

Jenna Frost - D4

History Grade 11

Educator: Mr van Dyk

**Topic: HOLOCAUST CENTRE White Rose
Writing and Art Project
“Resisting Injustice”
Category A: Research Essay: RESISTANCE**

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A number of resistance movements developed in response to the oppressive Nazi regime during the Holocaust between 1933 and 1945. One such movement was the Edelweiss Pirates. These courageous young Germans opposed the Nazi party by spreading anti-Hitler pamphlets, sabotaging Nazi equipment and assisting enemies of the Nazi party.

In the years leading up and during World War Two (1939-1945) the Nazi party established a number of youth organisations to develop a sense of patriotism and loyalty in the German youth. The most popular of these organisations was the Hitler Youth and, in its prime, the group's membership amounted to 90 percent of the country's youth population. Initially, the Hitler Youth functioned similarly to any other youth organisation and organised sport and different activities for members. Over time, the Hitler Youth developed into a compulsory recruitment programme with a significant focus on military training in order to prepare young people to fight in the war. Members of the Hitler Youth were exempt from police arrest and their activities included vandalism, theft and fighting (Kellerman n.d.). In December 1939, membership to the Hitler Youth became compulsory and there were severe consequences for those who did not obey this law. Small numbers of teenagers, largely born into working class families, were dissatisfied with the practices and values of the Hitler Youth and dropped out of school and Nazi Party youth organisations. These youths began spending time together and so developed the Edelweiss Pirates. They had long hair, wore checkered shirts with dark shorts and white stockings and wore metal Edelweiss pins to identify themselves (Faces of Courage, the Edelweiss Pirates, 2016). The Edelweiss Pirates consisted of a number of youth groups around the country, comprising of more than 5000 teenagers. They were also known as "Navajos" and "Kittelbach Pirates". The exact date on which the movement was born is not known but it is estimated to be sometime in 1936. (Trueman, 2015)

The Edelweiss Pirates was a liberal, open-minded movement that gave young people an element of freedom and encouraged them to think for themselves. While the Nazi party youth groups enforced strict segregation, the Edelweiss Pirates encouraged girls and boys to mingle with one another. In their early years they organised camping and hiking trips, defying Nazi restrictions on movements. While on these trips they enjoyed playing music and singing songs that had been banned by the Nazi Party and engaged in open discussions. Although seemingly harmless, at the time these activities were strictly forbidden and considered treason. (Trueman, 2015). As the war progressed the Edelweiss Pirates took a more active role in Nazi resistance. They spread anti-Nazi propaganda by spray-painting anti-Hitler slogans on city walls and distributing anti-Nazi pamphlets. Some members of the Edelweiss Pirates deliberately provoked street fights with the Hitler Youth. They also worked in collaboration with underground resistance movements. Pirates in Cologne offered shelter to German army deserters and escapees from concentration and labour camps (Faces of Courage, the Edelweiss Pirates, 2016). The Edelweiss Pirates also

engaged in general acts of sabotage against the Nazis. These included: vandalising Nazi equipment, raiding military bases, derailing Nazi trains and stealing supplies. (Faraci, 2014) They initiated numerous attacks on Nazi officials and planned to blow up the Gestapo headquarters in Cologne. Unfortunately this plan failed when leading members of the Edelweiss Pirates were captured and imprisoned but they still managed to assassinate the Head of the Cologne Gestapo in November 1944. (Steven, 2006)

Between 1936 and 1939 the Edelweiss Pirates were seen as nothing more than an irritation and there were no severe consequences for captured Edelweiss Pirates. A common punishment for captured Pirates was to have their heads shaved as a method of humiliation. However, as the Pirates grew bolder in their resistance against the Nazis, their punishments grew in severity. Those captured could expect a range of punishments including beatings, imprisonment in concentration camps, torture and in the most extreme cases, death (Kellerman n.d.). As the war progressed the Nazis grew increasingly concerned about the activities of the Edelweiss Pirates. In December 1942, under the instruction of Heinrich Himmler, the Dusseldorf Gestapo arrested and imprisoned more than a thousand Edelweiss Pirates (Faces of Courage, the Edelweiss Pirates, 2016). In 1944, the Nazis arrested leading members of the Edelweiss Pirates who were planning to blow up the Cologne Gestapo Headquarters. These teenagers were imprisoned and tortured for months. On the 10th of November 1944, five of them were publicly hanged in Cologne without trials (Kellerman n.d.).

The most significant achievement of the Edelweiss Pirates in their resistance against the Nazi Party would have to be their assassination of the Head of the Cologne Gestapo in 1944. Although the direct impact of their actions in Nazi Germany cannot be clearly seen, their behaviour contributed to the Nazi resistance movements and acted as a catalyst to end the war. The Edelweiss Pirates were not recognised as an official resistance movement after the war ended. However, in 1988, they were honoured as "Righteous among the Nations" by the Jerusalem Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial. In 2005 they were officially recognised as resistance fighters by the German government and criminal records acquired as a result of actions performed as a part of the Edelweiss Pirates were dropped. The German film, *Edelweiss Pirates*, released in 2005, pays tribute to the bravery of the Edelweiss Pirates and their contribution to resistance against the Nazi Party (Kellerman n.d.).

The members of the Edelweiss Pirates should be admired and honoured for remaining true to their own values and beliefs in spite of the Nazis attempts at indoctrination. They showed great bravery in their acts of resistance against the Nazi party and their courage inspired other people to also stand against the Nazis. They provided young people with freedom outside of the harsh Nazi rule and gave them the opportunity to express their own views. Their initial activities were an escape from oppressive conditions under the Nazi party and allowed teenagers to simply

enjoy themselves. Although the Edelweiss Pirates are not a well-known resistance organisation they should be commemorated for the significant contribution they made to the resistance movement and the lives of German teenagers at the time.

The Edelweiss Pirates were only one of many movements that opposed the brutal Nazi regime. The contribution made by the resistance movements ultimately benefitted the Allies and expedited the end of the war. The courage and strong moral codes of all resistance fighters should be recognised and commemorated.

ADDENDUM

Figure 1:

This photograph shows a group of unknown teenagers who belonged to the Cologne branch of the Edelweiss Pirates.



Figure 2:

This photograph, taken in 1937, shows members of the Cologne Edelweiss Pirates.



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