

# Edelweiss Pirates

*I want a brutal, domineering, fearless cruel youth. Youth must be all that. It must bear pain. There must be nothing weak and gentle about it. The free, splendid beast of prey must once again flash from its eyes. That is how I will eradicate thousands of years of human domestication. That is how I will create the New Order.*

**Adolph Hitler**

*Hitler's power may lay us low,  
And keep us locked in chains,  
But we will smash the chains one day,  
We'll be free again.  
We've got the fists and we can fight,  
We've got the knives and we'll get them out.  
We want freedom, don't we boys?*

## - Song of the Edelweiss Pirates

In the years before World War II, the members of the Nazi regime became intent on cultivating a sense of loyalty and entitlement in the German youth. It would be too late, they thought, to wait for adulthood; the Nazi mentality must be inscribed on children if it was to take hold and grow to support the cause. With such an intention, the Hitler Youth was born.

Boys between the ages of 10 and 14 joined the Deutsches Jungvolk (German Young People) and those between 14 and 18 joined the Hitler Jugend, or Hitler Youth. Though available to girls and boys (girls could join the Bund Deutsche Madel), the Hitler Youth was mainly concerned with controlling boys. With membership at 90 percent it was the world's largest youth organization.



The explanation for such a large enrollment percentage becomes clear when one considers that the Reich not only outlawed all other youth organizations, but also mandated Hitler Youth enrollment and even went so far as to threaten parents, telling them their children would be placed in orphanages if enrollment were denied. Any youth group found together outside of a Hitler Youth association was considered criminal.

Initially, the Hitler Youth functioned much like any organization for young boys would. The boys played sports and games, hiked, and went camping. With time, however, the Hitler Youth became more a method of recruitment and the organization increased its military training, leaving a great number of its members bored with their lack of freedom (they were supervised by older members who were divided into police squads), and dissatisfied with their activities, which once consisted of athletic games, but now included such enterprises as marching, drilling on the proper use of bayonets, grenades, and pistols, and maneuvering through dugouts, trenches and barbed wire. Pursuits also included stealing, vandalizing, fighting and bullying. (Because of a rule that disallowed police from arresting members of the Hitler Youth Patrol Service for their criminal activity, all was done without the fear of consequence.) Soon, these organizational changes led to an awakening regarding the actual motives behind the formation of the Hitler Youth.

There were many young people in Nazi Germany who resisted the cruelties of the Nazi Youth and remained true to their own codes of moral conduct. The Edelweiss Pirates was one of the largest youth groups who refused to participate in Nazi youth activities. The police were not allowed to arrest members of the Hitler Youth Patrol Service, who were known for their brutality and bullying. Hitler Youth were guilty of many crimes, they broke shop windows, stole, and beat people on the streets. In one case, a group of Hitler Youth broke the windows of the home of a teacher who had given them low marks. The Nazi Youth Patrol raided movie houses, billiard halls and coffee shops looking for the Edelweiss Pirates, who stood up to them and even fought with



them on the streets of the cities of Dusseldorf, Essen, Cologne and other industrial cities in western Germany. Much like the tenacious edelweiss flower clinging to the crags of Austria's Alps that the group was named after, these young Germans resisted Nazi indoctrination.

The Edelweiss Pirates had different names in different cities, (The Farhtenstenze, or Traveling Dudes, for instance, came from Essen, the Kittelbach Pirates from Oberhausen and Dusseldorf, and the Navajos from Cologne), but they shared basic beliefs and attitudes. They were not deprived children or delinquents; most were not even deliberate resistance fighters. They were simply the sons and daughters of working class parents who refused to be bullied into absolute obedience. Most of the Pirates were between 16 to 18 years of age and were too young for military service.

The first Pirates appeared at the end of the 1930's. Dressed in checkered shirts, short dark trousers and white stockings, the Pirates wore metal Edelweiss pins on their collars. Because they lived in the same neighborhoods they had a territorial identity and shared beliefs. Refusing to participate in Nazi Youth activities, they shared a strong sense of social identity and solidarity with one another.

