

Rulers of the World: The Hitler Youth by Walter S. Zapotoczny

"...You, my youth, are our nation's most precious guarantee for a great future, and you are destined to be the leaders of a glorious new order under the supremacy of National Socialism. Never forget that one day you will rule the world..."

- Adolf Hitler, 1938.

They were the chosen ones. They were the future of the German Reich. Their commitment was to be complete. They would be formed into a German in his totality. They would be molded in a physical and intellectual direction as well as cultivated spiritually. The German people would become great in the eyes of the whole world through their achievements. Germans of the future, as they grow up as little boys and *Hitler Jugend* (Hitler Youth) or as young girls and members of the German Girls' League would be educated to recognize German cultural values. They would learn their duties to uphold those values and make Germany great. They would represent the new German order. These were the ideals of the Hitler Youth. The political education of the German youth was to be conceived as a unity of thinking, feeling, willing, and action, which would determine the face of the Third Reich. Hitler's prediction of his *Hitler Jugend* growing up and making the world tremble would come to be true. The German tradition of youths belonging to clubs or groups already existed in Germany before the Nazi Party and the Hitler Youth were founded.

It began in the 1890s and was known as the *Wandervögel* (Migratory Bird), a male-only movement featuring a back-to-nature theme. *Wandervögel* members had an idealistic, romantic notion of the past, yearning for simpler days when people lived off the land. They rejected the modern, big city era and took a dim view of the industrial revolution. They found strict German schooling oppressive and rejected parental authority. *Wandervögel* members distinguished themselves by wearing shorts and hiking boots rather than the starched shirts and creased trousers of the middle class. They delighted in rediscovering nature without any modern conveniences, traveling on hikes and sleeping out under the stars. They sang old German folk songs around the campfire and also developed a custom of greeting each other by saying "Heil." This youth movement grew rapidly from 1900 to 1914, attracting the attention and grudging admiration of the mainstream political and religious establishment in Germany. The Catholic Youth Organization and the Boy Scouts, along with a variety of political, religious, para-military, and sports groups sprang up, organized so that youth was led by youth, with the leader being just a few years older than the boys he led. At the outbreak of World War I in 1914, most German youths were quickly caught up in the war mania that swept Germany and enthusiastically went off to the battlefield anticipating it as a noble, romantic experience that would mold them into new men.

By 1918, Germany was defeated and soon plunged into political and social chaos. New political, para-military, religious, and sports oriented youth groups sprang up all over Germany, including the Young Socialists, Young Democrats, and Young Conservatives. Many of the groups adopted military style uniforms and established a hierarchy of formal ranks, a big change from the informal clothing and rule by consent of the pre-war youth groups. However, they shared some of the same themes, opposing a return to the old social status quo, while working to create an idealistic new era, a better Germany, a better world perhaps. In 1920, Adolf Hitler, authorized the formation of a Youth League of the National Socialist Workers' Party (NSDAP). The new Nazi Youth League attracted very few members at first, competing against numerous other well-established groups. Following the failed Munich Beer Hall Putsch and Hitler's arrest, the Nazi Party and Youth League of the NSDAP had been outlawed. Gustav Lenk, former leader of the Nazi Youth League, then founded a new group, the Patriotic Youth Association of Greater Germany. However, German officials soon disbanded this group, believing it was just another name for the Nazi Youth League. After his release from prison in 1924, Hitler announced he would re-start the Nazi Party and invited all German nationalists to join the revitalized Nazi Party with him as its undisputed leader. During this time Gustav Lenk founded another youth group named Greater German Youth Movement. On July 3, 1926, a two-day Nazi rally began and was attended by the youth group members. On Sunday, July 4 Gruber's Greater German Youth Movement was renamed as the *Hitler Jugend, Bund der Deutschen Arbeiterjugend* and thus the *Hitler Jugend* (HJ) or Hitler Youth was born. Kurt Gruber was then officially proclaimed as its first leader. With new branches in twenty different German districts, the Hitler Youth organization faced financial problems

associated with its expansion. Paid dues and Party funds only covered a portion of the costs. Hitler Youth members began the practice of collecting money during propaganda marches. Those marches always included the attention getting, rousing singing of Hitler Youth boys. Their songs, borrowed mainly from the pre-war German youth movement, were based on old ballads and traditional German folklore. They also borrowed tunes from other nationalistic groups and other political organizations, even the Communists, and simply changed the lyrics.

