

I was Hitler's Last Contingent

Recollections of a Child Soldier and Teenaged POW

by Stefan Holzer

16 year-old Guenter Lucks is called up to join the Waffen SS in the last months of war. After very short battlefield experience he ends up as a Soviet Prisoner of War. This is the story of a seemingly “innocent” boy, who is coined by the atrocities of war and captivity for the rest of his life.

Growing up with the Nazi Regime

Born in Hamburg in 1928, Guenter grew up in Nazi Germany. Young people were confronted and highly influenced by Nazi ideology in these times. School teachers, Hitler Youth leaders and Joseph Goebbels' massive propaganda machinery contributed to the way how young Germans saw the Nazi regime. Consequently, many of them were dedicated members of the Hitler Youth and believed in a greater Germany that should rule over entire Europe.

Even though Guenter's family was left-winged and radically socialist, he was fascinated by Hitler and the prospects of war. He says:

“We (the youngsters) never talked about politics. We didn't even consider to do so, because there was only one opinion, at least only one that was permitted. Hitler was infallible ...”

Collecting pictures of Wehrmacht soldiers or reconstructing battles against the enemy were just some of the boys' activities back then. Even bombardment seemed exciting to Guenter at first.

After some time in Bohemia – Guenter was evacuated from Hamburg with his family – his brother Hermann and Guenter himself came back. During one of the worst air raids on Hamburg, the house of the Lucks family was destroyed, Hermann died and Guenter finally started to understand the real extents of war.

Life as a Child Soldier

Eventually, Guenter had to leave his beloved hometown. He describes it, as follows:

“My childhood ended on a cold winter day in 1945. I was 16 years old [...] and I knew that my life would change radically now.”

Being called up to the “Volkssturm”, he spent some time in a training unit and became part of the Waffen SS (the German elite troops). A membership, which should be a disadvantage for him in Russian prison camps. As soldiers were needed, Guenter and other young men (or rather boys) were sent to the front lines. Inexperienced, weak and without skills in combat, these boys were often killed or wounded easily. So was Guenter: After a shell exploded next to him, he was taken prisoner in a “hospital train”, the start of an incredible odyssey.

Of hardship, Comradeship and the First Love – the Years of Imprisonment

During his 5 years of imprisonment, Guenter went through several prison camps in different parts of the Soviet Union. Living conditions were harsh, food rations little and death was not a rare occurrence – especially in the beginning. Many soldiers died of hunger, illness or simply because they did not want to live any longer. Guenter experienced a similar situation, which he describes as low point of his imprisonment.

All Men between 16 and 60 were Obligated to Serve the Army.

Things improved, when they arrived in their 2nd camp in Tallinn. Some kind women who were employed in the camp helped the young POW by giving him extra food and clothes. Because of his youthful appearance Guenter was called “Bubi”. However, the time in Tallinn ended abruptly when they were – once again – brought to another prison camp. The “journey” ended in the outskirts of Moscow, in a town called Tuschino. Guenter stayed there until the end of his imprisonment. Apart from better food rations and accommodation, even cultural activities (theatre group, orchestra) were part of their daily life. Guenter befriended a young guard named Jorka and fell in love with a young girl who lived next to the camp. With the help of Jorka, he could see her regularly and even wanted to marry Walja.

“Our romance lasted from April until autumn of 1949. I felt as if I was flying and did not think often about coming back to Germany“, Guenter recalls. Unfortunately, he never saw her again.

Coming Home

In 1950, after 5 years of imprisonment, Guenter was one of the last soldiers to be sent home. That was because he was a member of the Waffen SS. “Regular” soldiers (of the Wehrmacht) had been released earlier as they were often regarded as less guilty. In the end, he arrived in Hamburg. Ill and weak, despite the comparatively good living conditions, but alive.

Guenter Lucks

Ich war Hitlers letztes Aufgebot. Meine Erlebnisse als SS-Kindersoldat

Reinbek bei Hamburg 2010

Rowohlt Verlag

9,99 Euro