

Excerpts from the Memoirs
of
Werner Mork

“Aus Meiner Sicht (From My View)”
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Nationalistic Spirit in the Schools

The history of Germany was always seen in a very nationalistic perspective and always in this sense taught to us and brought near to us. However Herr Torborg was a famous exception. His history lessons were not one-sided. Under the nationalistic perspective there was a special honor lent to the Prussian King Fredrick the Great, lovingly known as “Old Fritz,” as well as the great German, the unifier of the kingdom and Chancellor of the Empire, Herr von Bismark. The majority of primary school teachers were not ardent defenders of the [Wiemar] Republic having had a very conservative upbringing, even though they were beholdng to the Republic for their wages. They took their pay from the Republic, but in their heart they had hardly a good word to say about the State created by the “November Thugs.” [*Instigators of the November 1918 revolution.*] These men and women were in the best position to be the heralds of a distinctly nationalistic feeling and they were the great forerunners of that which was to come.

A very strong nationalistic orientation was apparent in the teachers, school masters and councils of the higher schools. Despite the conservatism of the primary school teachers, there was very little contact between them and the upper level professors. The master teacher was after all considered to be a more learned position and thus, superior to a mere elementary school teacher. At least it felt that way. Some were thought of as officers in the school system while the others were considered non-commissioned officers. This was the appearance to the general public.

However, both classes of teachers were declared opponents of the Republic and that is the way the teaching was oriented. Nationalism was a given not only in regards to the 1914 war, which was always taught in glowing terms, full of nationalistic pathos. The teachers encouraged the students to join the Kaiser's army, and for that they earned the primary culpability for the insanity of Langemarck which became a national epic that glorified the slaughter of youths. [*Langemarck was an incident early in WW I where a regiment of young reservists attacked the French lines. The attack, like all of the other attacks in the beginning of the war, failed and 2,000 young men were killed, but the propaganda machine blew the incident up into nearly mythic proportions and declared it a victory.*] Even now this nonsense continued to grow in the minds of the professors and the students continued to be overdosed with excesses of pathos and patriotism.

In general the teachers were unchanged in being captivated by this German nationalistic delusion. They carry a great deal of the responsibility for instilling this rah-rah patriotism in the heads of their students. They built the foundation where, after the fall of the hated Republic, National Socialism could find a footing. The new National Socialism was worse than ever and filled with negative attitudes to the Jews, the Reds and the Liberals. All ranks of teachers were enthusiastic banner carriers of National Socialism, true followers of the Party and not just in the National Socialist Teachers Union.

The teachers were conservative right to their bones, they couldn't be otherwise because they had always been that way particularly since 1871. I mean, it is no wonder that after 1945 in their teachings they did not want to deal with the spirit of the past. These distinguished ladies and gentlemen would have had to admit their own guilt. Their own way of describing the German history and European history was always through the perspective of Nationalism. That kept them in the good company of all of the German historians and authors of history books. German history was always treated as a national epic wherein great heroes and and their heroic deeds were always in the foreground. Wars and the commanders as well as the rulers were always the content of German history beginning with the Germanic tribes of Caesar's time. The military nature of the brave German was always the middle-point and highpoint of history lessons. It was always presented like this by the 'great' German

historians like Treitschke or Ranke just to name two who described heroic German deeds with one-sided emphasis on German mind and character, present in both men and women. This was the perfect “food” for the German teachers who responded immediately with loud “Hurrah's.”

Hero worship, ruler worship and the priority of the military were always dear to the heart of every teacher whether primary school or the upper grades. These traits were of the utmost importance in raising children to be good upstanding citizens and officers. The heroes of Greek mythology helped by providing the teachers with shining role models. We had our own heroes, not only the those of the prehistoric Germanic tribes, but also the heroes of Hellenic times that many primary and secondary school teachers danced before us. Their eyes sparkled when they spoke about such heroes and naturally they were always the 'good guys.' They were still considered to be the 'good guys' even when they fell in love not only with noble women, but also young boys.

In spite of our losing the Great War of 1914-1918, German hero worship also drew its heroes from those ranks, not only the 'Fallen Heroes,' but also the surviving heroes who were now citizens of the Republic. At their head stood a man honored by the majority of the people, General Fieldmarshal von Hindenburg. This great man had selflessly returned to serve his country as President of the Republic and was much beloved although the Republic itself was not. The Hero of Tannenburg was still the ideal portrait of true German manhood. Through his military service he had earned the eternal gratitude of the people even unto today when you can see highways and major streets named after him all over the land.