The groups of Edelweiss Pirates consisted of ten to fifteen boys, there were girls in some of the groups too. During the day they worked in factories and mills as unskilled workers and in the evenings and weekends they met together in cafes or in the parks. The high point of their activities together was the hikes they took into the countryside with rucksacks on their backs and their bread and butter rations. At night they slept in barns or tents. Sometimes they rode bicycles deep into the countryside ignoring the Nazi rules. Always on the watch for the dreaded Nazi Youth Patrols, they sometimes provoked street fights, but most of the time they avoided the Nazi Youth.

As the war progressed, social chaos intensified, and many Pirates became active in the underground resistance movement. When the industrial cities were being bombed between 1942 and 1945, the conflicts between the Edelweiss Pirates and the Nazi authorities intensified. Edelweiss Pirates in Cologne offered shelter to German army deserters, escaped prisoners from concentration camps, and escapees from forced labor camps. Groups of Edelweiss Pirates made armed raids on military depots and deliberately sabotaged war production. The Nazis were determined to suppress them.

A Nazi official wrote, "There is a suspicion that it is these youths who have been inscribing the walls (of the pedestrian underground walkways in the Altenbergstrasse, a boulevard in the center of the city) with the slogans "Down with Hitler". "The OKW (Oberkommando des Wehrmacht) is lying", "Down with Nazi brutality". No matter how often the writings on the walls were scrubbed away, they were back again after a few days.

Nazi patrols were constantly looking for members of the Pirates and those who were caught were imprisoned, sent to jails, reform schools, psychiatric hospitals, labor and concentration camps and many lost their lives. In a single day of raids in December 1942, the Dusseldorf Gestapo and the Secret Police made more than 1000 arrests. During the round ups, the Nazis were brutal. Captured Pirates had their heads shaven, were threatened and beaten, and often cruelly punished. 6 members of the Cologne Pirates were publicly executed by hanging in the center of the city of Cologne. The story of the Edelweiss Pirates is a story of courage and resistance.

<https://www.raoulwallenberg.net/saviors/others/edelweiss-pirates-story/>

<https://www.holocaust-trc.org/faces-of-courage-children-who-resisted/faces-of-courage-the-edelweiss-pirates/>



November 10, 1944, the Gestapo publicly hanged 13 from the Ehrenfeld Group and the Edelweiss Pirates without trial at an S-Bahn station near Cologne.





Hirschhof, Berlin, 1985 - Harald Hauswald / OSTKREUZ.

# OST PUNK

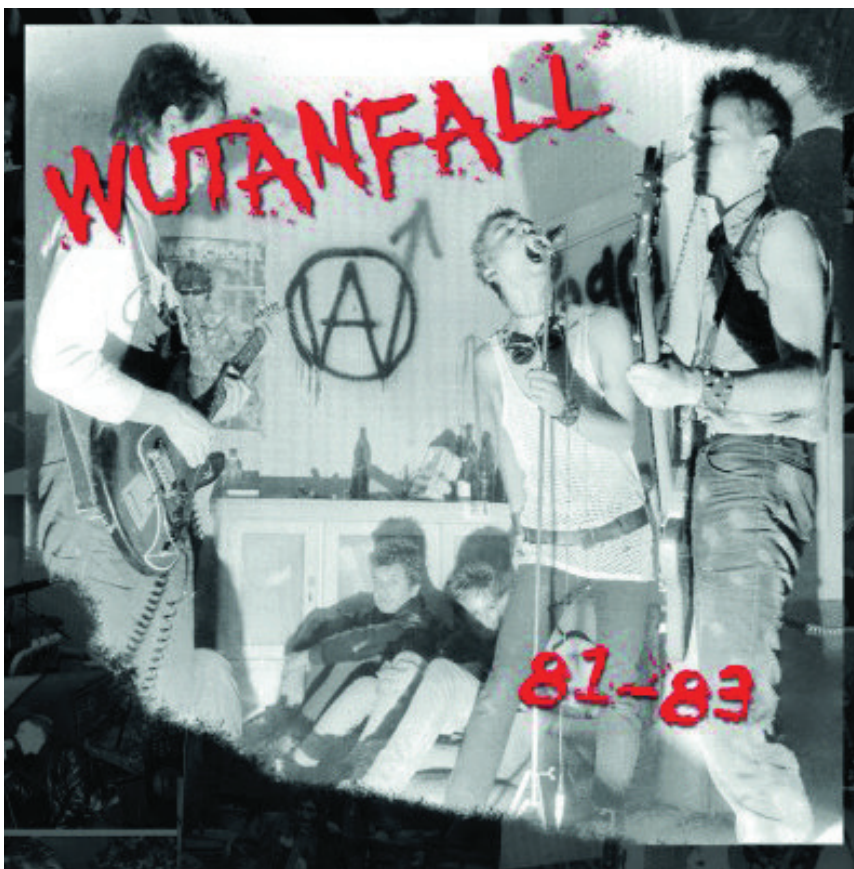
*We, the youth of Germany, pledge our  
loyalty to the German Democratic  
Republic, because it will bring us peace  
and a better life!*

