

WERNER BARTELS

Born 1902; World War I veteran; aircraft engineer and test pilot; air-line pilot in South America; recalled to the Luftwaffe in 1940; shot down over Britain and later exchanged for a British pilot; after the war was a company representative; lives in Bonn.

“In 1920, because of my reactionary intriguing, I was forced to leave the army.”

During World War I, I was drafted at the age of 15 into the auxiliary services and helped unload the wounded whenever a hospital train came in. That was in 1917. A year later, I became a dispatch rider in a field artillery battery. The Germans had already started to retreat by the time I got to the front. With my dispatch bag and my mess kit in hand, I ran back and forth between our battery and the various withdrawing units. I ran because we didn't have any more horses by then. Most of them had either landed in a cookpot or had been butchered to make sausage.

The only thing the withdrawing troops were really interested in was getting home respectably, without a revolution, but we were surprised by a revolution after all. Nevertheless, we continued to march back in organized formations. We even marched into Dessau to the sounds of band music. No one wanted to accept the fact that the war was lost and, moreover, that the country had left its army in the lurch. That's more or less why the *Freikorps* came into existence. I for one, chose to enlist in the *Freiwilliges Landesjägerkorps*, which was under General Märcker's command. If we couldn't live under the monarchy, then we certainly wanted to live in an honest and decent

INTRODUCTION

national state. Then in 1920, because of my reactionary intriguing and involvement in the Kapp Putsch, I was forced to leave the army.

GOTTFRIED FÄHRMANN

Born 1923; fighter pilot in the only jet fighter unit of the Luftwaffe; became a high ranking civil servant after the war; resides in Munich.

“Jobs were scarce, and they paid nothing.”

I grew up in the 1930s, alone with my mother. My father, who had worked in my grandfather's factory, died two months before my birth. At that time, social welfare or insurance for the self-employed did not exist, and my mother was left penniless. We moved in with my grandmother, who owned a small jewelry shop. As young as I was, I have a very good recollection of the economic situation during those years. Often after school I would run home and ask, “Did you sell anything today?” The answer was usually, “Only repair work for 30 pfennigs.”

When I was 7 years old, we lived practically next door to the employment office. I had to walk past it every day on my way to school, and the number of people lined up waiting for work was incredible. There was a pub on the corner, and I still have vivid recollections of seeing women there, with their children, keenly watching over their husbands in an attempt to keep them from going in and drinking up what little money they had.

I had two good friends in elementary school. One had a father who lost an arm in World War I. He worked as a doorman, and was among the first to be let go when the economic crisis began. My other friend's father was also out of work. He earned a little by gathering up

used toothpaste tubes. We helped him to cut up the tubes and remove the remaining contents, which he then sold as chalk. During this time, in 1929, my grandfather's factory went bankrupt as well.

In 1932, I entered secondary school. Even then, the differences in the political views of our teachers were very obvious. They were outspoken and debated openly with one another. In 1933, I joined the Hitler Youth, *Jungvolk*, and stayed a member until 1938. I received my secondary school diploma and decided to go to trade school. I found a position as a technical apprentice, which at that time wasn't the easiest thing to come by. Jobs were scarce to begin with, and they paid nothing.

We young people felt it was high time someone brought the situation under control. We were all fascinated when, after regular elections had been held, our highly respected President, von Hindenburg, appointed Adolf Hitler Reichs-Chancellor in the Garrison Church in Potsdam. I vividly recall Hitler bowing deeply to Hindenburg. In my mind, this gesture resulted in the identification of National Socialism with Prussia and Germany. It is simply wrong to categorize all Germans as Nazis because they loved their country.

KLAUS VON BISMARCK

Born 1912; great-nephew of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck; highly decorated infantry officer; after the war was director-general of Germany's largest radio and television station; president of the Goethe Institute; resides in Munich.

“The first president was a proletarian.”

There were very few Nazis among the *Krautjunker* “hillbilly aristocrats” in eastern Pomerania. They were, for the most part, monarchists who failed to grasp the essence of the Weimar democracy due to their blindness to history and their continued adherence to the monarchy. As monarchists, they maintained their traditional approach to the privileges of owning land in Prussia. Thus they lived in a sort of reservation for aristocrats.