*Flag of the Kaiser Reich
1871-1918*

It was not only the educators who did not like the flag of the Republic. Black-red-gold did not please the nationalistic Germans at all, they were still for the flag of the Empire, black-white-red. People were enchanted when the German National Anthem was sung [*Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles*], and tried not to mention that a Socialist, Fritz Ebert, the saddle maker, the pub owner, was the one who, as President of the Republic had declared this song to be the National Anthem.



*Flag of the Weimar Republic
1919-1933*

In addition to speaking badly about the Poles, our teachers also had nothing but negative things to say about the French, who they often characterized as our archenemies. They also instilled racial prejudice in us. A particularly sore point was the French occupation of the Rhein and Ruhr Valleys after WWI. The French used colonial troops from black Africa. Our teachers characterized this as a criminal act that was an attack on German honor. What was even worse, we were told, was that the Negro troops assaulted and raped German women. Moreover, during the war itself, the French unashamedly threw Negro troops into battle against our white soldiers. This they characterized as a crime against the white races.



French Troops from Senegal

Yet another criminal act perpetrated by the French on Germany was the harsh post-war reparations imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. Clearly France wanted nothing less than the complete destruction of Germany. This made them a merciless archenemy who did not like us and who we could never love.

This is the way we were taught in school to be the enemy. This is how we were raised to hate the Poles and the French, and how racial hatred was fostered in us against the blacks. It was not only the the Negroes in in France but also the Negroes in the USA, and they

didn't leave the Jews out either. America was known to be infested with both.

For us Germans, long before the Nazi Era, we had identified our enemies, and geographically they surrounded us. Our teachers made this crystal clear to us and made the threat to us palpable and real. We had no doubt whatsoever that what they taught us was true.

A particular humiliation was the occupation of the Saar Valley. It was supposed to be only for a limited time, no one knew if the French would ever really leave even though the inhabitants of the Saarland demanded it.

Especially painful was the loss of the Alsace and Lorraine. The evil French had used the Treaty of Versailles to rob us of those lands, and all in spite of the fact that they included the ancient German city of Strasbourg!

It wasn't just the teachers that cried out with loud lamentations over the humiliations inflicted upon Germany by our enemies, everyone in Germany regarded the Treaty of Versailles as a Treaty of Shame. It did not take the Nazis to call it that. Right from 1919 on it was called that by every good German and all of the political parties raged against the treaty that was clearly intended to make slaves of us. Hitler wasn't the first one to want the treaty undone, everyone did. Even the Communists were against it though they had a different rationale than most. For the German Communist Party the treaty was a loathsome spawn of capitalism intended to exploit the proletariat. The Right Wing saw the treaty as a means of our enemies for destroying the country. They were all right to renounce the treaty, it gave the country very little room to breathe.

The French occupation of the Ruhr Valley gave rise to another German hero that our teachers held out to us as a shining example of true German heroism. It was Lieutenant Albert Leo Schlageter, who was shot by the French for acts of sabotage against their arbitrary use of state power. Long before 1933 we learned about Schlageter and his fate and we were enthralled by this genuine German hero. His story filled us with boundless anger against the French. Here again, it did not take the Nazis to



*Albert Leo Schlageter
(ca. 1918)*

make this man a hero, even the Communists were part of it. They too thought Schlageter a hero who shared their view that the arbitrary exercise of power on the part of the French should be resisted. Even the USSR was against the occupation, like most of the other Allies.

It was also pointed out to us how the blind, hateful rage of the victors led them to illegally annex lands all along our borders. In reality the lands were not annexed, they were stolen. The worst was in the East where Poland, with the full approval of France, unabashedly helped themselves. But also Belgium, Denmark and Lithuania snatched up what they could. In the South Italy nicked the South Tyrol from Austria even though this had been Germanic territory since ancient times. Even the creation of new nations was used as a measure against Germany. Take for example the new nation of Czechoslovakia. Geographically it was like a wedge driven into Germany and lay there like a latent threat.

In the classroom our teacher darkly pointed out that the French (again!) in the Treaty of Trianon had specifically forbid the union of Austria and Germany, even though in 1918/1919 the Austrian Social Democrats demanded it! Wherever one looked one saw that Germany was surrounded by enemies who were even stronger than before 1914. The most dangerous enemies were the French and the Poles who demonstrated a unfettered hate for the German nation. This is how we learned modern history in school.

