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## Collection of Case Studies: Banker Amadeo Peter Giannini, The Fighting Sullivans, Sophie Scholl

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## The Compassionate Courage of the America's Greatest Banker



*Amedeo P. Giannini  
Courtesy Italiani di Frontiera*

*A banker should consider himself a servant of the people, a servant of the community.*

*Be the first in everything.*

*Work does not wear me out. It buoys me up.*

*I thrive on obstacles, particularly obstacles placed in my way by narrow-gauged competitors and their political friends.*

*The main thing is to run your business absolutely straight.*

*Failure usually comes from doing things that shouldn't have been done – often things of questionable ethics.*

*There is no fun in working merely for money. I like to do things, to be a builder.*

*Each of us is better for having to make our own way in the world.*

*Be ready to help people when they need it most. — Amadeo Peter Giannini*

He was filled with energy, passion, ambition, vision, integrity, honesty, compassion and courage. He saw a world of progress built on the hopes and dreams of ordinary people. All that was necessary was to give them a chance.



*In 1849, prospectors came from everywhere in search of gold, Courtesy, Library of Congress*

Amedeo Pietro Giannini was born in California in 1870. His parents were from Italy. His father, Luigi, came from a town near Genoa. He was a man of adventure.

He went to America to search for gold in the California Gold Rush of 1849. For nearly twenty years Luigi hunted for the precious metal that drove men to fight, cheat and even die for.

Then he returned to Italy to take a bride. He brought his wife Virginia to California and bought a farm. He grew fruits and vegetables and sold

them on the local market. His business thrived. A decent future lay ahead for this immigrant from Italy until fate changed the course of events. At age 37, Luigi Giannini was fatally shot by

a disgruntled employee. He left his wife with two children and one on the way. The family soon fell into poverty.

Virginia Giannini took over the farm. Her small son, Amedeo, worked night and day to help his mother and siblings survive. Three years later Virginia married Lorenzo Scatena. He expanded the farm to include a wholesale business to sell on a wider market. The family worked together to make it grow. Amedeo, in particular, showed a talent for management, sales, and organization. He was a teenager when he dropped out of school to work full time in the family operation. He became a commission merchant and made deals with local farmers to market their produce across the state and across the continent. Sales grew geometrically as the population of the nation rose.

By the time he was 31, Amedeo Giannini had built a flourishing firm. He sold it to his employees and retired to administer his father in law's estate. He became a director of a local savings and loan where his step father had an interest.

### **The People's Banker**

Giannini was troubled by the policies of the bank. They, like most financial institutions, lent money to those who were already established. The wealthy and influential were their clients. Amedeo saw an opportunity in helping the burgeoning population of immigrants flooding into California. Banks would not provide them service or assistance or extend credit to help them establish businesses. Amedeo decided he would start his own bank and name it for the country of his origins.

### **The Bank of Italy**

At age 34, he founded the Bank of Italy. It started in San Francisco in 1904. It was an immediate success. Shortly after opening its doors it had deposits of nearly \$9,000 (Maquis & Bessie, 1954). Giannini offered his clients savings accounts and loans. They were men and women from Italy and other parts of the world. They worked long hours in back breaking jobs with low pay. Giannini felt that it was his mission to help them realize the American dream of a home and a better life for their children.



*Currency from the Bank of Italy, Courtesy antiquebanknotes.com*

He judged these simple, hardworking people not on their wealth but on their character. In a year, deposits soared to over \$700,000. Business continued to grow until the ill-fated year of 1906.

### **The San Francisco Earthquake**

It was a little past 5 a.m., on April 18, 1906, when the ground began to tremble along the coast of California. A huge earthquake rocked the region from Eureka in the north to the Salinas Valley in the south near San Francisco. As the tremor struck the great city, fires broke out and spread wildly. Gas lines, that crisscrossed the streets and buildings, ruptured into exploding fireballs. San Francisco burned for days. Thousands lost their lives. Eighty percent of the metropolitan area was destroyed in one of the deadliest seismic upheavals in the history of the United States. Over 300,000 people were homeless. The economic, social and political fabric of the city was in ruins.



*Fire on San Francisco's Sacramento Street by Arnold Genthe, Courtesy Library of Congress*

Infernos overwhelmed the metropolis. Banks found their buildings and vaults engulfed in flames. The strong boxes melted in the conflagrations. Opening them would ruin the money. As a result, they had to wait days and even weeks before the heat dissipated to allow them to go back to work.

Instead, Amedeo Giannini, immediately moved to protect the deposits of his clients and his assets before the blazes reached the building housing his bank. The day after the earthquake, he collected all the money in his vault, placed it in a garbage truck, covered it with refuse, and brought it to his home, outside of the fire zone, for safe-keeping.

His was one of the few banks willing to extend loans for reconstruction. Within days, he set up a provisional bank, consisting of a plank across two barrels in the street. He made loans to those willing to rebuild their homes and business. His agreement was a handshake, a smile and words of encouragement. Decades later, he would tell the story of how each loan was repaid with interest. Amedeo Giannini was now a local hero who had shown trust in his community. That confidence, and his courage and passion to help others, would make him one of the world's most renowned bankers and business leaders.

## **Branch Banking**

While San Francisco continued to rebuild and grow, Giannini looked to provide services to clients in different places in the metropolitan area. In 1909, legislation was passed allowing banks to set up branches throughout California. The first branch of the Bank of Italy was established in Giannini's home town, San Jose. Amedeo saw area offices as a way for banks to stabilize operations especially during stressful economic times. Within a decade, the Bank had hundreds of branches throughout the state (McCalla & Johnston, 2016).