In October 1931, Hitler appointed Baldur von Schirach as chief of all the youth activities for the NSDAP. He had been the leader of the Nazi University Student League since 1928, as well as the Nazi Pupils' League. Schirach had proven himself an able organizer and propagandist while he was a student leader. Although he was from an upper class background, he became a militant opponent of his own social class. He was also an anti-Semite as well as an opponent of Christianity. As one of the earliest members of the Nazi Party, he was among Hitler's inner circle and was personally well regarded by Hitler. Schirach was a romantic and a self-styled poet who had worshipful admiration for Hitler. Schirach organized overnight camping trips where the new boys relaxed around the campfire and learned Nazi slogans while joining in sing-a-longs of Hitler Youth and Nazi anthems. Political instruction took place during weekly *Heimabende* (home evenings) in the houses of Hitler Youth. The agenda was usually set via special educational letters sent to local Hitler Youth leaders giving detailed instructions on how to conduct the meetings. During these meetings, propaganda activities for the following week were also planned.

Baldur von Schirach soon introduced a new structure to the Hitler Youth based on age. Young boys aged 6 to 10 were allowed to hang around the older boys and participate informally. Boys 10 to 14 belonged to the *Jungvolk*, and then from 14 to 18 were in the actual HJ, the commonly used abbreviation for *Hitler Jugend* (Hitler Youth). Each boy was given a performance booklet recording his progress in athletics and Nazi indoctrination throughout all of his years in the HJ. Girls 10 to 14 joined the *Jungmädel* and from 14 to 18 belonged to the BDM, the commonly used abbreviation for *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls). The girls wore a schoolgirl-style uniform with skirts and blouses along with hiking boots. However, the Hitler Youth organization was primarily male oriented and would remain so throughout the duration of the Third Reich, although the HJ and BDM did share common traits including a very heavy emphasis on competition. Just about every task, no matter how big or small, was turned into an individual, team, or unit competition. This included boys and girl's sports, the quality of singing during propaganda marches, and Winter Aid collections. Boys and girls were kept constantly busy. The Nazis capitalized on the natural enthusiasm of young people, their craving for action and desire for peer approval, hoping, ultimately, each young person would come to regard his or her HJ or BDM unit as a home away from home, or perhaps as their real home. Activities for boys included games of hide and seek called 'Trapper and Indian,' and war games in which the boys formed platoons, put on red or blue armbands, then were supposed to hunt down the enemy and rip off the other color arm bands. This often resulted in fistfights and outright brawls between platoons. Younger, weaker boys got pummeled while platoon leaders stood by or even encouraged the fighting. Ripped shirts, along with scrapes and bruises were common during these field exercises, which were intended to toughen them up.

The year 1934 was labeled by Schirach as "The Year of Training." Vocational training was also emphasized as Schirach and Nazi labor leader Robert Ley initiated the annual National Vocational Competition for Hitler Youth in which teens learning various trades were judged and rewarded, with the winners in each category getting to meet Hitler. In September of 1934, the Reich's Land Service was introduced, offering young city dwellers the opportunity to experience life on German farms. All HJ and BDM members were expected to participate, helping to bring in the harvest, while learning the value of hard labor and the simple life. An ominous new development within the Hitler Youth also appeared that year. *HJ-Streifendienst* (Patrol Force) units were formed, functioning as internal political police, maintaining order at meetings, ferreting out disloyal members, and denouncing anyone who criticized Hitler or Nazism including, in a few cases, their own parents. One case involved a teenaged HJ member named Walter Hess who turned in his father for calling Hitler a crazed Nazi maniac. His father was then hauled off to the concentration camp at Dachau under *Schutzhaft* (protective custody). For setting such an example, Hess was promoted to a higher rank within the HJ. By 1935, about 60 percent of Germany's young people belonged to the Hitler Youth. Schirach declared it "The Year of Physical Training" and introduced the second major annual HJ event. Sports Competition Medals were awarded to youths who performed rigorous athletic drills and met strict physical fitness