Long before 1933 our instructors taught us that in 1918 our country was the victim of a betrayal. Germany was not defeated on the front lines. It was a betrayal from the homeland that robbed us of a still possible victory. We also learned that Bolshevism had the potential of becoming a threat to the country if the Soviet Union decided to pursue its goal of a world revolution of the proletariat through the use of an ever expanding Red Army. We learned a lot in school. We had a lot of nationalistic thinking teachers long before the Nazis took power.

Also before 1933 we learned about Gregor Mendel's work. Examples of his laws of genetics were drawn not only from the animal world, but also very specifically related to the humans and the different races. This is how the monk (!) Mendel's work on heredity was used in the normal course of education. The different shapes of human skulls were demonstrated in class and the students were encouraged to become living subjects of study for each other. In class my classmates categorized me as Nordic-Fälén due to the shape of my head. These studies were led by Freulein Fahrenheit, the good Social Democrat! No evil Nazis were behind this ugly theory of race. It was embedded in the normal curricula of the Prussian public school system. It was handed down to us from the government and modeled on the school system of the only German state where the Social Democrats held power, Prussia.

We were already well prepared for the Third Reich in spite of the fact that nearly all of us had parents who were leftists, either socialists or communists. Very few of us came from homes with other viewpoints. A good portion of us kids retained our nationalistic spirit even if in our spare time we joined childrens' organizations of leftists groups. We were not 'Internationalists,' nor were our parents. Their generation still put a lot of value on the education from the Kaiser's era.

From everything that we heard and saw around us we knew that the German people were a chosen people, much like the Jews, that we had a past and a heritage that defined us as superior to the rest of Europe. We were a nation that was better than the rest in many ways. It was this feeling that made us "proud" to be part of this land.

Everything we were taught concerning German character and heroism made us into good patriots. However, we were taught nothing about the insanity of war, of the slaughter of populations just a few years before, of the misery and want, of the wretched deaths of soldiers on both sides, of the endless sorrow of wives and mothers, of children who had to learn to live as orphans, and of the totally senseless spilling of blood. For us war was and would always be an unavoidable necessity as it had been for all times. Soldiering was, as always, glorified and heroism remained in the foreground. We understood that every man must risk his life for the Fatherland even if it meant his death, it would be for the glory of the Fatherland. So, even without the Nazis, we were already prepared for a new war. When the Fatherland called its sons, we would answer! We heard no whispers of alternate views, only words of patriotism which we willingly accepted for the glory of our Germany. "Germany, Germany above all in the World" was not just a song lyric, it was our innermost conviction and not disturbed at all by our membership in the "Kinderfreunden" [*A Communist Youth Group*] or the "Red Falcons" [*A Socialist Youth Group*]. We were wax in the hands of those would later push us onto new battle fields.

Our still small German army earned the admiration for all of us children. I, myself, was very proud of my Uncle Karl who served for twelve years in the army. I proudly boasted to my classmates about how he was nearly killed in a major accident near Hameln when a pontoon bridge constructed by army engineers collapsed flinging many soldiers into the water where many were injured and several drown. He was transferred to a hospital in Bremen and my mother took me there to visit this hero. I went to school the next day and bragged loudly about him.

While the Greats of past German history, and especially the much admired figures of Prussian history continued to be venerated, the most recent horrible war also gave rise to new heroes. The good burghers of the new Republic gave themselves over to a new hero worship, forgetting the frightful misery of these deaths preferring to see it now as only a heroic battle showing the best ideals of the German soldier. Monuments were raised to the Fallen Heroes accompanied by military pomp and stirring march music. These heroes garnered more admiration now than they did during the war itself. They became part of the mass media landscape in the press and in films.

Out of our past loomed the Prussian king, Old Fritz, as the greatest of all. That as king and military leader he had once exhorted his troops with, "You curs, do you want to live forever?" before forcing them back onto the battlefield was not seen as something bad. A Prussian king had to do things like that. It was all about the State of Prussia and its expansion into Silesia, a land that was 'gloriously' snatched away from Austria. It was correct and proper and no one thought less of Old Fritz for it. He was the "Great" who, for the honor and welfare of his country, glorious Prussia, had done what was necessary for the well being of his nation which needed new lands and him to reign over them. The drive to the East was a facet of political life that ranges back to the times of the Crusades and the German Order of Knights. It continued to be an integral part of Prussian-German aspirations. "We want to ride the lands from Ghent to the Baltic" was a very popular expression of this feeling.