## **Bank of America**

In 1928, Giannini merged his bank with a major bank in Los Angeles. The new Bank of America was created. As Chairman, Amedeo oversaw the enormous growth of the Bank to be one of the largest in the world. He helped California and the United States overcome the Great Depression and World War II by keeping liquidity flowing to the private and public sectors and helped the transformation of America in the post-war period.

Giannini took a personal interest in a number of historic projects that changed the nation. For example, a young cartoonist needed money to launch a movie that would revolutionize Hollywood. No one would lend him a penny. His name was Walt Disney. The Bank of America financed the production of the first animated motion picture. It was entitled, *Snow White*.

Giannini helped nurture the creation of new vineyards and the growth of the wine industry. In the depths of the Great Depression, he bought bonds to finance the building of the Golden Gate Bridge. Companies involved in the war effort were supported financially by the Bank of America. After World War II, Giannini took a personal interest in the reconstruction of Europe. An example was arranging loans to rebuild the war-torn factories of FIAT in Italy.

## Legacy

*It's no use to decide what's going to happen unless you have the courage of your convictions. Many a brilliant idea has been lost because the man who dreamed it lacked the spunk of the spine to put it across.*

*No man actually owns a fortune. It owns him.*

*I leave everything to the young men. You've got to give youthful men authority and responsibility if you're going to build up an organization. Otherwise you'll always be the boss yourself and you won't leave anything behind you.*

*My hardest job has been to keep from being a millionaire.*

— Amadeo Peter Giannini

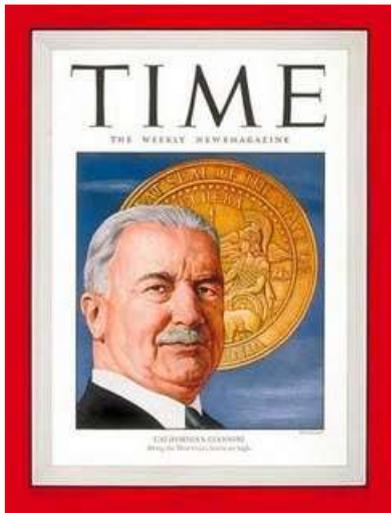
In *YouTube* video about Giannini, he is described as the real life “George Bailey.” It was referring to Frank Capra’s classic 1946 movie, *It’s a Wonderful Life*, starring James Stewart as a banker who helped countless people in his town realize the American dream. If there is anyone who truly possessed the qualities of George Bailey, it was Amadeo Pietro Giannini. He left a business and cultural legacy that was laced with courage, passion, determination, wisdom, generosity, risk-taking, and hard work.

In a November, 2016 article, *What Can We Learn from America's Greatest Banker*, Steve Forbes described Giannini’s legacy (Forbes, 2016):

- ***Break the Rules.*** At the turn of the last century, Amadeo Giannini pioneered new ways of doing business that were decades ahead of his time. He advertised, which banks had never done. His bank conformed to the needs of its clients. His first customers worked on shifts, spoke little English, and earned low wages. His bank stayed open long hours; had tellers who spoke several languages; helped immigrants fill out deposit slips, checks, and forms; provided low-interest rates on loans, and accepted even the smallest deposit. Giannini knew human nature and could size up people. As a result, bad loans were rare.
- ***Opened up Branches.*** He expanded everywhere. He bought up smaller banks and went into the insurance business. He ventured into consumer financing of cars, mortgages, and appliances and applied a similar approach to support the growing film industry and wineries.
- ***Crisis Management.*** The example of the San Francisco Earthquake is a classic study in how to deal successfully with a crisis. And when Franklin Roosevelt declared a bank holiday in 1933, Giannini’s competitors pushed to close his bank. He used every political maneuver at his disposal to keep his institution alive. He knew his customers and their ability to pay better than any Washington bureaucrat and he would fight to protect them and his bank.
- ***Character.*** He trusted and inspired trust. Giannini was a man with a passion and a mission. His goal was to serve his customers and help create jobs, prosperity, and fulfill dreams.



*Amadeo Giannini,  
Courtesy AP Photos*



- *Wealth isn't an end in itself.* Amadeo Giannini died in 1949. His real net worth was lower than when he sold his business to his employees five decades earlier. He never took more than \$50,000 a year in salary. He gave most of his money away in scholarships and to fund medical research.

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*I have worked without thinking of myself. This is the largest factor in whatever success I have attained.*

– Amadeo Peter Giannini

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*America's Banker, Courtesy Time/Life*

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## The Fighting Sullivans

*These fallen heroes represent the character of a nation who has a long history of patriotism and honor – and a nation who has fought many battles to keep our country free from threats of terror. — Michael N. Castle*

It was January 3, 1942. Five young men showed up at the Naval Station in Des Moines, Iowa to enlist. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor less than a month earlier. The men had lost a dear friend on the Arizona. They were determined to revenge his death and do their part in the effort to defeat the Japanese and end tyranny. Their names were Sullivan.



*The Sullivan brothers on board the USS Juneau; from left to right: Joe, Frank, Al, Matt, and George, Courtesy US Naval Historical Society*

## Waterloo, Iowa

They were born and raised in Waterloo, Iowa. Their parents were Thomas and Alleta Sullivan. The environment was a simple American mid-western village where most people knew each other. The boys were raised as Roman Catholics. Life centered on family, God, and country.

Their father worked as a conductor and brakeman on the Illinois Central railroad. He struggled to support his family especially during the difficult times of the Great Depression. Tom and Alleta had seen the First World War. Now their boys were among the first to fight in the Second World War.

