

The Terrible Story of Mildred Harnack was beheaded on Hitler's direct order.

L.SAM (Quora)



Mildred (September 16, 1902 – February 16, 1943) was born in Milwaukee, she was 26 when she moved to Germany to pursue a PhD.

As an American grad student in Berlin, she saw Germany swiftly progress from democracy to fascist dictatorship.

Mildred Harnack spent a year at the University of Jena and the University of Giessen working on her doctoral thesis. At Giessen, she witnessed the beginnings of Nazism. Mildred became an assistant lecturer in English and American literature at the University of Berlin in 1931.

Mildred and Arvid became friends with Louise and Donald Heath, who was First Secretary at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin, and

to whom Mildred and Arvid passed intelligence from Arvid's position at the Reich Economics Ministry. Between 1935 and 1940, the couple's group intersected with three other anti-fascist resistance groups. The most important of these was run by Luftwaffe lieutenant Harro Schulze-Boysen. Like numerous groups in other parts of the world, the undercover political factions led by Harnack and Schulze-Boysen later developed into an espionage network that collaborated with Soviet intelligence to defeat Hitler.

She and her husband Arvid began holding secret meetings in their apartment.

She recruited working-class Germans into the resistance, helped Jews escape, plotted acts of sabotage, and collaborated in writing leaflets that denounced Hitler and called for revolution.

"Mildred Harnack nicknamed their resistance group "the Circle." The group was diverse: its members were Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, atheist.

They were factory workers and office workers, students and professors, journalists and artists. Over 40% were women.

"The Gestapo arrested Mildred Harnack on Sept 7, 1942 and gave her group a name: the Rote Kapelle (Red Orchestra).

Postwar testimonies and notes smuggled out of a Berlin women's prison describe the daily interrogations and torture that Mildred and others in the group endured.

"Mildred Harnack and 75 of her German coconspirators were forced to undergo a mass trial at the highest military court in Nazi Germany.

A panel of 5 judges sentenced her to 6 years at a prison camp but Hitler overruled the decision and ordered her execution.

Before her execution Mildred spent the last hours of her life in a prison cell translating poems by Goethe.

The title of my book ALL THE FREQUENT TROUBLES OF OUR DAYS is a line from one of them.

A prison chaplain smuggled out the book of poems under the folds of his robe.

"On February 16, 1943 at Plötzensee Prison in Berlin, Mildred Harnack was strapped to a guillotine and beheaded.

According to all available records, she was the only American in the leadership of the German resistance to Hitler.