The time of the last war give us once again many 'great' military leaders and brave soldiers who were honored as heroes. They weren't only honored by the right wing political parties or those in steel helmets, no, they were honored by everyone and in the schools, even more. The horror, the misery, the want and the violent deaths in this war had changed nothing. The sparkle and glory of soldiering was celebrated. It spoke only of glorious deeds and never of atrocities. Atrocities were only perpetrated by the French and never by German soldiers, and certainly not by German officers.

Next to Hindenburg and Ludendorff there were other praiseworthy names of great soldiers who had fought for the Fatherland, or even better, great military commanders who ordered the available cannon

fodder to fight and die for the Fatherland. They couldn't do the fighting themselves because they had to lead and make proper use of this living war materiel.



Among these praiseworthy and luminous names belongs those of the Crown Prince, who was still called that in spite of the Republic and who still went about wearing a uniform that dated to the time of the Kaiser. There was also General Fieldmarshall von Mackensen who in public would only wear his erstwhile so proud uniform of the Hussars. The hat that went with this uniform was bedecked with the death's head badge. This was seen as quite normal since it was part of the uniform of the Death's Head Hussars. Who would think ill of it? When later others would make use of the same decoration, it too would not be thought unusual. Only in later times would this badge have a completely different meaning. Then would the death's head be the symbol of the SS and instill fear everywhere. In truth the death's head symbol had a long tradition that went back to the Wars of Liberation [*Part of the Napoleonic Wars 1813-1815.*] and even earlier. It was in remembrance of those times that it was adopted by the Hussars during the era of the Empire.

A very particular aura surrounded the hero of East Africa [*Roughly, modern day Tanzania.*], the legendary

General [*Paul*] von Lettow-Vorbeck, who, with just a small group of soldiers, held off the larger British forces from 1914 until the end of the war in 1918. The Kaiser's Schutztruppe [*Protective Forces*], as they were known, had in their ranks not only German soldiers, but also a large number of native, black-African soldiers known as "Askari's." The deployment of these blacks against the white Englishmen (who also had coloreds in their armies) was not seen as a possible insult to the English. Ours were true Askaris who fought side by side with the German soldiers against the cursed English because they wanted to remain "black Germans" and not "black Englishmen." This was a totally different situation and not to be compared with the use of Negro troops by the French! Well, everybody had their own opinion.



General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck

Everyone loudly sung the praises of the brave men of the German navy, especially the men of the submarine service. Particularly outstanding was the U-Boat commander [*Hellmuth von*] Mücke with his heroic crew on submarine U-9. [*This is a lapse on the author's part. Mücke's heroic exploits originated from the German Light Cruiser SMS Emden.*] There was great disappointment that now, after the war, we Germans were not allowed to have a submarine service. But surely that would change soon, then German sailors would again have the chance to serve on U-Boats and, one day, earn even more renown to rival that of First Lieutenant Mücke and Captain [*Otto*] Weddigen [*The actual Commander of U-9*].



Graf Felix von Luckner's ship the Sea Eagle

When speaking of heroes of the seven seas, everyone got a special gleam in their eye when speaking of the daring German seaman Graf Felix von Luckner who used his armed merchant cruiser, the Sea Eagle, as a privateer. He had an incredibly successful career as privateer against the English on the high seas. Even the Americans feted him and looked on him with wonder, and not just because he could tear a thick telephone book in half with his bare hands, but more for this incredible heroic feats. In Germany he was greatly revered and the book he wrote about his adventures as a privateer was extremely popular and not just among us kids.

All German hearts beat faster when they thought of the newest arm of the military, the *Kriegsflegerei* [*War Fliers*] as they were called then. Above all was the Red Baron, Baron von Richthofen, the commander of the Richthofen Squadron. No less respected were the other Aces like Boelcke, Immelman and others. Among these stories we also knew of a certain Herman Göring who took Richthofen's place as commander of the squadron

following Richthofen's heroic death. Göring was a hero of the air who was now cavorting with the Nazis. Flying enthralled everyone and the *Kriegsflegerei* even more so. This made it even more annoying that the Treaty of Versailles specifically forbid us to have an Air Force. It was unbearably painful that we should be shut out of the thrill of conquering the air. This simply had to change. Everyone else was able to fly, even the Russians. Up until 1933 members of the German Army went to the USSR to practice flying along with their comrades in the Red Army. It wasn't only the airmen, another 'forbidden' arm of the army, tanks and heavy armor, went to the USSR to train with the evil Bolsheviks. This practice was engineered by the arch-conservative leadership of the army which had no compunction whatsoever about making such a friendly deal with the Communist Red Army.