## Pearl Harbor

The family was stunned when on December 7, 1941, they learned of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Japan wanted to cripple the US Pacific Fleet to prevent it from stopping the Japanese invasion of British and Dutch territories in the South Asia. Within hours of the strike on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese conducted a series of coordinated attacks on the US territories of the Philippines, Wake Island, and Guam. Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore were also struck.

The toll at Pearl Harbor was devastating. Four out of the eight US battleships stationed were sunk. Cruisers, mine sweepers, and other vessels were destroyed or damaged. Over 2400 Americans lost their lives and nearly 2000 were wounded. One hundred and eighty-eight aircraft were destroyed.

Within a week, the United States was at war with Japan, Germany, and Italy. It faced well-trained and fierce enemies in a two-front confrontation of historic proportions. Americans were shocked, saddened, angry, and determined.

Shortly after the attack, US Army Air Corps pilots took to the sky. They shot down 29 enemy planes. Japanese Admiral Yamamoto, who had planned the attack and understood the American will to fight said: "I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve" (*American Thinker*, 2013).

It was this sense of determination that brought the five sons of Tom and Alleta Sullivan to the Naval Station in Des Moines on that fateful day in January, 1942. The men insisted they be assigned to the same ship. They had grown up as a family and a team. They loved each other and loved being together. The Navy consented.



*The USS Juneau, Courtesy, US Navy Historical Society*



The Sullivans did their basic training at the Naval Training Center at Great Lakes, Illinois. A new ship was about to be unveiled at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York. It was a 541 foot, 6,000 ton vessel designed to be an anti-aircraft cruiser. It was christened the *Juneau*. The Sullivans joined the crew of 26 officers and 597 seamen for the launching on February 14, 1942.

## Off to the Pacific

On August 17, the *Juneau* entered the Panama Canal on its way to the Pacific theatre. The men wrote home constantly. Albert's wife Katherine, and their baby Jimmie, were living at the Sullivan home on Adams Street in Waterloo as was their sister, Genevieve.

"The *Juneau's* first action came at the Battle of Santa Cruz in the Solomon Islands on October 26. She helped to screen the carrier *USS Hornet* in Rear Adm. Thomas C. Kinkaid's Task Force 61. The force was positioned to intercept Japanese naval units trying to approach Guadalcanal. On November 8, 1942, the *Juneau* weighed anchor from New Caledonia as part of Rear Adm. Richmond Kelly Turner's Task Force 67, whose mission was to escort reinforcements to Guadalcanal. The Sullivan brothers saw plenty of action on November 12 during a furious attack by 30 Japanese planes. The *Juneau's* gun crews accounted for six enemy torpedo bombers" (*Insight*, 2015).

## Save Henderson Field



*US Marines landing on Guadalcanal in August, 1942;*  
*US Navy Historical Society*

That same night, the *Juneau* set sail. The Japanese fleet was moving to destroy Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. The 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division was fighting desperately to hold the installation. The *Juneau* joined the US task force assigned to intercept the Japanese. They formed a winding column with four destroyers and the cruisers *Atlanta*, *San Francisco*, *Portland*, *Helena*, and the *Juneau*. In the wee hours of November 13, the *Helena* reported enemy vessels in sight. A ferocious battle erupted.

"American salvos sank two enemy destroyers, damaged three, and damaged a battleship, but Japanese fire crippled the *Atlanta* and *San Francisco* and killed Admiral Callaghan and Rear Adm. Norman Scott. The *Juneau*, the last cruiser in column, loosed salvo after salvo at enemy ships on both sides — until a torpedo slammed into her forward fireroom and put her out of action. She retired with her crew struggling furiously to keep her afloat. The American ships, unaccustomed to night fighting, took a beating but accomplished their mission to save Henderson Field. Air strikes from the field the next day sent 11 enemy troop transports to the bottom" (*Insight*, 2015).

## Aid to the *San Francisco*

The *Juneau* set sail for Espiritu Santo. They followed the *San Francisco* and transferred a medical team to assist the wounded. Twenty miles off southwest of San Cristobal, in the Solomon Islands, seaman on the *San Francisco* saw two torpedoes streaking ahead of their vessel toward the *Juneau*. There was no way to send a warning since communications had been knocked out. "Fired by the Japanese submarine *I-26*, the torpedoes found their mark.

There was a tremendous explosion, and the *Juneau* disintegrated in a thousand-foot-tall column of flame and smoke. She disappeared below the surface in 20 seconds.

Only 10 members of her crew survived. Gone were her skipper, Captain Lyman K. Swensen, and the happy-go-lucky Irishmen from Waterloo. George, the oldest, managed to get off the ship and onto a life raft” (*Insight*, 2015). The other brothers were below when the *Juneau* exploded. George searched for his brothers, but to no avail. Witnesses believed that he became distraught and delirious and drowned.



*Tom and Alleta Sullivan with the telegram reporting their five sons, “missing in action”  
Courtesy Navy Historical Society*

### **Telegram to Mr. and Mrs. Sullivan**

On January 12, 1943, one year and nine days after the five Sullivans joined the Navy, a telegram arrived at 98 Adams Street. It was addressed to Tom and Alleta. It said that their sons were “missing in action.” “Albert’s wife, his 22-month-old son, and Genevieve shared the grief in the modest home where five white stars hung in a front window. It was the most severe loss suffered by an American family during World War II” (*Insight*, 2015).