*We, the youth of Germany, pledge our  
loyalty to the German Democratic  
Republic, because it will be the first  
German state to ensure full self-  
determination for the German people!*

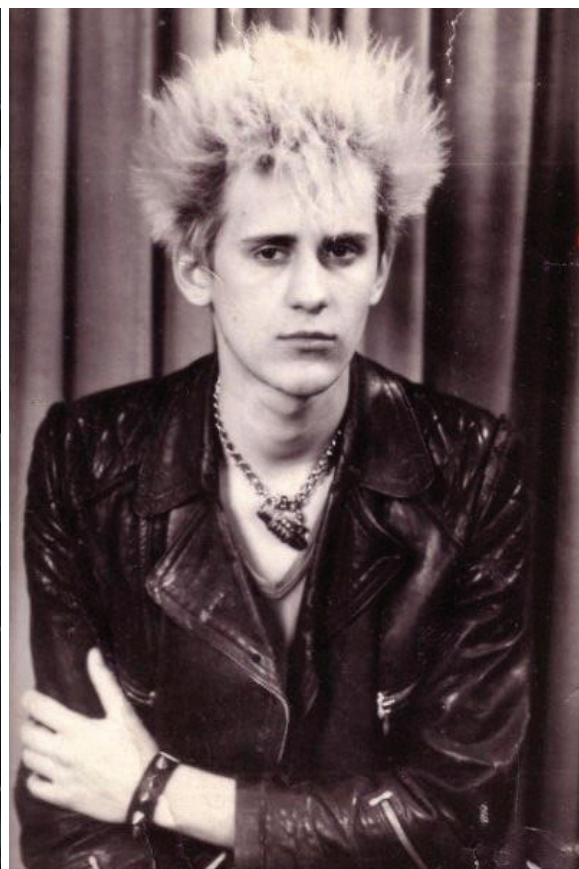
**- From: Oath of the German Youth**

*Wherever you go  
You're asked for ID  
If you say a false word  
You know what happened next  
It doesn't matter where you look  
Cameras are everywhere  
Accompanying you step for step  
"Security" always follows you  
You speak your mind openly*

*And what will happen?  
You can only hope  
Something has to happen  
Who wants to stand around passively?  
Were you really born  
To be subordinate to all?  
**- By Lade of Planlos***



Wutanfall album cover.



Michael "Pankow" Boehlke of Planlos.

It all started in the early 1980s. Small groups of young punks formed in East Berlin, in Leipzig and later across East Germany — and their numbers grew fast. These young people didn't want their futures being predetermined by the government- without their input. They didn't want to be in the young Pioneers at age 6 and then Free German Youth at 14 because these groups were designed to mold them into properly indoctrinated workers for the planned economy of East Germany. They were not content to wait for the system to slowly turn in their direction, as a popular saying among East German punks at the time went, they did not want to "die in the waiting room of the future"-so they acted up and acted out. Government officials complained that the current generation of youths tended to be spoiled and lacked political enthusiasm, whilst these young people, with their clear sense of urgency, had railed against the restrictions placed on travel abroad and the artificiality and lack of creativity in society. Young people wanted the opportunity to use the skills they had learned in school and to be challenged in their work while they were still young.

