

The Bundeswehr advertising campaign: “A warning call to all young people”

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In 2017, the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces) launched an advertising campaign on university campuses and even in schools. The author of this article, born in 1931, recounts some personal experiences and memories of his childhood and youth under the Nazi s and during World War Two as a “reminder to all young people to take a stand against the lure of the Bundeswehr in school s and other public institutions.”

My first experience of the world war period dates back to 1938. The morning after *Kristallnacht* a synagogue was still burning. In a Jewish shop, windows had been smashed and the window displays looted.

The first human loss I suffered was in the first year of the war. Our family received news that the 18-year-old soldier temporarily billeted with us had been killed in France.

The start of the Second World War on 1 September 1939, with the invasion of Poland, meant years of aerial terror were to begin for Duisburg, the city of my birth. The city, one of the centres of steel production of the Third Reich, suffered a total of 311 air raids between 1940 and 1945.

The first aerial bomb in our immediate neighbourhood destroyed a pub and its guests, including one of my schoolmates and his family. An incendiary shell, which penetrated the ceiling in an underground bunker and inflicted serious injuries on a woman, missed our family only due to a wall that separated us. In an overground bunker where we were seeking shelter, an explosive bomb penetrated the upper floor and exploded. We were only one floor below.

Due to the constant bombing of the heavily industrialised Ruhr and Adolf Hitler’s resulting “Führer order” to evacuate young people from areas at

risk of air war, I was sent to Pomerania and then to the “Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia” in former Czechoslovakia, much to the distress of my parents. Here, far from my parents’ home, I spent the time after school with my schoolmates following outdoor pursuits and other sporting activities. We were taught to think in terms of friend and foe by glorifying the Führer, *Volk* (the people), the fatherland, victorious battles, and heroic soldiering in singing lessons and while marching through the village.

But with the advance of the Red Army, our days in Czechoslovakia were numbered. Shortly before we departed for Germany, all the children were summoned once again to the spa gardens. There the company commander and his soldiers showed us how to deal with the enemy. The Czech population was shooed through the Kurpark completely unprepared and threatened with rifles and the firing of blanks.

On 20 April 1945, Hitler’s birthday, we were all supposed to leave the capital Prague by train. But shortly before the scheduled departure, all pupils 14 years and older had to leave the train again. They were to defend Prague, guns in hand against the overwhelming armies of the Soviet Union. I was lucky. My birthday was on 21 April, so I was still 13. Only a few hours separated me from the fate that befell my schoolmates. Only 17 of them escaped with their lives. I returned to a bombed-out Duisburg at the end of the war.

I am all the more shocked that the Bundeswehr is now massively increasing its advertising at universities and even in schools. A new recruitment offensive by the Bundeswehr, with which Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) wants to massively increase the size of the military and recruit thousands of new soldiers for the army in the

next few years, can mean only one thing: Young people are to be consumed again as cannon fodder for the geostrategic and economic interests of German imperialism, as in the past two world wars.

In the Second World War, more than half of the men between the ages of 25 and 30 who were drafted fell. Of the recruits born after 1920, i.e., children, adolescents and young men aged 14 to 24, more than 30 percent fell, in each case. In the wars of the last century, millions of parents had to suffer the loss of their children. To ensure that this does not happen again, it is urgent to build an international anti-war movement.



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