

Wait, We're the Criminals?

Correcting the Historical Record

As the allied bombing of Cologne intensified, the city, as well as public order crumbled, and the resistance against the Nazi regime and Hitler youth grew more serious.

An EP named Jean Jülich and his band of friends took to throwing bricks through munitions factories and pouring sugar water into the petrol tanks of cars belonging to Nazis. Other groups derailed train cars loaded with munitions, stole food from other trains to feed starving POWs held in Germany, or distributed leaflets critical of the regime. In 1944, Jean along with several of his friends were arrested for allegedly being involved with a man called Hans Steinbruck or Bomber Hans who was reportedly plotting to bomb the Gestapo headquarters in Cologne. Jean was fifteen years old and spent four months in a tiny cell at the Brauweiler prison on the outskirts of Cologne. He and the other prisoners were interrogated and tortured by the Gestapo. And then one day, Jean said some of his friends, including Bartholomaeus Schink were taken away.

In all, 13 people were hanged early in the morning on the tenth of November 1944. Among the six executed was the youngest, 16 year old Pirate Schink. The street is now named after him but he and the others executed that day and all the other resisting teens known as Edelweiss Pirates were still officially listed in Germany as criminals for the next 60 years.

Even champions of the EPs like Dr Nicola Wenge who believed the Edelweiss Pirates should be rehabilitated as victims of the Nazi regime, she was cautious not to apply the term 'resistance fighters'. "I think one has to differentiate the term 'resistance'. But primarily I would describe it as resistant or opposition conduct." However she adds that actions such as distributing leaflets, or chalking slogans on the walls like "down with the dictatorship" or pulling down Nazi flags required considerable courage and could be regarded as a form of youth resistance. However, the label of criminals in Cologne remained intact for six decades.



Jean Jülich

Even the state of Israel has recognized that some form of opposition existed in wartime

Cologne. In 1984, the Israeli Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, Yad Vashem, awarded Jean Jülich, and Bartholomaeus Schink, with its highest accolade for their actions. Jean said receiving the medal and traveling to Jerusalem to plant a tree in the

Yad Vashem garden was a wonderful and positive experience for his entire family. Though the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Yad Vashem honored the Edelweiss Pirates as Righteous Among the Nations in 1998, their story has not been widely known. In 2005 female Pirate Gertrud Koch, who survived the war, explained to a reporter, "We were from the working classes. That is the main reason why we have only now been recognized. After the war there were no judges in Germany so the old Nazi judges were used and they upheld the criminalization of what we did and who we were." Gertrud spent decades urging the German government to recognize the Pirates' heroism, and finally in 2005 they were "politically rehabilitated." Their criminal status was invalidated and they were officially honored as resistance fighters and heroes. Not only has the street where the public execution took place been named Schink Strasse but there is also a plaque and mural recognizing Berthel and the other martyred Edelweiss Pirates.

Sources

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