

Life in Bavaria during World War 2

History HL

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Abstract

My research question in my essay was as follows, „ What was life like in Bavaria during World War 2 ?“. I investigated my research question by interviewing several people who lived in Bavaria during the war therefore I was able to gain valuable information which allowed me to write draw a detailed picture of life in rural Bavaria. I used also books which looked specifically at the life during the war in Germany which basically underlined the points that were made by the people that I interviewed. My conclusion is that everyone was directly affected by the war in different ways. But perhaps not as affected in the same way as some books claim. However, the most common effect of both the interviewees and the books is the casualties that as good as every rural household had suffered.

What was Life in Bavaria like during World War 2?

In the following essay, I will attempt to portray what life in Bavaria was like under the rule of the Nazi Party. The objective is also to draw a comparison between the past and the present and what the long-term effect was on the people living in Bavaria during that violent period in history (1939-1945). In order to ensure that the information used is reliable, I interviewed various people to find out for myself what daily life was like then. The first person I interviewed was Joseph Halbig, the son of an average farmer, one of six brothers and sisters who lived in Kaldorf, a small remote village between Munich and Nürnberg, and, like many, a very young soldier and “defender of the last resort”, in the final year of the war. The second interviewee was a village girl, Katherina Risch, who was also one of six children of a fairly affluent family that owned a construction and grocery business in a purely agricultural region in southern Germany. Paul Hofmann, the third person I interviewed was the eldest of six children and the son of a teacher and his wife living from Landshut. Paul’s father, like many academics of his time, voted for the communist party when Hitler came to power in 1933. The last person I interviewed was Ingrid Schreiber, the daughter of a wealthy couple and the older sister to one brother. The reason that I used Ingrid Schreiber as a source was to compare her urban and affluent life in Munich to that of those who experienced the war in the country side or even on the battlefield.

Joseph Halbig was an ordinary child in a small town some 90 kilometers outside of Munich with a population of 300. The town was much like many other such isolated, simple, conservative and Christian farm villages that dotted the landscape of pre-war Germany. The sole church, in the middle of the town, also served as a school. Joseph was born in 1928 and was the oldest sibling to three brothers and three sisters. When the war started on September

3rd, 1939, Joseph Halbig had just started 5th Grade at the age of 12. The events of the next 6 years would influence him for the rest of his life.

Joseph Halbig's day started at 5:45 in the morning seven days of the week and consisted of washing up over a bowl full of ice cold water, feeding all the animals in the barn as well as milking the cows. After that he had to go to church before school, without having had any breakfast. As an altar boy, Joseph had to be in church by 6:30 and make all preparations for mass at 7:00. After mass all students went straight into the school's single class room which for grades 1 to 8 and "shared the school's single teacher. The school day consisted of 4 hours of school of which the teacher only taught 2. The other 2 hours were filled with assignments by class, in so far the grade had students at all. This enabled the teacher to devote his teaching time to another grade. Even as a child, he had to help his family in the fields after school in addition to attending church and school every day. Upon returning home from school, he was given a meager meal by his mother consisting of a piece of bread with a cup of milk. After Joseph had his lunch, he would go to work in the fields. Thus, for the rest of the afternoon, rain or shine, he was required to perform hard labor and work long days in order for the family to be able to sell enough goods to then buy "Lebensmittelmarken"¹. After returning from the fields he and his siblings received their dinner, sometimes consisting only of a cup full of dried coffee. However, after his dinner Joseph still had to do his homework and finally at around 11:00 o'clock at night he was able to go to bed. Until 1943 this was Joseph Halbig's daily routine. Not a childhood one would envy him for.

However, in June 1943, he received a letter from the mayor of Karldorf stating that he would have to go to Gunzenhausen to have his physical check for induction into the army since Hitler reintroduced conscription on March 1935. After Joseph arrived in Gunzenhausen and

¹ Lebensmittelmarken: Food stamps which enabled you to buy food such as butter and flour, it was a way of payment during the war just like money.

was checked through by the army doctors, it was determined that he was physically underdeveloped for his age of 16 and therefore send back home. Joseph recalls that he was very happy that he did not have to go to the army because out of the 60 students in his school 40 of them had lost one or more family member in the war by the beginning of 1944. His joy was short lived. He was called back to Gunzenhausen 14 day later to take him into training. Joseph did not understand why he was sent home only 2 weeks earlier. The only explanation he could think of was that the German army had lost so many men and therefore needed every man – or child - to stave off the advancing Russian tanks which were had already penetrated the German lines. Joseph was assigned to the “Schwerflack Ersatzabteilung Regensburg”, in December 1944. He remembers that when he arrived in Regensburg he saw two men sleeping on a hay sack on the floor and seeing there were 50 men crammed into one bunker. After he had received his basic training he was sent to Toeging am Inn, where he became a crew member of a 3.7 Flack² unit on January 15, 1945 only 3 months before the end of the war in Euope.

