Fritz Molden
Alpbach (Tyrol)
March 1989*

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Resistance in Austria: Development, Scope, Significance, Results, and Parameters (1938–1945)

“In the beginning was the word”—this short Bible verse (John 1:1) applies to the Austrian Resistance as well, for the first activities of that Resistance probably consisted of critical discussions about the imminent or actual Nazi regime in post-Anschluss Austria—that is, on March 11, 1938, or immediately thereafter.

It is only natural that the question “What is Resistance?” should arise. Could a critical conversation among friends and acquaintances or—involving greater risks—among strangers be regarded as resistance, or was some action necessary? Was it sufficient to listen to enemy broadcasts, an activity that the Nazi authorities during World War II punished by years in prison, or was it necessary to share with third parties what had just been heard over the British Broadcasting Corporation or on some other enemy broadcast? (After the beginning of the war the latter activity carried the death penalty.) Was not the mere telling of political jokes an act of resistance? After all, anyone who was caught telling such a joke or who was subsequently denounced by someone risked going to jail or being sent to a concentration camp. Was a kindly word spoken to a Jewish neighbor or some aid given to “persons of non-Aryan descent” already an act of resistance? That surely applied to the sheltering of so-called “U-boats”—Jews or those persecuted for political reasons who were often concealed for months or even years by persons risking their own lives. In other words, were all utterances or activities that contravened the laws of the Third Reich—that is, political infractions rather than blackmarketeering or looting during a blackout—already acts of resistance?

These matters are open to debate. There is no doubt that some of the above activities were more dangerous than, say, throwing leaflets from a bus or a train during a wartime blackout. In any case, even this short list shows how difficult it has been, and will continue to be, to evaluate the Austrian Resistance as far as the support of the population, its parameters, its effect on the Nazi regime, and its appraisal by posterity are concerned.

The Austrian Resistance differed markedly from the resistance movements of the other countries that were subsequently occupied by the National Socialists or the Third Reich. Austria was annexed in peacetime, and this annexation was, in the final analysis, recognized and more or less ratified by every state except Mexico. Isolated protests like that of the Soviet Union were rather insignificant. Within a matter of weeks every country closed its embassy in Vienna and transformed it into a consulate or a consulate-general, offices that were subordinate to the respective embassies in Berlin, the capital of the Reich. There was no army that had been beaten, that had fled or been captured in part—a military force formerly armed that could have hidden among the civilian population and constituted the nucleus of a future group of partisans or maquis. Nor was there a linguistic barrier of the kind that helped most other countries occupied by the Germans to engage in a struggle or resistance against the system of occupation. Finally, there was a hopelessly muddled political and psychological situation in relation to union with Germany.

In 1918 all members of the Austrian parliament had demanded that the newly founded Republic Deutsch-Österreich (German-speaking Austria) become part of the German Reich (Weimar Republic). After Hitler seized power in Germany, the major political parties in Austria—including the small KPÖ (Communist Party), not to mention the always staunchly anti-German Monarchists and Legitimists—unequivocally rejected political union with National Socialist Germany. Yet two prominent representatives of the two great camps of Austria welcomed the Anschluss in the first weeks after the occupation of Austria—namely, Dr. Karl Renner as the chairman of the Nationalrat (National Council, i.e., the Speaker of Parliament) and head of the Social Democratic Party, and Cardinal Dr. Theodor Innitzer, the Archbishop of Vienna. In the fall of 1938 Renner even went so far as to hail the Munich Agreement, in accordance with which the Western allies “gave” the Sudetenland to Hitler. The Catholic leaders learned their lesson more quickly than the Social Democrats did. As early as summer 1938 all Catholic schools were closed, and in September and October the Nazi state declared war on the Church. Soon Karl Renner and his friends in the Social Democratic camp also had occasion to note that neither

the union between the German and the Austrian labor forces nor the promises of Hitler's Gauleiter (district chief) Bürckel would improve conditions. Secretary-General Robert Danneberg, whom Renner had hoped to save with his pro-Anschluss declaration, was not released from a concentration camp and was, in fact, killed there in 1942. Less prominent young Socialists like Franz Olah and Felix Slavik were arrested in short order.

Since 1933 the Christian Socials had been so closely associated with the Ständestaat (corporative state) of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg that it would not have done them any good if they had suddenly welcomed the Anschluss—an action that would not have been credible in anyone's eyes. The small number of Christian Social leaders or adherents of the authoritarian Vaterländische Front (Fatherland Front) who suddenly professed their support of Greater Germany and of Hitler, were, at the very least, opportunists or, in the eyes of Austrian patriots, guilty of nothing less than high treason. However, in 1938 the problem of belonging to the German people did exist among a large part of the population. Those who hailed the Anschluss in the spring of 1938 were by no means only members of the hitherto illegal Nazi party. For both economic and political reasons the supporters of the Anschluss were far more numerous than the barely 15 percent of the population who were National Socialists. Hence there was no predicting how many Austrians (if any) would actively oppose the Nazi regime, be it for religious, political, or other ideological reasons, such as a basically conservative and patriotic attitude.

