



Jungvolk: The Story of a Boy Defending Hitler's Reich

Wilhelm R. Gehlen, Don A. Gregory

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This is the wartime memoir of a boy named Will, who happened to be the nephew of the head of Nazi Germany's intelligence agency, Foreign Armies East. After reading this book, the reader will wonder who had the most exciting time during World War II.

Will Gehlen's father, a trolley driver, was drafted into the Wehrmacht to man a Sturmgeschutz assault gun in Russia. His older brother, Len, was enlisted in the Hitlerjugend. The author, only 10 years old when the war began, became a helper at the local Luftwaffe flak battery, fetching ammunition. It was exciting work for Will (a member of the "Jungvolk") and by the end of the war he had become expert at judging attacks. As fighter raids increased in frequency he noted that the pilots became less skilled.

Aside from aircraft kills, Gehlen had other adventures during the war, as when his mother dragged him to visit his aunt in Luxembourg in 1944. Crossing the lines they found no aunt but met American troops, and were surprised when the German Army launched an offensive, overrunning the village and forcing US soldiers to retreat with casualties. Making their way back to Germany was even more perilous, until they discovered the most secure vehicles were mail trucks. No one, not even the SS, tried to interfere with their progress.

Gehlen's town was repeatedly bombed and he often had to help with the wreckage or to pull survivors from basements. He witnessed more death than a child ever should; nevertheless, his flak battery continued firing until US tanks were almost on top of the position.

In this book Gehlen, provides an intimate glimpse of the chaos, horror and black humor of life just behind the front lines. As seen through the eyes of a child, who was expert in aircraft identification and bomb weights, food-rationing and tank types, one encounters a view of life inside Hitler's wartime Reich that is both fascinating and rare.

REVIEWS

"There are no OOB's, weapon specifications, or other hard details of battles and strategy. But what you have is a readable home front account on the German side. And that's not something you find every day."
Magweb.com 5/2008

"...An extraordinary account of a young boy caught up in the middle of a war...Frank and even funny at times...utterly absorbing...Heartily recommended for anyone wanting to know what life was for ordinary people in Hitler's Third Reich, but also for students of history and people who are simply interested in other people's lives."
Books Monthly (UK), 7/2008

"a real gem, a quiet tour de force. It's very hard to accurately recapture how it feels to be 10 years old again but the author has more than succeeded in doing this... we are given a window into home front Germany that is unique in its perspective. Despite its serious subject matter the book reads as an adventure story from start to finish and I can honestly say I did not want it to end... If you buy one book this year make it this one."
Military Modeling, 6/2008

“...a very good read and describes a part of the Second World War that is not often delved into; usually civilians are merely identified as victims or statistics. This book gives them their humanity back.”

Play History.net, 07/2008

“In his first effort, Gehlen, born in 1933 Germany, provides a firsthand look behind Axis lines. . . . Too young for the Hitler Youth (though his big brother attends every meeting), Gehlen’s account [focuses] mostly on his home-life: the trials of his overworked mother, the deployment of his father, and the companionship of a Nazi platoon operating weaponry in the fields near his home. Eventually, Gehlen becomes a messenger for the field fighters during multiple attacks, and he recounts intriguing conversations with Nazis, Nazi sympathizers, and Allied soldiers. . . . The memories Gehlen shares are . . . remarkable for the child’s perspective they bring to bear on a warring country’s ferocious struggle.”

?PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, 08/2008

“...gives us an intriguing glimpse into a rarely seen aspect of life inside the Third Reich.”

Yorkshire Evening Post, 07/2008

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