Three days before the war was officially over which at that time no one knew of course, Joseph deserted his unit and managed to go back home to Karldorf where he then hid in a barn waiting and hoping that the war would soon be over. If the SS or the authorities had caught him they would have hung or shot him on the spot since he was “Fahnenflüchtig”³ and would have been accused of “Feigheit vor dem Feind”⁴. However, Joseph Halbig was not discovered and lived to recount his experiences. This was the story about a young boy in a small remote village, isolated from all news and global events, yet caught up in terrible turmoil of a world war he did not understand. About 80 percent of the male population of

² 3.7 Flack: It was an Anti Aircraft Gun, which needed 4 men to operate.

³ Fahnenflüchtig: This meant that he distanced himself unauthorized from his unit.

⁴ Feigheit vor dem Feind: Coward ness of the enemy.

Germany shared Joseph's horrifying experience. They were forced to fight a war in which many did not believe and millions lost their lives for the mad dreams of a megalomaniac⁵.

I will now turn to the experiences of a girl who just entered 1st grade when the war started. Katherina Risch was born in 1932, and as Joseph Halbig, in Karldorf. Her father owned a grocery store in Karldorf and her mother received the "Deutsches Mutterkreuz"⁶ for having born 7 children. She was 7 when the war started. Katherina Risch was the eldest of 6 brothers and sisters.

Katherina had to get up every morning at 5:30 o'clock to milk the cows for fresh milk that would then be sold in the grocery store. She went to church every morning at 7 o'clock. Mass lasted for one hour and then the children had to go to school which was part of the church complex. Katherina too had a school day of 4 hours, instructed by the school's single teacher.

After school, which was from 8 o'clock in the morning till 12 o'clock in the afternoon, Katherina Risch went home, had something to eat, which she was able to choose and then went on to work either in the grocery store or on the field with her mother since the father mostly worked in the grocery store by himself. Katherina Risch, recalls that in 1941, her father was in the "Gasthaus" drinking with his friends and started talking about Adolf Hitler, he probably did not say good things about him because the next day the police came to pick him up. As a punishment for disloyalty he was sent to the Russian front. Katherina Risch, later found out that the father of her best girlfriend informed the police on her father. Therefore Katherina Risch, her mother and her three sisters were alone at home her three brothers and her father were all in the army. Since Katherina Risch was the oldest of her sisters she was the one that had to make sure that her sisters had enough to eat, went to school

⁵ This was the information from the personal interview with Joseph Halbig on June 22, 2003.

⁶ Deutsches Mutters Ehren Kreuz: Gold mother's cross for having 7 children.

and that the cows were milked as well as that the store was running and that the field was ploughed. Her mother got sick a lot therefore Katherina Risch had to do all the work herself such as, work in the grocery store as well as go to church with her sisters, work on the field, milk the cow and do all the housework at home like cooking washing all the clothes and cleaning the house. She was freed from school in 5th grade because she was not able to go to school and do all the work in the household by herself. Katherina Risch, was always able to see the bombings that were going on in Nürnberg. Close to the end of the war, on February 26, 1945, Katherina Risch's brother was killed at the Russian front. She recalls getting a letter from the army saying that her brother was killed by a grenade which hit him in the back of the head during fighting⁷.

Paul Hofmann, a little boy in the early stages of war, was forced to move a lot through Bavaria, from Grafenhausen to Blumberg, to Amberg and lastly to Landshut. His mother was a housewife. His father had always wanted to live in Landshut, therefore he was extremely happy after he was moved to teach at a Gymnasium there. His parents however were then asked by the army to work in the fields to help grow food for the soldiers. Paul Hofmann listened to the radio every night for one hour and one thing he remembers from before the war is that the Germans always reported the fact that the Polish citizens treated the Germans in the Polish Corridor and Silesia really badly and that it was time that these Germans should be saved. Paul Hofmann remembers that the Germans were talking about "Blut Sonntag"⁸ in Bromberg, which was said to be the slaughter of the Germans by the Poles on the Sunday the 2nd of September 1939. This was a day after Germany invaded Poland. The day that the war broke out Paul Hofmann was 10 years of age and was not really afraid of the war. His father just said "now we have war". Paul Hofmann and all his friends were very anxious of the war because they all felt for the German that were trapped in the Polish Corridor and were treated

⁷ This was the information from the personal interview with Katherina Risch on June 23, 2003.