The family carried on to set an example for others who had lost their children in the War. Tom went to work at the rail yard, to hide his enormous sadness. Albert’s wife went to work at a local meat packing plant to provide for her son and take her mind off the tragedy. Genevieve later joined the Naval Reserves. The light in Alleta’s life was gone. Yet she recalled the words at the end

of her boys’ letters: “Keep your chin up.” She said, “Now’s a good time to do just that” (*Insight*, 2015).

Messages of condolences came from throughout the country to comfort the family of “The Fighting Sullivans,” as they were now known. “First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt wrote to Mrs. Sullivan, ‘You and your husband have given a lesson of great courage to the whole country, and, in thinking of this war and what it means to all mothers of the country, I shall keep the memory of your fortitude always in mind, as I hope other mothers with sons in the service will do’” (Abbott, 1980).

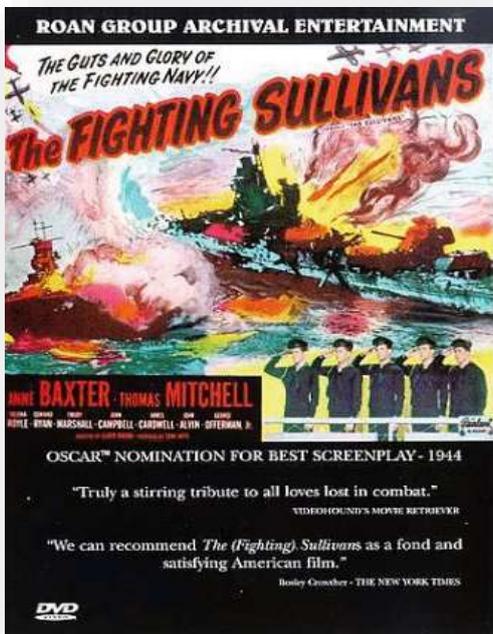
The five sons of Tom and Alleta Sullivan were awarded the Purple Heart, American Defense and European theater ribbons, the Victory Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific ribbon, and two battle stars.

### **An Example of Courage**

The sacrifice of the Sullivans became a symbol of the American resolve to defeat tyranny. Tom and Alleta were determined to keep the memory of their sons alive and to help in the war effort. They toured factories and defense plants urging workers to build the tools to end the war. They said that if the fleet had the support of planes and bombs in the Pacific, the *Juneau* and other ships and sailors and soldiers could have been spared. “I speak as a mother who lost five sons,” she said, “and they went down fighting. They were never afraid. Now we have more sons in action. We must give them everything they need” (*Insight*, 2015).

On February 8, 1943, Tom and Alleta attended a mass to honor their sons in New York’s St. Patrick’s Cathedral celebrated by Cardinal Spellman. They received a medal and a set of rosary beads from Pope Pius XII. The following day, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt approved the

naming of a new destroyer to be christened, *USS The Sullivans*. It was launched on Sunday, April 4, 1943 at the Bethlehem Steel Company shipyards in San Francisco, California. Alleta smashed the bottle of champagne to launch the new vessel in the name of her sons. Now the Sullivan boys were once again at sea.



*The Fighting Sullivans* Movie  
Courtesy 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox

## Remembering the Fighting Sullivans

“Meanwhile, Hollywood had paid tribute to the saga of the five brothers with the release by 20th Century-Fox in 1944 of *The Fighting Sullivans*. Directed by Lloyd Bacon and starring Thomas Mitchell and Selena Royle as the parents, supported by Anne Baxter, Ward Bond, George Offerman, Jr., and Bobby Driscoll – it was a warm, inspiring portrait of an ordinary American family that made an extraordinary sacrifice.

In Waterloo, as part of the city’s urban renewal program, a nine-acre recreation area was dedicated to the brothers on the site of the old Sullivan home. Funded by popular subscription, a pentagonal granite shrine is surrounded by a moat and anchors, and topped with a bronze shamrock from the deck of *USS The Sullivans*. The memorial is located a few yards east of a tree planted by the five brothers when they were children” (*Insight*, 2015).

The *USS The Sullivans* went on to fight in the most dangerous battles of the Pacific and became a decorated vessel for its engagements and rescue operations. With eleven battle stars to her credit, it was eventually retired to a permanent memorial in Buffalo, New York in 1958.

## Conclusion

All wars have those who avoid fighting to save themselves. It also has heroes and heroines who for one reason or another feel compelled to make a special sacrifice. It could be for a principle. It could be for a unique cause or to defend the homeland.

The Sullivans joined the Navy as soon as their nation entered the conflict. They could have waited to be drafted. They could have sought safer situations. Instead they chose to set an example. They took the riskiest of roads and did so as brothers who put their collective lives on the line for their family, their country, their God, and each other. The Sullivans left a legacy of enormous courage and the willingness to pay the supreme price to stop the onslaught of tyranny in the world.

*True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost. — Arthur Ashe*

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## The Girl Who Defied Hitler



Sophie Scholl, Courtesy La Rosa Bianca

*You need not go back four thousand years for heroines. The world is filled with them today. They do not belong to any nation, nor to any religion, nor exclusively to any race. Wherever woman is found, they are found.*

— Robert Green Ingersoll

*There is a certain enthusiasm in liberty that makes human nature rise above itself, in acts of bravery and heroism.*

— Alexander Hamilton

*Stand up for what you believe in even if you are standing alone.* — Sophie Scholl

*You need not go back four thousand years for heroines. The world is filled with them today. They do not belong to any nation, nor to any religion, nor exclusively to any race. Wherever woman is found, they are found.*

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*How can we expect fate to let a righteous cause prevail when there is hardly anyone who will give himself up undividedly to a righteous cause?*

*An end in terror is preferable to terror without end.*

*I know that life is a doorway to eternity, and yet my heart so often gets lost in petty anxieties. It forgets the great way home that lies before it.*

— Sophie Scholl

She was born in a peaceful hamlet in Germany in 1921. Her parents, Magdalena and Robert were middle class professionals. Magdalen was a liberal politician and he was the elected mayor of their town. The Scholls lived in the village of Forchentenber, near Baden-Wurttemberg in southwest Germany in the district of Stuttgart. The town overlooked two picturesque rivers and rose into lush forests surrounded by vineyards. It was a tranquil place

for the Scholls to raise their six children. Sophie was their fourth child. She was happy and intelligent. She loved to draw and paint and was an avid reader.