standards. Every summer, a day would now be set aside as the "Day of the State Youth" for these events. Physical fitness, according to Hitler, was much more important for his young people than memorizing "dead facts" in the classroom. School schedules were adjusted to allow for at least one hour of physical training in the morning and one hour each evening. Prior to this, only two hours per week had been set aside. Hitler also encouraged young boys to take up boxing to heighten their aggressiveness. The most common Hitler Youth activities began to change from singing folk songs around the campfires and hiking to pre-military training. Local HJ groups enthusiastically played war games against each other, during which boys could be roughed up in order to steel themselves for greater adventures. Local camp events often took place in tents, with mandatory overnight stays. The game plan included many military features, such as roll calls during flag ceremonies, military trumpet fanfares, and rifle practice. Much more importance was given to the study of maps and the spotting of imaginary or designated enemies. In the guise of games and play, constant vigilance and discipline were practiced. This applied as well to regional and national hikes, which would take the Hitler Youth on strenuous marches to historically important sites, preferably near borders of countries to be conquered later, such as Denmark and Poland. Learning how to shoot was a key element in pre-military training and a regular part of the agenda early on for all boys, from ages ten to eighteen. Those up to fourteen years practiced with air guns, while the older boys were taught how to use small-caliber rifles. Apart from the general HJ, there were some specialized units that were regarded as more elite than others, such as those with gliders, then turning into the *Fliers Hitler Youth*. In these units, experience in the air was paramount, often after courses in model-plane construction. Playing with handguns or rifles took second place. In the *Motor Hitler Youth*, senior HJ members or their well-to-do fathers owned some of the automobiles and motorcycles. Others could train on the HJ's own vehicles, which incited much enthusiasm in the young boys. In the North, the *Marine Hitler Youth* was sought after, since many youths in Hamburg, Bremen or Kiel were already familiar with sailboats and kayaks. Their members would go to join the *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy). Like the motor branches, members of the *Equestrian Hitler Youth* and the *Communications Hitler Youth*, which trained with the telephone and Morse code, would merge with conventional ground troops of the *Wehrmacht* later. There was also a music division where boys and girls who were artistically inclined flocked to. In addition to the political instruction that took place during weekly *Heimabende*, the German school system supported and emphasized the Nazi teachings.

A portrait of Hitler hung in every classroom. Particular emphasis was paid to the subject of history, which was rewritten to emphasize Nazi themes of racial struggle and German pride. Hitler's struggle for power from 1918 to 1933 was emphasized, glorifying events such as the Beer Hall Putsch and offering hero-worship of Nazi figures such as Horst Wessel (a Berlin SA leader killed by Communists) along with Nazi mythology concerning Hitler's liberation of Germany from the international Jewish/Bolshevik world conspiracy. Racial indoctrination in the classroom included teaching young children how to spot a Jew by describing the physical traits, which Nazis believed were associated with inferior peoples. In some classrooms, where Jews were still present, a Jewish child would be brought to the front of the class as an example. The teacher would then use a pointer, highlighting certain facial characteristics. Hitler Youth songs also contained anti-Semitic lyrics. In addition to the traditional German school system, the Nazis established three types of elite schools for the training of the young Nazis: the Adolf Hitler Schools run by the Hitler Youth organization; the Napolas (National Political Institutes of Education) and the *Ordensburgen* (Order Castles) both run by the Nazi Party. There were eventually ten Adolf Hitler Schools, which took boys at age 12 from the *Jungvolk* and provided six years of intensive, highly disciplined leadership training under Spartan-like conditions. Top rated graduates of these schools were eligible for the exclusive *Ordensburgen* for another three years of training after which they would be ready to assume high level positions in the Nazi Party. It was from these *Ordensburgen*, steeped in Teutonic mythology, that Hitler hoped would emerge a "violently active, dominating, brutal youth...indifferent to pain, without weakness and tenderness." Over the years, the Hitler Youth organization would gradually replace the traditional elementary and secondary school system and become the main force educating German youth. Students emerging from the elite Adolf Hitler Schools were in superb physical condition and thoroughly drilled in Nazi ideology.

Schirach's goal in 1936 was to enroll the entire population of ten-year-olds throughout Germany into the Hitler Youth as a present for Hitler on his 47th birthday. Called "The Year of the *Jungvolk*," enormous pressure was put on young children to join. In school, Nazi-affiliated teachers pressured them. At home and at play, they were aggressively pursued by individual Hitler Youths and through

