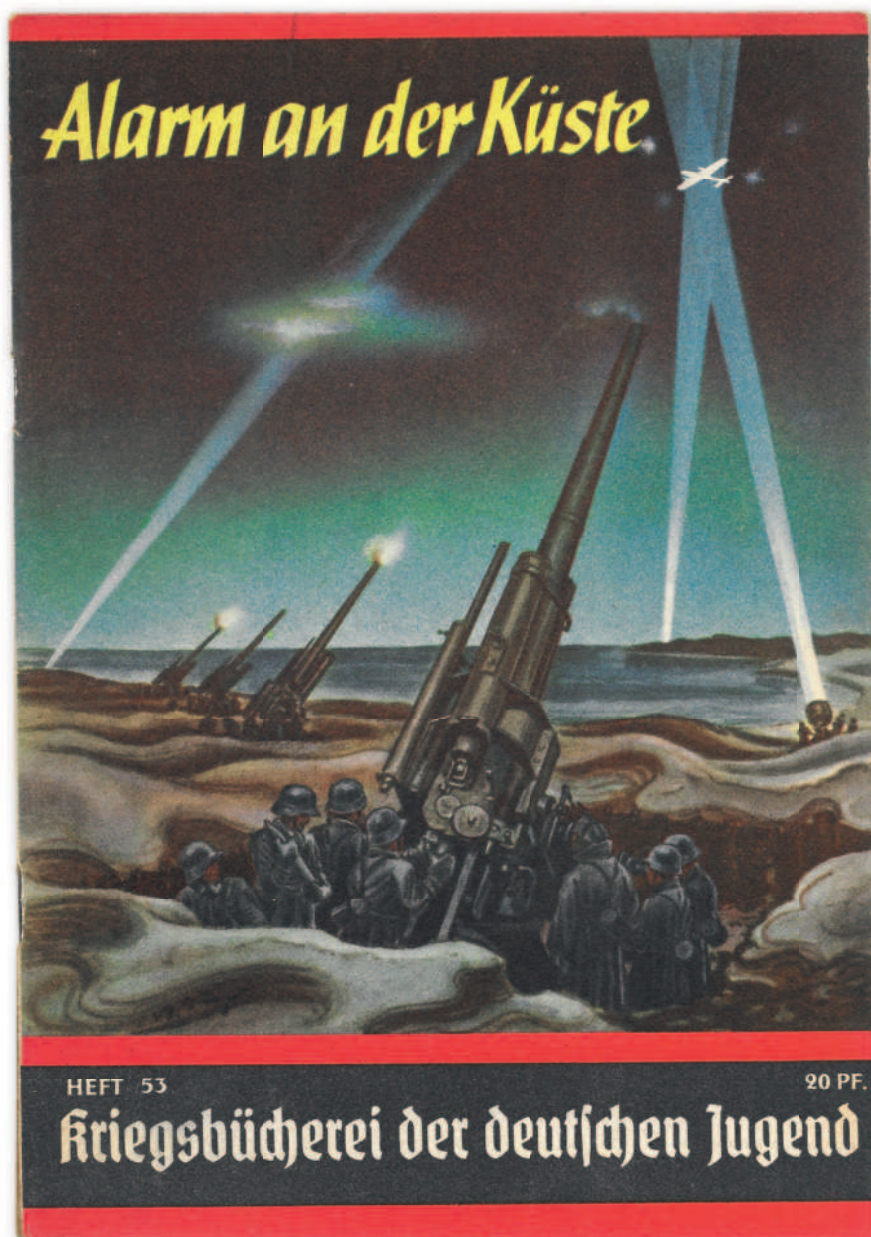


Pulp Fiction

The War Library of German Youth was a series of short stories published weekly between 1940 and 1942. **David Benyon** looks at these propaganda tales for young people.



■ The front cover of number 53 in the War Library of German Youth series, 'Alarm on the Coast', which dealt with the story of a Luftwaffe flak battery.

In stories for children set during the Second World War, the Wehrmacht habitually fulfils the role of the 'bad guys.' Generations of British and American children grew up with tales of granite-jawed Allied soldiers heroically overcoming the legions of Hitler's Germany.

The narrative is familiar: the Wehrmacht committed many atrocities and fought a war of aggression for a regime condemned by history. But for German boys during the war, the men of the Wehrmacht were the heroes, the Third Reich's propaganda men eager to provide fresh reading material for a generation of German boys.

The War Library of German Youth were short stories, published as propaganda for children and a recruitment tool for the Wehrmacht. This series linked children at home with the men at the front, and some of these boys, schooled in propaganda from infancy, would reach the frontlines in 1944, the war reaching their homes by 1945.

EVERY THURSDAY

Sold for 20 pfennigs by Germany's booksellers, each volume was 32 pages long and featured a colourful cover of a dramatic combat scene. Advertisements were placed across German radio, newspapers and cinema to attract interest, promising: "Every Thursday a new book!"