She was raised as a Lutheran. Her Christian faith became the compass of her life. Her parents moved several times and eventually settled in the city of Ulm in 1930. Two years later, a man came to power that would change the fate of mankind. His name was Adolf Hitler.

Magdalena and Robert were strong critics of the regime. Sophie and her brothers and sisters grew up under Nazi propaganda.

In school, they were taught to swear loyalty to Hitler and his philosophy of Arian supremacy.

### League of German Girls

Like her classmates, Sophie joined the League of German Girls. Starting from the age of 10, the League indoctrinated girls to take their place in a society as wives, mothers and homemakers run by the rules of the Nationalist Socialist Party. The Reich prepared the road map for their lives and Adolf Hitler was their guide, father and god.



*Girls in the League making hay, 1939, Courtesy German Federal Archives*

“The government – or rather, the party – controlled everything: the news media, arms, police, the armed forces, the judiciary system, communications, travel, all levels of education from kindergarten to universities, and all cultural and religious institutions. Political indoctrination started at a very early age, and continued by means of the Hitler Youth with the ultimate goal of complete mind control. Children were exhorted in school to denounce even their own parents for derogatory remarks about Hitler or Nazi ideology” (Wittenstein, 1979).



*A supposed drawing by Sophie Scholl, 1943  
Courtesy, The White Rose*



*Girls from the League meeting Hitler  
Courtesy German Federal Archives*

## Disillusionment

Sophie soon became disillusioned. The League and Hitler Youth were brainwashing her generation into believing that Hitler and his dictatorial rule would bring glory and greatness to Germany. Sophie instinctively felt this was a lie and that the regime would, instead, create suffering and snuff out all freedom of thought and action.

She left the League and began to choose her friends with care. Her older brother Hans had been a member of the Hitler youth. He, too, realized that the Nazis were bringing Germany and the world to a disaster never seen in the annals of history.



*Hitler Youth, Courtesy German Federal Archives*

The views of her parents, friends, and teachers made an important impression on her. She read philosophy and theology and found that the Nazis were godless. They were atheists. The Nazis believed only in the Fatherland, their imperial view of the world and the ruthless and evil means available to them to obtain and maintain power. They used fear as their weapon. Hitler and his henchmen frightened the people of Germany into subjugation while they hypnotized and propagandized them with lies and visions of grandeur and greatness. Hitler played on the insecurity of his countrymen and their hunger to be respected and to preserve their identity. Millions were convinced that their leader would bring them to be the preeminent race to dominate the world and create a new order. They supported his murderous plans to conquer and eliminate anyone considered an enemy of the state.

Soon the children of Germany were loyal Nazis. They were proud nationalists ready to give their lives for Hitler. Many would. They would die in the global conflagrations started by one of the most malevolent regimes in history.

*Adolf Hitler and German children, Courtesy German Federal Archives*





*Sophie Scholl, Courtesy German Federal Archives*

## University of Munich

In 1940, Sophie finished secondary school. She almost did not graduate. It was perceived that she was resistant to Nazi indoctrination. Sophie suffered seeing how Nazism poisoned the souls of her classmates and took over the minds and hearts of her people.

After finishing her studies, she obtained a position as a kindergarten teacher. She loved children, but wanted to continue into higher education. To be eligible to enter a university she was forced to work for six months in the National Labor Service. The Service was used to reduce unemployment, militarize the workforce, and inculcate young men and women with Nazi ideology. It was in the Labor Service that Sophie's hatred of the regime grew.

By May, 1942 she was in the University of Munich. She majored in biology and philosophy. Her older brother, Hans, was studying medicine. Hans and Sophie shared a

group of friends who enjoyed art, music, hiking, skiing, and swimming. They spoke secretly about politics and world affairs. They attended lectures by German philosophers who questioned the role and responsibilities of individuals during a dictatorship.

## A Question of Conscience

In the summer of 1942, their father was sent to prison. He made a critical remark about Hitler

and was incarcerated. Hans had also been in jail for a short time with some friends in 1937 when they participated in activities of the German Youth Movement. It was mainly a group of young people involved in sports and outdoor events yet the Nazis saw any activity of this kind as a threat to the regime. Sophie and Hans knew the risks of defying the Nazis. Those who dared question or protest were accused of treason. They were jailed, subjected to a mock trial, and often executed.



*Christopher Probst, Sophie Scholl and Hans Scholl 1943  
Courtesy German Federal Archives*

German armies had conquered continental Europe. They were invading Russia and had declared war on the United States. The globe was engulfed in killing as the imperial forces of Germany and Japan invaded one nation after another.