Dashing, young flying ace Herman Göring in 1918

In all of the stories of the wartime fliers we loved it the most when it came to descriptions of the chivalrous one-on-one duels in the air. How two guys trying to bump each other off with machine guns can be considered chivalrous was never at all clear to me. Nor was how this could be considered a 'honorable death.' To me it is simply murder, regardless of who is shooting at whom. But soldiers don't murder, they just kill. Killing is honorable and is rewarded with praise and decorations, murder is done for base reasons and is punished by law. I have no idea what the difference is since the end result in both cases is a cadaver, a dead human being. But the airmen were the knights of the new age who honored even their adversaries and downed opponents. Still the end result was just a dead hero. The airmen carried a laurel wreath on board their aircraft and when they shot down their enemy they would fly over the crash site and drop the wreath, fly a chivalrous pass over the fallen foe then climb back into

into the heavens to seek out another victim. So much chivalry made a deep impression but also made us forget the horror of dying to the point that we did not even think about it.

We only saw the heroes, their commitment to the Fatherland and nothing else. We weren't supposed to look too deeply, we were to only see pride and not uneasy fears. We were to aspire to be heroes. No one mentioned the fact that these heroes had killed other human beings or sent their soldiers to die on the field of battle. It certainly was not spoken of in the schools. Those who did see it as murder and cried out "No more war" were seen as evil people like birds that fouled their own nest. They were traitors to the German people and soon found themselves before a judge. Men like Kurt Tucholsky and Carl von Ossietzky who were avowed pacifists and did not want to hear about heroism and war, were seen by the majority of Germans as bounders and traitors of the worst sort.

On the other hand many people in Germany still thought of the exiled Kaiser Wilhelm II as His Majesty, the Emperor and King of Prussia, even though he had deserted his army in the field in 1918 and beat a retreat to Holland. Of course no one thought of it like that at the time. He had to flee the Reds, and also a possible war tribunal. In exile this poor man dissolved in longing for his country and lived only in the hope that one day HIS people would call him back to HIS country. In the schools of the Republic he was still thought of as "His Majesty" and whenever the occasion arose in our studies he would be fondly remembered.

So in our earliest days were we instilled with the stories of the best of the good Germans and thus we became good patriots. We loved our Fatherland and suffered along with it in its time of great shame and disgrace. We were so filled with nationalistic sentiments that even as post-war children in the Republic, or under the Social Democratic reign, or the republican coalition, or at the behest of our generals, we were ready to go to war if we had to. We would do it for the Fatherland in order to regain our lost honor and to once again be a great power on the continent and win back our colonies. We would march into a new war if called upon to restore Germany as an independent country with its old boundaries intact. It would not be from a love of war and death, but solely out of a patriotism that continually held us in thrall. Even we children of the left-wing were ready to answer the call of the Fatherland even though in our Socialist childrens' clubs they tried to teach us that war was a criminal act. We were more influenced by the overall tone of the nation and were overflowing with love for the Fatherland. This was in a time long before the Nazis became established. The seed was already sown by our dear German teachers who were filled with an unalterable national-conservative and true German sentiment that they passed on to us. We had no reason to question this sentiment. We trusted them who instilled this spirit in us.

No one wanted another war even there were many who said that it was inevitable. Our old enemies had not become our friends and they were still out to do us harm if they could. Therefor it was essential that the country have a powerful army once again outfitted with the newest weapons and technology. The nation needed to be in a position to protect its endangered borders and prevent our evil neighbors from doing evil to us. We deserved the same rights as other countries, in spite of the past war, for which we did not bear the full responsibility. The talk of Germany as being the sole cause of the war was a nasty lie encouraged by our enemies to cover up the guilt they shared for the catastrophe. Our nation was in almost total agreement on this point. A great nation like the German nation had a right to military sovereignty, no one could deny that. This particular article in the Treaty of Versailles needed to be nullified. If there were no other way to do it, then it would have to be done through our strength and courage.

It was on this point alone that got people talking about a “necessary” war. This talk did not first arise in the National Socialist era, it was already being discussed immediately after the Treaty was signed.

My parents, especially my mother, did not want to hear any talk about war although my mother felt that another war was a possibility and it filled her with dread when she thought about our enemies. My father thought war a possibility from the viewpoint that Germany could not long remain dishonored and defenseless. For him that meant a new army, naturally only for the protection of Germany. Therefor, both of my parents thought and voted as Social Democrats. That is why one day they placed me under the care of the Social Democrats childrens' organization. From there I eventually moved on to the Red Falcons.



*Flag of the Socialist Youth Group:
The Red Falcons*