

ANTI-FASCIST YOUTH IN NAZI GERMANY

By Autonome Antifa (M)

(Anti-Fascist Action, Germany)

Very little is told in the United States about German resistance to the Nazis. The official U.S. government line during the war is that NO resistance existed. Of course that was a lie. During the German Third Reich, there was widespread resistance against the Nazi dictatorship. The resistance was very different: You can find Anarchists, Communists, Social Democrats, church-people (keyword: "Bekennende Kirche"- "church of confession") and also conservative officers (keyword: 20th of July 1944) who were against the Fascist regime, but they had different motivations and reasons for that fight.

The "Edelweisspiraten" (Edelweiss Pirates) were a youth protest movement, that could be found in big cities on the Rhine like Duisburg, Essen and Dortmund. There was no youth movement you could compare with them in the countryside . In Cologne there were thousands of these youths. Alone in the card file of the Gestapo in 1942 you can find over 3,000 names of presumably "Edelweisspiraten".

THE NAME "EDELWEISS PIRATES" AND OTHER TERMS

The groups of youths who are known under the name Edelweiss Pirates have very different names, but this term is the best-known and during the Second World War it was used in the whole Rhine region. The term was first applied by a Gestapo officer in Essen in 1939, because the boys who protested against the regime wore badges of this flower (Edelweiss), you can find in the Alps. From 1934 and 1935 until 1941 youths in Cologne were called "Navajos", which was a name they got from the Hitler-Youth. Later they used it themselves. Also "Kittelbachpiraten" (K.P.-Literally, Pirates in Sailors Overalls or "River Pirates") was used in Duisburg and Oberhausen until 1941 and 1942.

WHO WERE EDELWEISS PIRATES?

The Edelweiss Pirates were groups of young people, who didn't want to accept the Fascist way of living. All the people in Germany were under the control of the Fascists and their organizations. Young people could only be a member of the Fascist youth movement called the Hitler-Youth (Hitlerjungund or HJ).

Other organizations were illegal. But the Hitler Youth was organized like an army, with a strict and severe structure. Subordination and obedience were expected from the youths. Many of them didn't like that structure (especially if they had problems with their superiors) and left the Hitler Youth. They met other young people who were also against the dominant climate in the Fascist society and founded groups in their areas and their streets. 90 % came from the Working Class. You can find girls too in these groups. It's not really clear, what an Edelweiss Pirate was. The Fascists had different definitions for them. One member of the Hitler Youth in Essen defined them in 1940 as "...boys, who no longer go to church." Another thought they were people who were kicked out of the Hitler Youth, because of their "bad" behavior. Every one of the "Edelweiss Pirates" in Cologne who wore a colored checked shirt, a very short trouser and a special kind of socks were called Navajos by the Hitler Youth in 1936 [Edelweiss Pirate groups took the names of native American tribes as their *nom d' gare*].

ACTIVITIES OF THE REBEL YOUTHS

The groups met almost every evening in special places like ruins, parks or bars where before 1933 political radicals met. They sang songs, drank and smoked, and other things which weren't approved of by the Fascist society. They developed a subculture with their own way of living. They defended their places, often known by the Gestapo, against the Hitler Youth. There are many documents about Edelweiss Pirate street fights in the card files of the Gestapo. They made trips together on the weekends which were the high spot in their free time: They could leave the control of the Police State and meet other groups who thought in a similar way. The Edelweiss Pirates increasingly came into conflicts with the Gestapo. Some of the Pirates not only had another way of living, but developed actions to protest against the dictatorship: Non-concurring behavior escalated to politically-motivated resistance. In 1943 and 1944 Edelweiss Pirates in Wanne/Eickel regularly distributed leaflets from the Allies to German households. The Gestapo persecuted the youths. They were arrested because it seemed that they had founded a group which was like the traditional youth groups before 1933 (When all groups except the Hitler Youth were banned). In Germany they were called "Buendische Jugend" (Youth Group). They were a kind of scouts. If youths were arrested, they were beaten up by Gestapo officers and perhaps taken to prison.