On the other hand, the aristocrats in Pomerania were poor in contrast to those in Silesia, East Prussia, and the Saar area. They arose at 5 A.M. with everyone else—even though they were the owners—and harnessed the horses. And their wives worked into the night balancing the books. But most of these men had naturally been officers in the Prussian Guards, and the mantelpieces above their fireplaces were appropriately adorned with the silver ashtrays and cognac goblets exchanged with their fellow officers. In other words, this was their world, a world miles from the reality of Weimar. To them, the Weimar Republic was a socialist and clerical state, and Ebert, the first president, was a proletarian. They also considered the *Gauleiter* and other classes who came into existence during the Third Reich as satraps, and rejected them as well.

sipping strawberry punch. Suddenly he disappeared. He had taken a big bowl of punch down to the crew in the engine room.

In June 1939, I took part in a Berlin victory parade staged by the Condor Legion. We marched through the Brandenburg Gate and were received by Hitler, Göring, and Ribbentrop. So you see, I was once able to march through the streets of Berlin as a victor after all, adorned with a German and a Spanish medal.

Behind the parades, the navy's situation was bad. When Chamberlain announced a new British armaments program shortly after the Munich Agreement in 1938, Hitler reacted very harshly. A new naval construction plan was the result, and it was aimed at England. Nevertheless, this so-called Z-plan still acknowledged the pre-eminence of the army and Luftwaffe. In my eyes, this was a terrible repeat of the botch-up in 1914, with the same catastrophic results. The naval balance looked like this: the British had 12 battleships, 9 aircraft carriers, and 184 destroyers. Germany had no comparable battleships, no aircraft carriers, and only 22 destroyers with unreliable engines.

I was captain of the destroyer *Erich Steinbrinck*. At 9 A.M. on September 4, 1939, we received the order to head toward Swinemünde to refuel because we were to be sent into the North Sea. Towards 1:00 A.M. on September 5, we reached Swinemünde. We will never forget this last night we had with our families. The future was like a nightmare to us. Now our opponent was a mighty naval power. When I met my wife that night, she told me, "Finis Germaniac."

JUTTA RÜDIGER*

"I was somewhat shaken—my hand kissed by the Führer!"

National Socialism attracted many women who were not ordinary housewives impressed by Hitler's talk about "children, church, and kitchen." I finished my studies and became one of the first social psychologists in Germany. I was a practicing psychologist when I joined the League of German Girls in 1933. Two years later I was asked if I wanted to work for the League full time. I had done a lot of work with young people, and thought that this would be a good way to spend a few years.

By 1937, I was head of the organization—at the ripe age of 27. I took over something my predecessor had already begun, something new in a youth movement, physical training. Before that, the girls had sports only in secondary schools. So we gave them a lot of opportunities, and they participated enthusiastically. We also tried to see that every girl got job training. Earlier this wasn't the case. Either they were from "good families" and did nothing, or they were unskilled workers. We in the League were determined that every girl should be able to stand on her own feet, whether she was married or not.

Before 1933, the youth movement had been a kind of elite. We wanted to bring in everybody, all the boys and girls. That was the goal of Baldur von Schirach, head of the Hitler Youth. His idea was to have one comprehensive youth movement. Even the youngest would learn to give up her selfish wishes, to see that even the smallest task was part of her responsibility to the people. And we succeeded.

At the same time, that brought the risk of too much collective experience. I told Schirach that once the girls had learned to be part

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of a group, from age 17 on, they should be able to develop their appropriate tendencies and talents individually. Schirach was very attracted by the idea. He spoke of individuals bound to a community. And I still find that a good goal today: individual personalities who still have a sense of responsibility to the whole.

That was the basis of our work in the League of German Girls. Schirach stressed gymnastics. He said, "It doesn't matter how high a girl jumps, or how far she puts the shot, but that her body develops properly, harmoniously."

