

Who was Horst Wessels?

By way of illustrating the times, let's take a brief look at the life and death of Horst Wessels. This young man became the poster boy of Nazism and his song became a second national anthem during the Nazi reign. In my first draft of this chapter, I wrote him off as a "Nazi thug"; but that isn't fair either to him or to history. Few, if any people are born thugs. His story was a tragedy played out many times over in Weimar Germany. Wessels was born in Bielefeld, home of Bethel, the son of a Lutheran pastor. He grew up in Berlin, where his father pastored a large church. Wessels was admirable in many ways, a good student, a gifted musician; but, like so many other young Germans, his life lacked meaning, perhaps hope. He began to be more and more involved in the Nazi Party, absorbing all its poisonous propaganda.

Finally, in 1929, he quit law school and became a full time Nazi leader. His seemingly incongruous duties with the Storm Troopers (SA) included organizing a band to play at SA rallies, and leading gang raids into Red Front controlled neighborhoods. He was shot dead that same year by a Communist gangster in a seamy episode, never fully understood, involving revenge, or a quarrel over a prostitute, or unpaid bills, or some combination of those motives.



His father died the following year. Wessels' imprisoned killer was, in turn, killed by the Gestapo after Hitler took power.

But Wessels lived on in the hearts of the Nazi faithful through a song he wrote, well the lyrics anyway. It's ironic that a song once paraded so proudly throughout Germany is now banned. Here are a few of the lyrics, some of which proved to be prophetic (they aren't complete and in order so don't try to sing them):

Comrades whom Red Front and Reaction shot dead
March in spirit within our ranks.

Already millions are looking to the swastika, full of hope;
The day of freedom and bread is dawning.

We are all prepared for the fight, we are all willing to fight!
Soon Hitler flags will flutter over barricades.

The foregoing selection was excerpted from *War Comes to God's House*.