neighborhood propaganda marches, meetings for parents, and special children's' sing-a-longs. On April 20, Hitler's birthday, a ceremony was held inside the ancient Marienburg Castle of the Teutonic Order. Amid the glow of torch lights, solemn beating of drums and fanfare of trumpets, ten-year-old boys entered the *Jungvolk* by swearing the following oath: "In the presence of this blood banner which represents our Führer, I swear to devote all my energies and my strength to the savior of our country, Adolf Hitler. I am willing and ready to give up my life for him, so help me God." This was followed by the singing of the Hitler Youth anthem, the *Fahnenlied* (Banner Song) written by Schirach. After first joining the organization, the boys spent a few months on probation while undergoing training by older HJ members. A test was then given in which they had to recite all the verses of the Horst Wessel Song and answer basic questions concerning Nazi ideology and the history of the Party. They also had to prove physical fitness by running 60 meters in twelve seconds, and take part in a cross-country hike lasting a day and a half. A *Mutprobe* (courage test) was then given such as jumping from a first or second story ledge into a large canvass held by older HJ or leaping over a campfire. After passing all of the tests, each boy was entitled to wear the brown shirt bearing the *Jungvolk* insignia with a leather shoulder strap and the coveted Hitler Youth dagger bearing the inscription Blut und Ehre (Blood and Honor). On December 1, 1936, Hitler decreed "The Law concerning the Hitler Youth" which mandated that all young male and female Germans (excluding Jews) would be educated physically, intellectually and morally in the spirit of National Socialism though the Hitler Youth from the age of ten onward. This law also effectively ended the Catholic Youth Organization, Boy Scouts and all other non-Nazi youth organizations. In 1938, Hitler expanded Germany's borders by absorbing neighboring Austria and the Sudetenland (western portion of Czechoslovakia) with their large populations of ethnic Germans. As a result, Hitler Youth membership swelled to 8.7 million. In September, the last peacetime Nuremberg rally took place. It had the theme *Grossdeutschland* (Greater Germany) and was the largest one ever held, with nearly 700,000 members of various Nazi Party organizations participating during the weeklong festivities. On Saturday, September 10, over 80,000 Hitler Youths marched into the city stadium and performed military-style parade maneuvers, which they had been practicing for an entire year, ending with a grand finale in which they spelled out the name 'Adolf Hitler' in the grandstand. After a tumultuous welcome, Hitler gave a speech in which he spoke candidly about his own youth and painful adolescence and then ended by telling them, "You, my youth, are our nation's most precious guarantee for a great future, and you are destined to be the leaders of a glorious new order under the supremacy of National Socialism. Never forget that one day you will rule the world!"

A new law was issued on March 25, 1939, conscripting any remaining holdouts into the organization amid warnings to parents that their children would be taken from them and placed in orphanages unless they enrolled.

Girls also enthusiastically participated, although they were assigned duties in keeping with the Nazi viewpoint on the role of females. An old German slogan, popular even during the Nazi era, summed it up -- *Kinder, Kirche, Küche* (Children, Church, Kitchen). The primary role of young females in Nazi Germany was to give birth to healthy, racially pure boys. All women's organizations were thus regarded as auxiliaries ranking below their male counterparts. Local BDM groups would gather each week to play music, sing folk songs or to do arts and crafts. By 1939, there were 1.5 million members. BDM girls were assigned to help care for wounded soldiers in hospitals, to help in kindergartens, and to assist households with large families. They also stood on railway platforms, offering encouragement and refreshments to army troops departing for the front.

On September 1, 1939, Hitler's armies invaded Poland. Six years of war would follow with the full participation of the Hitler Youth eventually down to the youngest child. At the onset of war, the Hitler Youth totaled 8.8 million. But the war brought immediate, drastic changes as over a million Hitler Youth leaders of draft age and regional adult leaders were immediately called up into the army. This resulted in a severe shortage of local and district leaders. The problem was resolved by lowering the age of local Hitler Youth leaders to 16 and 17. The average age had been 24. These 16 and 17-year-olds would now be responsible for as many as 500 or more boys. Another big change was the elimination of the strict division between the *Jungvolk* (boys 10 to 14) and the actual HJ (Hitler Youth 14 to 18). The HJ organization had sprawled into a giant bureaucracy with 14 different regional offices. It was now cut back to just six main offices. Hitler Youth leader Baldur von Schirach, not wanting to be left out of the war, received Hitler's permission to volunteer for the army. He underwent training and received a rapid rise through the ranks, becoming a lieutenant in just a few months. Artur