⁸ Blut Sonntag: Bloody Sunday.

unfairly so they thought.

Until the end of August in 1939, Paul Hofmann recalls that they had “Lebensmittelmarken” which is a way of payment which ensured that all Germans would get the same amount of food no matter if poor or rich. This did limit their access of food supply for instance of bread and potatoes. However, fat, meat and fruit were in short supply in the stores and chocolate and sweets were as good as gone. Therefore, Christmas, as he recalls was pretty slim, because all the foods that they were used to eat on Christmas were missing from the shops. Furthermore, Paul Hofmann recalls that on Christmas in 1941 he was given skis from his parents, however *one week later the German army came into Landshut and collected all skis that they could find for the German soldiers in Russia.* Paul Hofmann had to hide his skis in order to be able to keep them; these kind of things happened many times during the war, once they needed blankets, another time they needed winter jackets. He remembers that every year that the war went on that the food rations on the “Lebensmittelmarken” got smaller and smaller, at the end of the war every family only good 200g of meat and 100g of fat every month as well as less bread and less flour for baking. Starting from 1943 every kind of bread that was sold or made by the Germans included bits of potatoes and other things in order to hide the fact that there was a great shortage of grain and flour. Furthermore, the heating materials, such as coal and wood became very limited, which at the end of 1943 reduced the amount of heating per household to one room. In most cases as Paul Hofmann recalls the room that was heated was the kitchen. Even the schools had no more heating materials therefore the schools asked their own students to bring in coal and wood to heat the classrooms. Another thing that Paul Hofmann and his friends did when they were about 13 years of age in 1943 was that they could get cigarettes with their “Lebensmittelmarken” and since none of them smoked they *sold their cigarettes to the farmers in return for meat and coal and wood to heat their homes and schools with.* Paul Hofmann and his parents were pretty wealthy for that time since they

had their own farm therefore they had chickens which they could get eggs from; however after the authorities noticed that they had their own chickens they stopped giving Paul Hofmann and his parents eggs since they had their own.

Paul Hofmann remembers that the government wanted every individual no matter what their social position was, to take part in at least one public work scheme by physically participating. They wanted to make sure that not only the working class had to participate in these work schemes but every German man. However, as Paul Hofmann remembers the closer Germany got to the end of the war the more teenagers had to learn how to use the rifle rather than working in the fields. Paul Hofmann was one of the only students in his school that did not have to go to the army and fight in Russia because he was still too young. Out of 150 students in his school 100 of them were killed in Russia. However, Paul Hofmann was told that he would have to work on the fields and help harvest crops. He remembers that the only good thing about the time that he had to work on the fields was that the people who worked there got a lot of food to eat for the time of war⁹.

Ingrid Schreiber was born on the 6th of October 1931. She lived in Munich with her family who were rather wealthy and therefore able to afford living in the city of Munich and still have the privilege of having enough food and a luxuries roof over their heads. She was the oldest to her brother, Ulrich. They lived with their family in an urban part of Munich called, Herzog Park. She recalls that during the bombing raids by the allies her family fled down to the basement into a room and remained there until the bombing stopped. They had various goods during the war that not a lot of people could either afford such as chocolate and butter. She received private teaching lessons therefore acquired the kind of education that she needed to become as successful as her parents. Otherwise she went on with her daily life just like she

⁹ This was the information from the personal interview with Paul Hofmann on October 5, 2003.

had always done. Her father did not have to go fight in the war because he was already too old and therefore was not of any use. Ingrid Schreiber went to Starnberg on weekend to enjoy life boating, hiking and sledding in the winter. One could say that the war did not influence her very much, since her parents as well as her whole surrounding tried to protect her of the happenings as much as they could and therefore she was not able to recall any major changes in her life during the time of the war. However, she does recall the propaganda which was all over Munich, the signs on the shops and the radio broadcastings claiming that the enemy is being defeated and that Germany is on the path to "Victory"¹⁰.

If we now look at the people that I have interviewed and compare their life situations and their surroundings we clearly see similarities between two interviewees who lived in the rural part of Bavaria, Joseph Halbig and Katherina Risch. However, one can also clearly see a similarity between the urban citizen, Ingrid Schreiber and Paul Hofmann who lived in the outskirts of Munich.

First of all, Joseph Halbig and Katherina Risch both came from the same village called Karldorf and their daily lives were for the most part the same, however if we now compare their life to what different sources say we clearly see similarities as well as differences. For instance it is stated that the women in the villages had an increased demand put on them meaning that they had to work harder as well as doing more different jobs such as mother, housewife and worker.¹¹ This statement fits in right with what Katherina Risch had to go through and do by having to not only be the mother to her sisters but also to be the housewife, the storekeeper and the farmer. Furthermore, another very important issue being dealt with is the fact that conscription deprived the households of their men which meant that the women had to now also take the role of the men meaning with it all their work such as ploughing and

¹⁰ This was the information from the personal interview with Ingrid Schreiber on October 6, 2003.