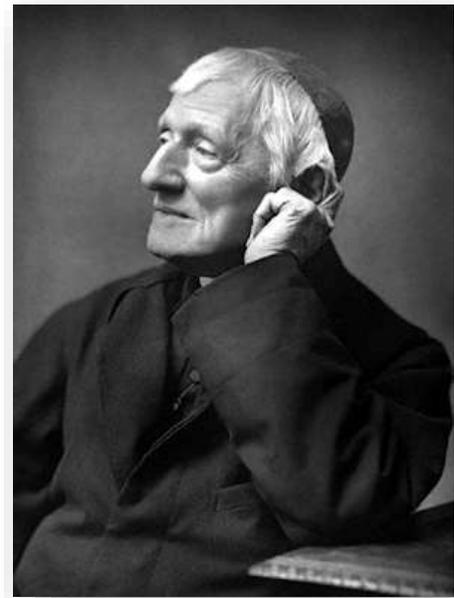
Even so, by 1942, the Allies began the systematic bombing of major German cities that included industrial and civilian sites. The war was being brought home to the Nazi regime.

Hans and Sophie were influenced by the writings of a Catholic Cardinal. John Henry Newman, was an English theologian and philosopher in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Newman's sermons and words included reflections on conscience. He said: "Conscience is not a long-sighted selfishness, nor a desire to be consistent with oneself but it is a messenger from Him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by His representatives. ..." (*A Study of Faith Through Film*, 2011).

In one of his meditations, Newman wrote about each person's place in the world: "*God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission, I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good. I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth...*" (*The Restless Pilgrim*, 2011).

Newman's ideas had an enormous impact on these two young people who saw the brutality of the Nazis in crimes committed against innocent victims throughout Europe. Sophie and Hans discovered information about the execution of Soviet prisoners of war on the Eastern front and the mass murder of Jews. The conscience of the German people needed to be aroused for them to stop these atrocities. Hans and Sophie could no longer fail to act.



Cardinal John Henry Newman  
Courtesy, *The Restless Pilgrim*



Hans Scholl, Courtesy German Federal Archives

## The White Rose

Unbeknownst to Sophie, Hans and a group of friends wrote a pamphlet, *The White Rose*, in the summer of 1942. It was distributed on the college campus of the University of Munich. It appealed to the German sense of humanity, shame and Christian responsibility:

"Nothing is so unworthy of a civilized nation as allowing itself to be 'governed' without opposition by an irresponsible clique that has yielded to base instinct. It is certain that today every honest German is ashamed of his government. Who among us has any conception of the dimensions of shame that will befall us and our children when one day the veil has fallen from our eyes and the most horrible of crimes – crimes that infinitely outdistance every human measure – reach the light of day? ... Therefore every individual, conscious of his responsibility as a member of Christian and Western civilization, must

defend himself against the scourges of mankind, against fascism and any similar system of totalitarianism. Offer passive resistance – resistance – wherever you may be, forestall the spread of this atheistic war machine before it is too late, before the last cities, like Cologne, have been reduced to rubble, and before the nation's last young man has given his blood on some battlefield for the hubris of a sub-human. Do not forget that every people deserves the regime it is willing to endure" (*History as a Weapon*, n.d.).

When Sophie discovered the first brochure, her brother could no longer keep the secret of *The White Rose* from her. She joined him in his fight against the Nazis. The leaflets had their effect. They stirred concern among the students. From June to July, 1942, the young people wrote and distributed four pamphlets. They quoted extensively from the writings of German authors, the Bible, Greek philosophers, and others to appeal to intellect, heart, and soul of thinkers and moralists in the community.

*The White Rose* pamphlets were left in public places like telephone booths, sent by courier to other universities and mailed to professors and students. Young people in other parts of Germany joined them in their effort to spread the message about the crimes of the regime. In Munich they painted graffiti on buildings in large letters, "Down with Hitler, Hitler the Mass Murderer and Freedom."

Each edition of *The White Rose* grew more powerful in its condemnation of Nazi Germany. The second pamphlet brought up the issue of guilt. It wrote about the murder of Polish Jews and accused the citizens of Germany of knowing about the crimes and still doing nothing to prevent them:

*We do not want to discuss here the question of the Jews, nor do we want in this leaflet to compose a defense or apology. No, only by way of example do we want to cite the fact that since the conquest of Poland three hundred thousand Jews have been murdered in this country in the most bestial way. Here we see the most frightful crime against human dignity, a crime that is unparalleled in the whole of history. For Jews, too, are human beings – no matter what position we take with respect to the Jewish question – and a crime of this dimension has been perpetrated against human beings...Why tell you these things, since you are fully aware of them – or if not of these, then of other equally grave crimes committed by this frightful sub-humanity? Because here we touch on a problem which involves us deeply and forces us all to take thought. Why do the German people behave so apathetically in the face of all these abominable crimes, crimes so unworthy of the human race? Hardly anyone thinks about that. It is accepted as fact and put out of mind.*

*The German people slumber on in their dull, stupid sleep and encourage these fascist criminals; they give them the opportunity to carry on their depredations; and of course they do so. Is this a sign that the Germans are brutalized in their simplest human feelings, that no chord within them cried out at the sight of such deeds, that they have sunk into a fatal consciencelessness from which they will never, never awake...It is not too late, however, to do away with this most reprehensible of all miscarriages of government, so as to avoid being burdened with even greater guilt. Now, when in recent years our eyes have been opened, when we know exactly who our adversary is, it is high time to root out this brown horde. Up until the outbreak of the war the larger part of the German people were blinded; the Nazis did not show themselves in their true aspect. But now, now that we have recognized them for what they are, it must be the sole and first duty, the holiest duty of every German to destroy these beasts (History as a Weapon, n.d.).*

In January, 1943, between 6000 and 9000 copies of the fifth leaflet of *The White Rose* were distributed throughout Germany. By the time the last pamphlet was produced, the group evolved into calling itself *The German Resistance Movement*.