Axmann, who had headed the HJ Social Affairs Department and had been involved with the organization since the late 1920s, replaced him. The war returned a sense of urgency to the daily activities of the Hitler Youth. The organization had experienced a bit of a slump after 1936 when participation had become mandatory. For many young Germans, HJ meetings and activities had simply become part of the weekly routine. The original mission of the HJ had been to bring Hitler to power. Victory in the war became the new mission and HJ boys enthusiastically sprang into action, serving first as special postmen delivering draft notices in their neighborhoods along with monthly ration cards. They also went door to door collecting scrap metals and other needed war materials. Following the rapid German victory over Poland, girls from the Land Service were assigned to the acquired territory in northern Poland (*Warthegau*) to assist in the massive Nazi repopulation program in which native Poles were forced off their homes and farms by Himmler's SS troops to make way for ethnic Germans. Boys and girls of the Hitler Youth assisted in this operation by watching over Polish families as they were evicted from their homes making sure they took only a few basic possessions. Everything else of value was to be left behind for the Germans. Hitler considered the war in the East to be a war of annihilation in which those considered racially inferior, the Slavs and Jews, would be forcibly resettled or destroyed. Masses of unwanted humanity were thus forced into the southeastern portion of Poland where ghettos sprang up along with slave labor camps and eventually the extermination camps.

Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, ethnic Germans began arriving into the Warthegau from areas of Russia and central Europe. Hitler Youth were utilized to help resettle and Nazify the new arrivals, many of which did not even speak German. Children of the arrivals were also subject to mandatory participation in the HJ. In August 1940, British air raids began against Berlin in retaliation for the German bombing of London. Hitler Youth boys had been functioning as air raid wardens and anti-aircraft (flak) gun assistants in Berlin and other cities since the outbreak of war, and now saw their first action. America's entry into the war in December of 1941 resulted in a massive influx of air power into England. The first thousand-bomber raid occurred in May 1942 against Cologne. In that same month, newly created *Wehrertüchtigungslager* or WELS (Defense Strengthening Camps) went into operation in Germany providing three weeks of mandatory war training for all boys aged 16 to 18 under the supervision of the *Wehrmacht*. They learned how to handle German infantry weapons including various pistols, machine-guns, hand grenades and *Panzerfausts* (German bazookas). By the beginning of 1943, Hitler's armies were stretched to the limit, battling the combined forces of the Soviet Union, United States, England and other Allies. By this time, most able-bodied German men were in the armed services. As a result, starting on January 26, 1943, anti-aircraft batteries were officially manned solely by Hitler Youth boys. At first they were stationed at flak guns near their homes, but as the overall situation deteriorated, they were transferred all over Germany. The younger boys were assigned to operate searchlights and assist with communications, often riding their bicycles as dispatch riders. Following each bombing raid, Hitler Youths assisted in neighborhood cleanup and helped relocate bombed out civilians. They knocked on doors looking for unused rooms in undamaged houses or apartments. Occupants refusing to let in the new 'tenants' were reported to the local police and could likely expect a visit from Gestapo.

As the Allies stepped up their bombing campaign, the Nazis began evacuating children from threatened cities into Hitler Youth KLV (*Kinderlandverschickung*) camps located mainly in the rural regions of East Prussia, the Warthegau section of Poland, Upper Silesia, and Slovakia. From 1940 to 1945, over 2.8 million German children were sent to these camps. There were separate KLV camps for boys and girls. About 5,000 camps were eventually in operation, varying greatly in sizes from the smallest, which had 18 children to the largest that held 1,200. Each camp was run by a Nazi approved teacher and a Hitler Youth squad leader. The camps replaced big city grammar schools, most of which were closed due to the bombing. Reluctant parents were forced to send their children away to the camps. Life inside the boys' camp was harsh, featuring a dreary routine of roll calls, para-military field exercises, hikes, marches, recitation of Nazi slogans and propaganda, along with endless singing of Hitler Youth songs and Nazi anthems. Schoolwork was neglected while supreme emphasis was placed on the boys learning to automatically snap-to attention at any time of the day or night and to obey all orders unconditionally "without any if or buts." The year 1943 marked the military turning point for Hitler's Reich. In January, the German Sixth Army was destroyed by the Soviets at Stalingrad. In May, the last German strongholds in North Africa fell to the Allies. In July, the massive German counter-attack against the Soviets at Kursk failed. The Allies invaded Italy. An Allied front in northern Europe

