



Hitler Jugend

Adolf Hitler, the leader of Nazi Germany, understood that young people played an important role in the implementation of his beliefs and vision for world domination. He thus created *Hitler Jugend* (*Hitler Youth*) as a vehicle to train youth in Nazi beliefs and to strengthen their capacities as potential fighters.

In the early days young people were eager to join *Hitler Jugend* and to be part of this movement which offered them a positive future. Over 65% of the Germany's youth were members of *Hitler Jugend* in 1935.

This enthusiasm waned quite quickly. To the outside world, *Hitler Jugend* personified German discipline and dedication to Hitler. The reality was quite different. By 1938, attendance at Hitler Youth meetings was barely 25%. In response to this, authorities passed a law in 1939 making attendance at *Hitler Jugend* meetings compulsory for all members. Another law was passed in 1941 making *Hitler Jugend* membership compulsory for all children ten years and older.

If young people became less interested in being part of Hitler's vision, he was committed to the value of youth as "Aryan supermen". By "Aryan", Hitler meant of Nordic or German ethnicity with fair skin and blue or green eyes. He worked to keep this race pure by passing laws to ban interracial marriage, to force sterilization of the mentally deficient and to execute the mentally ill.

Hitler had definite objectives for the kind of youth that *Hitler Jugend* would produce:

“The weak must be chiseled away. I want young men and women who can suffer pain. A young German must be as swift as a greyhound, as tough as leather and as hard as Krupp’s steel. I want a brutal, domineering, fearless and cruel youth.”

There were different expectations for boys and girls. The idea was that boys would be engaged in active military service and thus had to be trained accordingly. Hitler believed that girls’ proper role was as wives and mothers.

Boys were given training in “military athletics” which included activities such as marching, bayonet drill, grenade throwing, trench digging and pistol shooting. Girls had to be able to run 60 meters in 14 seconds; throw a ball 12 metres; complete a 2-hour march; swim 100 metres and make a bed.

Hitler’s original plan called for boys under 18 years of age to be limited to support functions during the war. This included work as messengers and firefighters. However, as the war progressed and Germany’s fortunes diminished, boys were pressed into service.

In 1943 the 12 SS Panzer Division *Hitler Jugend* was established. This unit was fully equipped and enlisted boys between 16 and 18 years of age. This division was stationed in Normandy, France in mid-1944. American, British, and Canadian soldiers recalled their ferocity and unquestioning loyalty to Nazi Germany, making these boys some of the toughest opponents the Allied soldiers faced. But however fearless they were, they were still children unaccustomed to the battlefield. It is estimated that 43% of the youth section of the 12th SS Panzer Division died in the Normandy campaign.

The trend towards the use of under-age soldiers increased in the war’s latter years. Boys as young as 14 years served in these ranks. Young recruits were given chocolate milk instead of cigarettes and alcohol. Training focused on combat operations and weapon maintenance.

By 1945 12-year-old boys were performing active military service. When Berlin was surrounded by Russian forces, a significant part of the German defense was conducted by *Hitler Jugend* members.

The situation and roles for girls also changed over the course of the war. In the early days girls focused on the collection of clothing, care packages and scrap metal. They also worked with younger boys in the distribution of food and water to those who had been displaced by Allied bombing. However, by late-1943, many female youth were receiving military training and were being transferred to the German Air Force where they served as signalers,

ammunition carriers, messengers or searchlight operators. Girls also served in the military fighting units in the latter part of the war.

Photo Credits



Accessed December 2015 at:

<http://www.rageboy.com/mbimages/cover-clip-hitler-youth-0674014960.jpg>



Accessed December 2015 at:

<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/hitler1.jpg>