



Save the Last Bullet: Memoir of a Boy Soldier in Hitler's Army

Wilhelm Langbein

Heidi Langbein-Allen

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Wilhelm Langbein and Heidi Langbein-Allen's harrowing memoir *Save the Last Bullet* concerns Langbein's experiences as a child soldier during World War II.

Wilhelm was ten years old when enrolled, as required by German law, in the Nazi youth organization Deutsche Jungvolk (DJ). At fourteen, he graduated to the also mandatory Hitlerjugend (HJ), or Hitler Youth. Only months into the HJ, he was drafted to fight in the war and sent to the front in an attempt to stall defeat.

Split into four sections, the book chronicles Wilhelm's life a few years before the war, when Hitler's regime was already well underway, followed by his military training, his days on the front, and the aftermath of the ceasefire. Each section gives an account of all the different ways in which Nazism impacted Germany. It is a ruthless, heartbreaking account of the indoctrination that children were subjected to, and of the horrific situations in which they were knowingly put. It describes the atrocities committed by the SS against all, even the civilians that met with the arbitrary parameters of the Aryan ideal. The grief and suffering of war are captured with poignant clarity, and the aftermath, in which Wilhelm and the other children were expected to "move on" while grappling with the newfound knowledge of the horrors perpetuated by Nazism, is somber and painful.

The abuse perpetrated on non-SS German soldiers by the Allied Forces is also detailed, including their resistance or inability to comprehend that being drafted wasn't voluntary, and that not all Germans were Nazis. The mass rapes of German women, an often forgotten war crime committed by the Allies after ceasefire, is recounted in brutal detail.

Save the Last Bullet is an invaluable memoir by one of many German children taken from their families and sent to be slaughtered.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (January / February 2023)

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