As a rule, punks were not welcome in

regular pubs or clubs so they met in basements, backyards and churches. People were hostile to punks on the street with some hissing they "should be gassed," and they were harassed by the repressive state regime. Erich Mielke, chief of the Ministry of State Security or "Stasi" (secret police), called them "filth from the West". Parents no longer wanted anything to do with their own children.

These youngsters who ventured outside with mohawk haircuts and dog collars around their necks were spat on or stopped by the police for no good reason. Being a punk in East Germany was not very pleasant, so why do it? As one former Ost Punk described it - Punk music gave voice to their rage, thus the strength to survive, while the punk look allowed them to clearly show their opposition to the system that wanted to police their thoughts and creativity every time they stepped out in public.

Punk-style clothes were not easy to get in East Germany and what was available came at a price leading to a strong spirit of DIY. The punks ripped and then safety-pinned their clothes in exactly the right places, made badges, dyed their hair with ink and whipped it into shape using shav-

ing cream or soap - a problem in the rain when it all dissolved and ran onto their eyes. The "real" punks decided who was really punk and allowed to belong and who wasn't. People they didn't want in their groups were told to remove, for instance, the safety pins they had skewered through their lips, cheeks and ears. Less polite punks simply snatched the unwelcome person's leather jacket.

Punks were all about shocking people. Being different was what mattered, a bit of freedom in an unfree state. Punk music was the East German punk movement's soundtrack, but punk music from the West was not for sale in East Germany. The easiest way to get a hold of western punk records was to get one's grandparents to go shopping in West Berlin, since East Germans who had retired were allowed to travel to the West. Grannies were sent to record stores, shopping lists in hand. "If grandma had a B52's record in her hand when she entered the country, there wasn't much the border guards could do. They thought it was okay if grandma brought something like this with her," says Bernd Stracke, better known as just "Stracke," who used to sing in the band Wutanfall ('Tantrum') back in the day





Acceptable behavior: The Free German Youth shouldering pictures of East German Leaders.

Michael Boehlke, who fronted a band called Planlos ('Aimless') said in a Reuters interview that choosing to be a punk rocker affected every aspect of your life. To be a punk in the communist state meant an end to job prospects or further education. Though jobs for punks were scarce, not working even a dead-end job was not an option thanks to a policy inherited directly from the Nazis that saw lack of work as criminally antisocial. Interrogations, jail time, and pressure from the secret police to become an informant on the local punk scene characterized day-to-day life. Moreover, another legal holdover from the Nazi era, paragraph 220 of the East German penal code worked as a catch-all clause that was frequently used against political crimes. This paragraph made slandering the system illegal—a vague crime that carried up to a three-year sentence.

"The police interrogated me every day," said Boehlke, adding that prison time was an ever-present possibility for everyone.

To the punks, East Germany was the "most boring country in the world," and they wanted to alleviate the prisoner-style isolation they felt. Strake said: "We stood up for our cause with our faces and our names—and paid for it". The true tragedy of the violence and intimidation that the East German punks felt was that the majority of them were idealists wanting a better future for themselves and their fellow East German citizens. Though many would be granted permission to leave the country, without their families, most stayed and continued to work toward reforming policies and improving civil rights in East Germany—a goal that was realized in 1989 when the gates of the Berlin wall swung open and the GDR became a thing of the

past. By standing against and opting out of a system that afforded them little say in their own futures, i.e. refusing to "die in the waiting room of the future", Ost punks played a significant role in ushering a new era of modern German history.

#### Sources:

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## **EDELWEISS PIRATES**

## **OST PUNKS**

**WHERE & WHEN?**

**WHERE & WHEN?**

**TRAITS, QUALITIES & FEATURES:**

**TRAITS, QUALITIES & FEATURES:**

**WHO OR WHAT THEY WERE RESISTING:**

**WHO OR WHAT THEY WERE RESISTING:**