Schirach had a streak of genius. Every conference with him, once you got to know him, was an experience. He came from a very cultivated family. His mother, and his grandmother on his father's side, were Americans, so he was three-quarters American. I remember being invited to his house in 1938. His mother was there as a guest, as was his sister, an opera singer who had just returned from a concert tour in the U.S. She told us it was horrible what was being said about Germany, and her mother suddenly burst into tears and said there was going to be another war between Germany and America. Of course I didn't believe it.

I first met Hitler personally in 1931 in Düsseldorf. His sonorous voice impressed me. I felt, "Here is a man who thinks not of himself, but of Germany!"

I met Hitler for the second time seven years later, in 1938. He gave a reception for his high party officials, and Schirach invited me and a colleague from a branch of the League. We considered wearing our new uniforms, which had been designed by a fashion house in Berlin. But we changed our mind and wore evening dresses instead.

When we went up the stairs to the reception hall, there stood Hitler! Alongside him was a master of ceremonies who announced the guests as they arrived. We were formally presented, and Hitler kissed the ladies' hands! I was somewhat shaken—my hand, kissed by the Führer! Then a bit later he said he would like to see our uniforms, so we went back to the hotel and changed.

When we returned, there was only a small group around Hitler. I got the impression then that he was somehow shy and inhibited around women. After dinner he moved from table to table, and when he got to ours he looked me and my colleague up and down and said,

"I've always told the Mercedes people that a good motor isn't enough. You need a good body too." He leaned forward a bit and said, "But a good body alone isn't worth anything either." Then he left. Mercedes cars were his great love; I suppose he thought he was honoring us with the comparison.

Until 1945 that was our picture of Hitler. He could hold people spellbound, but still had a sense of humor and knew how to laugh.

We didn't go to war with any great enthusiasm, but we thought Hitler was right. We had reports of how Germans in Poland were being persecuted, and how the Poles were saying, "On to Berlin!" We were told Hitler's first demands were moderate, that he only wanted the Polish Corridor. There was even a joke about Hitler telling a Polish countess: "Madame, I don't want your whole castle; I'll be satisfied with the corridor." We didn't believe Hitler wanted a bigger war. Then France and Britain declared war on us. Schirach called the leaders of the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls together. He told us it was going to be a long, hard war. "It can last seven years," he said. "As long as the Englishman smokes his pipe by the fireplace, things will be all right. But when he puts his pipe aside and climbs into the trenches, it will be a hard fight. You'll live to see Berlin in flames!"

Our mouths hung wide open! We were shocked, but it helped prepare us for what was to come.

1 person made just about the same impact on me as his a postcard did. As a man, he had absolutely no flair, at to me. People talked about his sincere interest in the arts. own concept of the arts and he was most likely interested it it wasn't our kind of art. I was invited back much later. happened on that evening is a really strange story. n *The Rebel* was being shown. It was about the people's he Tyrol against the French in 1809. In one scene, the ny had to march through a very narrow pass. From above, ans had set up some boards loaded with stones. When the ne through, the Tyrolians cut the ropes, and all of the rocks French. Hitler became terribly excited and started to rub le started to moan as the rocks started to roll. I don't know crazy or what, but he had a kind of orgasm. iber standing up in the dark room. This man was sickening. never went back.

7 in 1936, the doorbell rang. There was an SS soldier at the llo," he said, "the Reich Propaganda Minister is on his way ps." And a few moments later, he really was there. The it back downstairs and Goebbels walked into my apartment I the door. I was 25, old enough, you'd think, but I was still naive. In a situation like that you're speechless, totally /hat was I going to do? How was I going to get this man out

is sat down and said he thought the two of us could get and he hoped we could make some kind of arrangement. ple, he told me he was giving a speech in Dresden, and urally have a plane ready to fly me there. "You fly over, I'll ppeech, and then we'll dine together." I began to feel a bit id thought: "He can't really mean he's going to pick me up rplane and flowers. Surely others will be going along too!" it wasn't easy, I told him, "You know we both have our is to lose. I don't think it will work out." I had a reputation any case, something I had absolutely no desire to do. Then I nk of a way to get him out of my apartment. He started to ances. He told me how much influence he had in the film and so on. I didn't like that one bit. He was trying to

blackmail me! I don't think I was really aware of what I was saying, but I told him, "And you seriously think I would fall for a person like you?" Hearing that, he turned pale, took his cap, and left.