¹¹ Life in the Third Reich, by: Richard Bessel, article written by: Gerhard Wilke, Page 22

harvesting crops¹². Katherina Risch had to do this when her father and her brother were called to the Russian front by the German military. From this so far we can see that women played a major role in the Nazi Regime, their crucial roles were to bare children and to be the substitute for their men¹³. Another major similarity between the interview and the books was that it claimed that the villagers towards the end of the war hid soldiers in their barns¹⁴ this was exactly what Joseph Halbig did three days before the war was over. However there were also a lot of differences between the books and the information gathered by the interviewees such as that the books claimed that refugees were brought to the villages since the cities were bombed to an extent that they could no longer live their¹⁵. None of the interviewees recall this to have happened at any time of the war in their villages. It could be just a coincidence that this was not the case however the surrounding villages as the recall did not receive refugees either. Another difference between the books and Katherina Risch and Joseph Halbig was that it the books it had stated that the children no longer had to do, agricultural work, however now had to participate in “keep-fit”, survival and other military exercises¹⁶. Joseph Halbig and Katherina Risch had to work in the fields ploughing and harvesting crops throughout the whole war and were not faced to do the training exercises as described.

If we now compare books to the life of Paul Hofmann we can see that between these two sources of information clear similarities can be drawn. Paul Hofmann for instance recalls that the other students in his school mostly had to go either the army or were called for social service such as public buildings or roads. This information goes along with the information provided that young men were either conscripted into the army or labor service such as road

¹² Life in the Third Reich, by: Richard Bessel, article written by: Gerhard Wilke, Page 23

¹³ Modern Europe 1870-1945, by: Christopher Culpin & Ruth Henig, Page 302

¹⁴ Life in the Third Reich, by: Richard Bessel, article written by: Gerhard Wilke, Page 24

¹⁵ Life in the Third Reich, by: Richard Bessel, article written by: Gerhard Wilke, Page 23

¹⁶ Life in the Third Reich, by: Richard Bessel, article written by: Gerhard Wilke, Page 22

building¹⁷. Furthermore another book stated that these young men also had to build homes for families and drain swamps in order to gain valuable land¹⁸. Moreover, Paul Hofmann stated in the above that in his school most of the students never returned from the front which underlines the claims made by a book which writes that virtually every household had lost at least one family member to the war¹⁹.

Lastly, Ingrid Schreiber in contrary to most books which say that the Nazis had total control over the people and the lives that they were living²⁰, did not have any major changes done to her life during the war period and under the Nazi regime. Her life went on as usual and she kept her living standard that she was used to from before the war period. Added to this, Katherina Risch had experienced that her father was taken away by the police and assigned to the front in Russia because he questioned the authorities of Adolf Hitler. However, as seen in the above it was not the Gestapo or any other Nazi organization that were aware of that, it clearly showed that the Nazi regime relied on the people to inform them²¹. Many sources claim that the Nazi regime repressed the German people since it was considered to have been a "Police State"²², however no reference from any interviewee underlined this claim.

In conclusion, if we now examine what the books have said and what the interviewees claimed we can see that much of the reporting by both sources showed clear similarities and matched with the information provided by the other source. This clearly suggests that the experiences that the interviewees received through the war were very common throughout the whole of Germany. However, there were also some differences which can be explained, that

¹⁷ Life in the Third Reich, by: Richard Bessel, article written by: Gerhard Wilke, Page 22

¹⁸ A History of the Modern World since 1815, by: McGraw-Hill Inc, written by R. R. Palmer and Joel Colton, Page 827.

¹⁹ Life in the Third Reich, by: Richard Bessel, article written by: Gerhard Wilke, Page 24

²⁰ Modern Europe 1870-1945, by: Christopher Culpin & Ruth Henig. Page 293

²¹ The Nazis, A Warning from History, by: Robert Gellately in a BBC World Wide Production, 1998.

²² Modern Europe 1870-1945, by: Christopher Culpin & Ruth Henig. Page 293.

the people that I have interviewed only make up a small percentage of the people that experienced the war. However, I believe that how the war affected people, was governed by where they lived for instance the rural part of Germany was not bombed. People who lived in different areas of Germany might have gone through these experiences that were claimed by these books. The information that was provided by all sources in the same way was that the war and the experience that came along with the war was terrifying and horrible in that way, family life was in one way or another directly affected, usually by having one or more family member killed.

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