The first groups that seemed to be virtually predestined to offer active resistance were the Legitimists and the Monarchists, who had always opposed Hitler and the Nazi system and championed a free and independent Austria, and, on the left, the tiny KP (Communist Party), which had been illegal since the unrest of February 1934 but was excellently organized. In the spring of 1938 it was assumed that there were around 200,000 to 300,000 committed Legitimists or Monarchists, although only a small fraction of these, around 10,000 or 15,000, were registered members of the appropriate organizations and thus visible to the watchful eye of the Gestapo. In the case of the Communists it was known that in February 1938 there were 14,000 to 16,000 party members, although the number of sympathizers among the leftist workers and in certain intellectual circles was considerably higher than that. This was due to the fact that the Communists, unlike the Social Democrats and the Revolutionary Socialists, whose leaders—both those who had gone into exile and those who had stayed home—refrained from opposing the Nazi state after the Anschluss and warned their comrades against resisting, had from the outset emphasized their

unconditional struggle against the Third Reich. It is hard to establish the number of those sympathizers, but it may be assumed that considerable numbers of people from the Socialist camp sympathized with the KP, especially in well-organized unionized outfits like the Bundesbahn (federal railroad—later the Reichsbahn), the postal service, or a number of large industrial firms (for example, in Greater Vienna or Upper Styria).

A third group that seemed predestined for resistance were the supporters of Schuschnigg's corporative state, the political structure that had just been destroyed by Hitler. However, those who had been in prominent positions were immobilized within days or weeks after the German invasion, and many of them were arrested and sent to prisons or concentration camps. Even those who were released again remained under the constant surveillance of the Gestapo. After all, in the Third Reich, and after 1938 in Austria as well, the Hauswarte (house guardians), Blockwarte (block guardians), and Ortsgruppenleiter (chiefs of local groups) of the Nazi Party guaranteed a constant control from apartment to apartment and house to house. Of the approximately 75,000 people arrested in Austria during the six weeks following the Anschluss, around 55,000 belonged to this group, and thus these likely members of the Resistance were thwarted from the very beginning.

Within the non-Marxist but anti-Nazi camp this left only some not yet prominent and not particularly active persons who could theoretically have joined the Resistance. These were primarily youths, students, or retired persons—those who were not yet, or no longer, in the limelight.

Natural opponents of the new Nazi regime were the almost 200,000 Austrian Jews and a number of smaller groups hated and persecuted by the Nazis, such as the gypsies or Jehovah's Witnesses. However, both the Jews and the other minorities were basically unsuited for any resistance activities, since they were from the very first persecuted and therefore observed by the Nazis. In point of fact, in 1938 it was primarily Communists, Legitimists, devout Catholics from all walks of life, students, and liberal intellectuals in the major cities who made initial, although still rather dilettantish, attempts at resistance. This first wave of resistance came to an end as early as the fall of 1938, for it had taken the Gestapo only three or four months to ferret out these early amateurs of underground struggle and arrest them. Astonishingly enough, other groups rapidly took their place; these proceeded somewhat more cautiously and had the advantage of not being compromised.

It is hard to believe that the Communists were the only ones who did not observe the minimal rules of caution. Every time a group of KP idealists had been flushed out and arrested by the Gestapo, new

emissaries from Moscow (or, at the very beginning, from Prague and Paris) appeared and formed new groups with the same organizational pattern. Thus it happened that between 1938 and 1943, when they were finally smashed by the German Security Service, the Communists had to change their leadership five or seven times, for the Gestapo usually managed to identify and immobilize the leaders after just a few months. Between 1938 and late 1943 more than 6,000 Communists were arrested in the Reich provinces Vienna and Niederdonau (Lower Danube, i.e., Lower Austria) and probably more than 10,000 in all of Austria. Several thousands of these were executed or killed. This incredibly high number indicates that if one can assume that in the spring of 1938 there were 15,000 party members, two-thirds of these comrades were arrested by the Gestapo while engaging in Resistance activities and murdered in large numbers.

The Legitimists had a substantially larger reservoir from which to supply their apparatus of activities, although that, too, was soon decimated. Unlike the Communists, however, they stood their ground until the end of the war and always had an above-average share in the big Resistance movements that were finally formed and transcended local limits. It was similar with the Catholic students, particularly those members of the *Bündische Jugend* (fraternal youth groups) who had not joined the Nazis in the 1930s. There, too, the share of activists did not diminish despite disproportionately great losses. This was partly due to the fact that many of these youths or students were drafted into the army in the early years of the war and thus appeared to be safe from the Gestapo. Those who were wounded returned home, were able to resume their activities in the Resistance, and were available as replacements for associates lost to the movement.