The people of Germany had learned of the Battle of Stalingrad. It was an ignominious defeat costing the lives of hundreds of thousands of soldiers. It signaled the turning of the tide in the war.

*The White Rose* pleaded for the citizens to rise up and rid the nation of scourge of Hitler and his gang of assassins and stop them from committing more crimes against humanity:

*Fellow Fighters in the Resistance! ...The day of reckoning has come – the reckoning of German youth with the most abominable tyrant our people have ever been forced to endure. In the name of German youth we demand restitution by Adolf Hitler's state of our personal freedom, the most precious treasure we have, out of which he has swindled us in the most miserable way... For us there is but one slogan: fight against the party! No threat can terrorize us, not even the shutting down of the institutions of higher learning. This is the struggle of each and every one of us for our future, our freedom, and our honor under a regime conscious of its moral responsibility... Freedom and honor! For ten long years Hitler and his coadjutor have manhandled, squeezed, twisted, and debased these two splendid German words to the point of nausea, as only dilettantes can, casting the highest values of a nation before swine.*

*They have sufficiently demonstrated in the ten years of destruction of all material and intellectual freedom, of all moral substance among the German people, what they understand by freedom and honor. The frightful bloodbath has opened the eyes of even the stupidest German – it is a slaughter which they arranged in the name of "freedom and honor of the German nation" throughout Europe, and which they daily start anew. The name of Germany is dishonored for all time if German youth does not finally rise, take revenge, and atone, smash its tormentors, and set up a new Europe of the spirit. Students! The German people look to us. As in 1813 the people expected us to shake off the Napoleonic yoke, so in 1943 they look to us to break the National Socialist terror through the power of the spirit. Beresina and Stalingrad are burning in the East. The dead of Stalingrad implore us to take action. "Up, up, my people, let smoke and flame be our sign!" Our people stand ready to rebel against the National Socialist enslavement of Europe in a fervent new breakthrough of freedom and honor" (History as a Weapon, n.d.).*

## Arrest by the Gestapo



*Sophie Scholl, Arrested by the Gestapo, February, 1943, Courtesy German Federal Archives*

Hans and Sophie carried a suitcase filled with leaflets to the University. It was February 18, 1943. A maintenance man reported them. Hans was arrested while trying to destroy the draft of a seventh leaflet, prepared by Christopher Probst. Sophie was also brought into custody. The three students were immediately taken before the Gestapo.

Under torture they confessed to be the authors of *The White Rose* but refused to reveal the identity of their colleagues and friends who helped them. The Gestapo later discovered the names of other students who assisted in other parts of Germany.



*Judge Ronald Freisler, Courtesy German Federal Archives*

Four days after their arrest, they were tried for treason. They were brought before Judge Roland Freisler, head of the Peoples Court. Freisler was the most feared judge in Germany. He was a zealous Nazi known for his dramatic court room gestures. He acted as prosecutor, judge, and jury. Freisler screamed and intimidated defendants in an atmosphere of terror, especially in cases of resistance to the Nazi regime. Over 90% of proceedings brought before him received sentences of death.

Frequently, the outcome was predetermined even before the trial. From 1942 to 1945, Freisler sent more than 5,000 people to be executed.

## **The Trial**

Freisler conducted the trial as he did others. His theatrics were designed to show loyalty to the Reich and strike fear into the hearts of anyone who would dare question Adolf Hitler. He thundered denunciations at the three defenseless young people. Since they had confessed to their crimes, there were no witnesses called. Their accusers could not comprehend how they, who had been members of the Hitler Youth and were well educated in German schools, could be traitors to the Fatherland. Sophie responded defiantly, "Somebody, after all, had to make a start. What we wrote and said is also believed by many others. They just don't dare express themselves as we did...You know the war is lost. Why don't you have the courage to face it?" (Hornberger, n.d.). Robert and Magdalena Scholl tried to defend their children, but were prevented from entering the courtroom.

Freisler callously pronounced his sentence: guilty of treason. They were condemned to death, without the right to an appeal. They were immediately brought to Stadelheim prison.

Hans and Sophie were permitted to see their parents for the last time. Hans showed no fear. He expressed gratitude and love to his mother and father. He held back his tears as they carried him away. Sophie was serene and steadfast. She smiled to them and said, "We took everything upon ourselves. What we did will cause waves" (Hornberger, n.d.).

Christopher Probst had no visitors. His wife was expecting a baby. No one in his family knew of the trial or his sentence. He asked a Catholic priest baptize him. "Now," he said, "my death will be easy and joyful" (Hornberger, n.d.).

The three friends saw each other for the last time. They embraced and reaffirmed their commitment to their cause. A few moments later, Sophie faced the guillotine. She was without fear.

Hans and Sophie Scholl and Christopher Probst were beheaded on the afternoon of February 22, 1943.

In the months following their death, the Gestapo arrested and executed other members of *The White Rose*.



*Sophie Scholl, Courtesy German Federal Archives*

*How can we expect righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone willing to give himself up individually to a righteous cause? Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to go, but what does my death matter, if through us, thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action? – Sophie Scholl*

## **Conclusion**

It is hard to imagine the fear of living during the Nazi regime. All laws and constitutional protections were swept away. Hitler

created a society of spies and indoctrinated a generation to swear greater allegiance to him than to the values of faith, liberty and human rights. The slightest dissent was punished from rapid incarceration to death. Trust among people was submerged under the banner of Nazism.

In this atmosphere of terror, a group of German young people decided that they had to stand out, speak out and fight even if it cost them their lives. They did it nonviolently. Their only arms were the power of the pen. It would prove mightier than the sword.