was anticipated. Amid a dwindling supply of manpower, the existence of an entire generation of ideologically pure boys, raised as Nazis, eager to fight for the Fatherland and even die for the *Führer*, could not be ignored. The result was the formation of the *12th SS-Panzer Division Hitler Jugend*. A recruitment drive began, drawing principally on 17-year-old volunteers, but younger members 16 and under eagerly joined. During July and August 1943, 10,000 recruits arrived at the training camp in Beverloo, Belgium. To fill out the HJ Division with enough experienced soldiers and officers, Waffen-SS survivors from the Russian Front, including members of the elite *Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler*, were brought in. Fifty officers from the *Wehrmacht*, who were former Hitler Youth leaders, were also reassigned to the division. The remaining shortage of squad and section leaders was filled with Hitler Youth members who had demonstrated leadership aptitude during HJ para-military training exercises. The division was placed under the command of 34-year-old Maj. Gen. Fritz Witt, who had also been a Hitler Youth, dating back before 1933. Among his young troops, morale was high. Traditional, stiff German codes of conduct between officers and soldiers were replaced by more informal relationships in which young soldiers were often given the reasons behind orders. Unnecessary drills, such as goose-step marching were eliminated. Lessons learned on the Russian Front were applied during training to emphasize realistic battlefield conditions, including the use of live ammunition. By the spring of 1944, training was complete. The *12th SS-Panzer Division Hitler Jugend*, now fully trained and equipped, conducted divisional maneuvers observed by Gen. Heinz Guderian and Field Marshal von Rundstedt, both of whom admired the enthusiasm and expressed their high approval of the proficiency achieved by the young troops in such a short time. The division was then transferred to Hasselt, Belgium, in anticipation of D-Day, the Allied invasion of northern France. A few days before the invasion, SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler visited the division. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the *12th SS-Panzer Division Hitler Jugend* was one of three Panzer divisions held in reserve by Hitler as the Allies stormed the beaches at Normandy beginning at dawn. At 2:30 in the afternoon, the HJ Division was released and sent to Caen, located not far inland from Sword and Juno beaches on which British and Canadian troops had landed. The division soon came under heavy strafing attacks from Allied fighter-bombers, which delayed arrival there until 10 p.m. The HJ were off to face an enemy that now had overwhelming air superiority and would soon have nearly unlimited artillery support. The Allies, for their part, were about to have their first encounter with Hitler's fanatical boy-soldiers. The shocking fanaticism and reckless bravery of the Hitler Youth in battle astounded the British and Canadians who fought them. They sprang like wolves against tanks. If they were encircled or outnumbered, they fought until there were no survivors. Young boys, years away from their first shave, had to be shot dead by Allied soldiers, old enough, in some cases, to be their fathers. The "fearless, cruel, domineering" youth Hitler had wanted had now come of age and arrived on the battlefield with utter contempt for danger. On May 8, 1945, numbering just 455 soldiers and one tank, the *12th SS-Panzer Division Hitler Jugend* surrendered to the American 7th Army.

Many national leaders have at least given lip service to the idea that the future of a nation lies with its youth. Perhaps no national leader so fervently believed this and acted on it with greater effectiveness than Adolf Hitler. He envisioned an entire generation of obedient fighter pilots and panzer commanders extending the domination of the Reich to the farthest reaches of the world and implementing his chilling vision of the future. Before the war most young people were happy to join the Hitler Youth, with many games, camping, songs and fun activities. It was also a way of escaping from their parents and from school. It was a world of their own, whose leaders were often in conflict with the traditional authorities, teachers and parents. It was also an organization that seemed to consider youth as very important. As war loomed, many young people became disillusioned with the constant drilling, propaganda and anti-Semitism. Some members never identified with the political goals of the Nazis or the anti-Semitic views and were only members of the HJ because they had to. Many members did fully accept the views of the Nazi Party and went on to be members of the infamous *Einsatzgruppen* (Special Action Group), *Waffen-SS* and *SS-Panzer-Division Totenkopf* (Concentration Camp Guards). The performance of the *12th SS-Panzer Division Hitler Jugend* and the Hitler Youth involvement in the final defense of Berlin illustrates the degree of dedication to Hitler many members possessed. On April 23 1945, the Soviets were rushing toward Berlin, capital of Nazi Germany, where Hitler had chosen to make his last stand. Battalions made up entirely of Hitler Youths were formed to hold the Pichelsdorf bridges by the Havel River. Five thousand boys, wearing man-sized uniforms several sizes too big and helmets that flopped around on their heads, stood by with rifles and *Panzerfausts*, ready to oppose the Soviet Army. Within five days of battle, forty five hundred had been killed or wounded. In other parts of Berlin, HJ boys met similar fates. Many committed suicide rather than be taken alive by the Red Army. Many members of the Hitler Youth went on to

achieve greatness in battle as members of the *Wehrmacht*, *Kriegsmarine* and the *Luftwaffe*. They fought fearlessly for their *Fuhrer* and their nation. The commitment developed and the fanatical devotion to duty made them rulers of much of the Third Reich. They almost became rulers of the world!

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