The first great actions of the non-Marxist, or rather non-Communist, Resistance came in the years 1939 and 1940. Three big Resistance groups joined forces: the so-called Greater Austrian Freedom Movement as well as the Austrian Freedom Movement I and the Austrian Freedom Movement II. The most prominent historian who has researched the Austrian Resistance, Radomir Luza, a professor at Tulane University (New Orleans) and a native of Czechoslovakia, where he was active in the Resistance during World War II, has termed the Catholic conservative groups that formed after the fall of 1938 and existed until the summer of 1940, when they were discovered and destroyed by the Gestapo, the "traditionalists." The three leaders of these movements were interesting types. One of them, an Augustinian canon from Klosterneuburg named Roman Karl Scholz, created the *Österreichische Freiheitsbewegung* (ÖFB, Austrian Freedom Movement) together with his friend Dr. Viktor Reimann in the fall of 1938. Scholz was a multiply

gifted man with a pronounced sense of mission and strong religious convictions. These he shared with the considerably more introverted Dr. Jakob Kastelic, a Viennese lawyer and the founder as well as leader of the Greater Austrian Freedom Movement. Kastelic, an Austrian patriot from the very beginning, had founded the Grossösterreichische Freiheitsbewegung in the fall of 1938 with the help of the Social Democratic journalist Johann Schwendenwein and the conservative writer Dr. Karl Rössl-Majdan.

Scholz and Kastelic now wished to establish contact with the Resistance group of Dr. Karl Lederer, a commissioner in the government's Department of Finance in Vienna. Lederer had also founded, in 1938, an Österreichische Freiheitsbewegung together with his main associates, the mechanical engineer Alfred Miegler and the businessman Rudolf Wallner. (For simplicity's sake, we shall call the latter ÖFB II to distinguish it from Roman Scholz's ÖFB I.) Lederer had also come from the Catholic conservative camp and had in the 1930s belonged to the Ostmärkische Sturmscharen (a rightist militia). He was a fanatical supporter of an independent Austria and was ready to fight for one together with his friends. The three groups finally agreed on a *modus collaborandi*, but for reasons of political security and probably of prestige as well there was to be no central headquarters.

Nevertheless, the contacts between the three groups, which by the spring of 1940 comprised more than 1,000 activists, were quite close—much too close to escape for long being shadowed by the Gestapo. In late July and early August of 1940 more than 150 Resistance fighters were arrested. Another 300 members of the Resistance group were interrogated by the Gestapo; they, too, were to be imprisoned, but there was no room for them in any prison. This group had been betrayed by Otto Hartmann, an actor at the Burgtheater. Hartmann's motives are said to have been the result of emotional instability as well as greed.

Scholz, Kastelic, and Lederer, the three leaders of the Resistance movements, as well as their closest associates—Fischer-Ledenice, Heintschel-Heinegg, Simmerl, Kühmayer, Christian, Loch, Wallner, and Miegler—were sentenced to death and executed. Thus an informer's treachery caused the destruction of the first big non-Marxist Resistance movement in the summer of 1940.

Other groups, which fortunately had never joined the big movement—presumably because they had not known of its existence—continued to exist. One of them was the group around Major Alfons Stillfried, of which Dr. Alfred Miksch, Dr. Hans Dorrek, and Dr. Karl Gruber were also members. These groups operated cautiously, and hence their chances of survival were much better. Even though in the

succeeding years some of these Resistance fighters were arrested by the Gestapo, they invariably regained their freedom and were eventually able to play important roles in the decisive phases of the Resistance in 1944 and 1945.

Other groups of “traditionalists” survived in Graz, Salzburg, Linz, Innsbruck, and Vorarlberg. They kept a low profile and contented themselves with recruiting supporters in their immediate vicinity, carrying out regional propaganda activities and carefully cultivating contacts. Nevertheless, some of these groups were broken up—in particular the one in Salzburg headed by Johann Graber, a postal official from an Austrian youth group called Österreichisches Jungvolk who maintained contact with the General Command XVIII in Salzburg and collaborated with officers there. In August and September 1940 all officers of the Salzburg group were arrested, and two of them were killed in a shootout with the Gestapo. The years 1942 and 1943 witnessed the return of an increasing number of people who had been arrested and sent to concentration camps immediately after the Anschluss as well as of Austrian soldiers who had been wounded at the front. The latter were now on duty in Austria and constituted potential candidates for Resistance activities.

Those were the years in which the tide of the war turned, and the confidence of those who believed in Austria and were opposed to National Socialism began to mount again. They were joined by very young secondary-school students or young workers who felt repelled by National Socialism, be it for religious or other reasons, and who already lacked the enthusiasm for Greater Germany that the immediately preceding generation had had. To them their lost homeland was no longer a nebulous Greater German Reich, which they had had ample opportunity to get to know, but the Austria of their early childhood in which there had been no war and in which people had not been subjected to a harsh dictatorial regime.

These very young people, then, constituted the third wave of reinforcements for the slowly reconstituting camp of the Resistance. This time the impulses clearly came from the military. Austrian officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers in the German Wehrmacht (armed forces) increasingly formed Resistance groups enjoying the protection from the Gestapo that the field-gray uniforms still offered in those days. They were now reinforced by men who returned from the concentration camps or the front as well as by more youthful members, and thus they constituted the personnel for an imminent, decisive phase in the history of the Austrian Resistance.

On October 30, 1943, the Moscow Conference of the Allied foreign ministers (Anthony Eden of Great Britain, Cordell Hull of the United