How much courage did they have to do this? More importantly, how did they match their courage with the love of their country and of humanity? They demonstrated bravery and love by willingly dying for their nation so that they could be models to live by. Hans and Sophie represented the best of their country during the worst time in its history.

Their sacrifice is more than symbolic. It is fresh and contemporary especially for those of us who live in democracies and love the freedom acquired by the bloodshed by our ancestors. The example of Sophie, Hans, Christopher and the brave members of *The White Rose* is important for us now and will be more vital in the next decade.

Authoritarianism is a rising tide in the United States and Europe. Our democracies are in peril. We need to promote the concept of courage in the face of tyranny at all levels in society, particularly now when many politicians choose expediency to patriotism.

In effect, how many of us would do what the members of *The White Rose* did in the same circumstances and be willing to go to our grave saying as Hans Scholl said: “Long live freedom!”

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*Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.*

— Mahatma Gandhi

*One individual can begin a movement that turns the tide of history.*

— Jack Canfield

*Heroes are ordinary people who make themselves extraordinary.*

— Gerard Way

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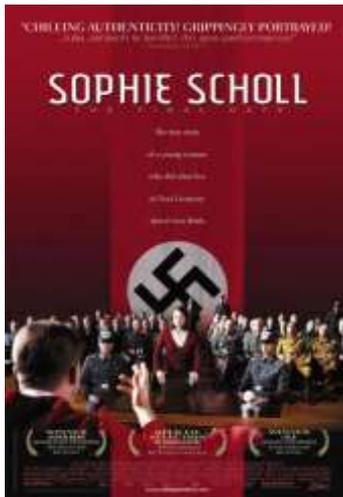
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**Movie: Sophie Scholl, The Final Days:**<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0426578/>



### Remembering Hans and Sophie Scholl

The 2005 movie, *Sophie Scholl, The Final Days*, sparked a renewed interest in the story of these two young people who fought tyranny nonviolently. They were memorialized in many ways following the war. They are mentioned in museums and the University of Munich has a special memorial to them.

Several biographies have been published and schools were named to honor their memory. Numerous web sites and stories have been written about *The White Rose*.

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## About the Author

**Emilio Iodice, Director Emeritus, Professor of Leadership, Loyola University Chicago, John Felice Rome Center, Former Executive and US Diplomat, Award Winning Author and Presidential Historian**



Emilio Iodice was born in the South Bronx in 1946. He was the son of immigrants from the island of Ponza in Italy. He grew up in a truly bi-cultural environment: living in Little Italy and America at the same time. He worked full time while studying to pay for his education from elementary school to graduate school and still managed to complete his studies at the top of his class.

Iodice received his BS in Business from Fordham University, his MBA from the Bernard Baruch School of the City University of New York and was named to BETA GAMMA SIGMA, the honorary society of distinguished graduates in Business. He conducted doctoral work in international business and applied finance at George Washington University in Washington, DC.

Iodice spent over four decades as a senior executive in the public and private sectors, as an educator and as a university administrator. Those forty years of experience included being a key official in Washington working for several Administrations, serving as a confidential adviser to the President, and reaching the top ranks of the civil service and the diplomatic corps.

He was among the most decorated officers in American history with a Gold Medal for Heroism, a Gold Medal and Silver Medal for Exemplary Service, nominations for the Bronze Medal and numerous commendations and citations. He served as Minister in key US missions abroad

including Brasilia, Mexico City, Rome, Madrid and Paris and departed after being named to the list of future Ambassadors. Among his honors were being knighted by the former king of Italy. He received Medals of Honor from Spain and Italy. At age 33, he was named by the President to the prestigious Senior Executive Service as a Charter Member. He was the youngest career public official to reach this distinction.

Before joining Loyola he was Vice President of Lucent Technologies in charge of operations in numerous countries and later taught full time as an Assistant Professor at Trinity College in Washington, DC. He joined Loyola in 2007 as Director of the John Felice Rome Center. After one year he was promoted to Vice President. After serving for nine years as Vice President and Director, he was awarded the title of Director Emeritus and Professor of Leadership on June 30th, 2016.

He spoke several languages and traveled across the globe. His passions in life were the Rome Center, its students, faculty and staff, Loyola University, good music, writing and reading, his family and, in particular, his four grandchildren and god-children. His academic field of study was “leadership.”

He wrote and published numerous peer reviewed articles on leadership in the Journal of Values Based Leadership of Valparaiso University in Indiana that have been read across the globe.

In 2012 his bestselling book on tenor Mario Lanza was published entitled, “A Kid from Philadelphia, Mario Lanza: The Voice of the Poets.” In 2013 his second book, “Profiles in Leadership from Caesar to Modern Times” was published by North American Business Press along with “Sisters,” the story of two extraordinary people, his mother and aunt. In 2014 he published “Future Shock 2.0, The Dragon Brief 2020,” and “Reflections, Stories of Love, Leadership, Courage and Passion.” In 2016 he launched, “2016, Selecting the President, The Most Important Decision You Will Ever Make. 2016.” In 2017, his new book was published: “When Courage was the Essence of Leadership, Lessons from History and reached number one bestseller status in the world in the field of leadership. Profiles in Leadership from Caesar to Modern Times and Reflections were translated into Italian and published in 2017 and immediately reached best seller status. His works can be found on this Amazon site: [https://www.amazon.com/Emilio-Iodice/e/BOOHR6PNFW/ref=dbs\\_p\\_pbk\\_rwt\\_abau](https://www.amazon.com/Emilio-Iodice/e/BOOHR6PNFW/ref=dbs_p_pbk_rwt_abau).

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