OTTO KUMM*

"The Waffen-SS had nothing to do with the concentration camps; we were soldiers."

We SS men didn't become soldiers for career reasons, but out of necessity. Germany was surrounded by enemies, and the Reich had to be protected from outside forces if it was to be built up from the inside. That's why we became soldiers, and for no other reason. I don't believe I would have spent my life in the military. As every officer had to, I signed up for 25 years, but I really doubt whether I would have stayed on. I have to say I liked being a soldier, no doubt about that, but I didn't see it as a career, more as a mission.

What we envisioned right along with the great majority of our people was a Reich with national sovereignty and social justice. We felt both of these goals were being reached more and more in the late 1930s. We had no cause for any kind of doubt, because our commanders were so deeply rooted not only in the German military, but also in National Socialism and the meaning it had for all of us. That's probably also a reason why the Waffen-SS accomplished such outstanding achievements during the war. We didn't have a single commander who questioned the higher leadership. Sure, we had some second thoughts at the end of the Western campaign in 1940, when we let the British get away, but these didn't last long. They were superficial and didn't cause us to question Hitler or his genius. The

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real doubts only came much later, at the end of the war, but then they came in force.

The Waffen-SS had nothing to do with the concentration camps; we were soldiers. From 1934 onwards, there were the SS General Service troops, the later Waffen-SS. They were separate from the "Death's Head" battalions, which were the guard battalions for the concentration camps. Their service was not considered military service like ours. The "Death's Head" division was set up at Dachau in 1940, after the Polish campaign. But these troops were guard units which had nothing to do with the internal operation of the concentration camps. They knew as little as we did about what was going on inside those camps. Inside, there was only a small camp command post, consisting of maybe 12 men. That was all the SS actually had in the camps: just the commander with his staff from the general SS.

When the SS General Service Troops were re-named Waffen-SS after the French campaign, all of the other SS organizations were included under the term Waffen-SS in order to keep them from being drafted into the regular armed forces. That's how the men of the "Death's Head" nominally became members of the Waffen-SS. The Waffen-SS had its own regiments and divisions, its own officer training schools, and its own replacement battalions, all directly under the direction of the highest SS authority. The other troops were subordinate to completely different administrations, and they had nothing to do with the real Waffen-SS.¹ The nominal grouping together has the bitter disadvantage for us today that people say we were all Nazis. But we considered ourselves to be soldiers, exclusively. We wanted nothing to do with what happened in the concentration camps, for God's sake! And I would never have lent myself to anything like that!

¹ For a clearer analysis of the relationship of the Waffen-SS to the camp system see Charles Syndor, *Soldiers of Destruction: The SS Death's Head Division, 1933-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

WOLFGANG STRESEMANN

Born 1904; son of former German Reich-Chancellor Gustav Stresemann; emigrated to the United States in 1939; later returned to West Germany and became superintendent of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra; resides in Berlin.

"It wasn't long before everything German was damned."

I was a musician, and not particularly active politically. Nevertheless, as the son of Gustav Stresemann, one of the Weimar Republic's leading political figures, I was something of a marked man in Hitler's Germany. I finally decided to emigrate to the United States in 1939. For months before there was not a single social event in Berlin where someone didn't seek me out to say: "If only your father were still alive, none of this would be happening."

In the States, I had some of my biggest confrontations with other German emigrants. Emigrants were ultimately more patriotic than most others in the United States. They all lived in the same area of New York City, and eventually became more American than the Americans. Their obvious hate went so far that they discontinued speaking German altogether. Husbands and wives spoke to one another with horrendous accents in English, Goethe's language no longer good enough to claim as their own. I believe that deep down underneath, these people had been so hurt, as Germans, that as a result they only felt terrible hatred for a country they now wanted to see destroyed.

Initially, it was a different story in Washington. Roosevelt was a gambler of sorts. He had a superficial quality to his character. He was