Published by Steiniger Verlage, Berlin, the format is known in German as 'Hefroman'. In Britain, they would be described as 'penny dreadfuls', and in America 'dime novels' or 'pulp fiction'. The style followed the prewar travel



- Left: One of the Kriegsmarine titles (number 59) covered the sinking of HMS *Glorious*.
- Below: The artwork inside the booklets was often striking, an example being this depicting HMS *Glorious* sinking.
- Right: Dunkirk, in issue number 76, was another opportunity to showcase German military prowess over the Englander.



novel and was fashioned after a similar First World War series, “*Under the German Flag*”.

The war library was commissioned by Reich Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach in December 1939. Its rollout continued during the tenure of Artur Axmann, von Schirach’s deputy and successor, who led the Hitler Youth from August 1940 until the war’s end. The stories had the backing of each high command of the armed forces, and in most books, particularly later volumes, a recruitment advert for whichever arm of service featured in that story would be included on the inside-back cover. In total, there were 156 weekly numbered volumes until December 1942, with another 14 non-numbered issues published in the same period. These were not offered for sale but were instead distributed via official channels.

The first story, “Before the Attack”, dealt with Germany’s attack on Poland. The last, “A Stuka Squadron in the East”, came out as the deteriorating war situation ended many entertainment forms across Germany.

HOME FRONT MORALE

The war library focuses disproportionately on fighting in the air and at sea, and out of 156 volumes, only 66 take an army perspective,

many of those about the crews of tanks or armoured cars. Some 45 entries take a Kriegsmarine perspective, and another 45 focus on the men of the Luftwaffe, both arms of service together representing the bulk of the series. A minority, though, featured of the real-life Wehrmacht.

Children were accustomed to travel books, and the relative focus on air and sea suited the adventure format popular

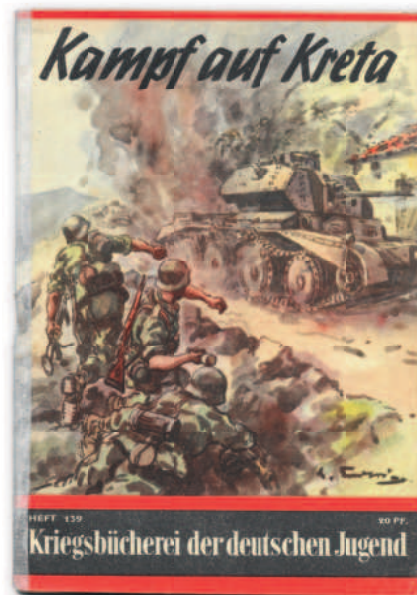
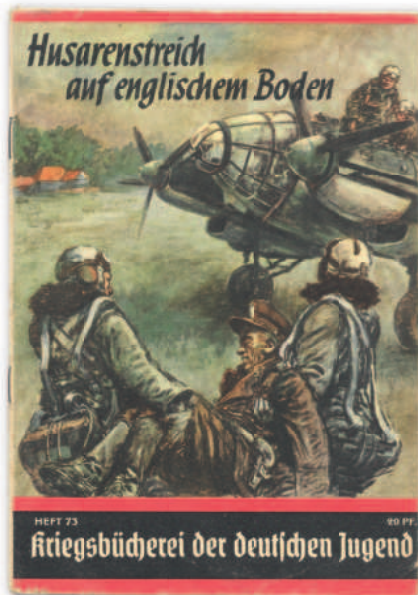


■ A depiction of a Junkers 87 Stuka attack in the Dunkirk volume.

before the war. The series showcased a range of exotic fronts across Europe to fit the travel novel genre, from Narvik and the North Cape, to Salonika and Cyrenaica. Concentrating on the air and sea war provided some distance from war’s brutality, by featuring heroic protagonists on the bridge of a warship or in a bomber’s cockpit, presenting sanitised perspectives for children. With an eye to home front morale, several books also feature the flak and searchlight crews which were becoming familiar sights across Germany.

Many early entries focus on opponents defeated within the first year of war, but the enemy most often featured is Britain (typically referred to as England). The war against Britain also tallies with the air-sea focus. Britain in the propagandists’ crosshairs is best exemplified by No. 76 in the series: “Dunkirk: The French Sacrifice Themselves for England.”

“Bombs on Coventry”, No.84 in the series, is another overt political statement. The story justifies the night bombing raid of 14-15 November 1940 as a strike against the city’s factories and a response to the RAF bombing Munich on 8-9 November. The book begins: “*The ‘gentlemen’ of the Royal Air Force attacked Munich...Thus our mission this evening is to destroy Coventry’s industry!*”



In the story, the Ju 88s accurately dive-bomb legitimate targets, demolishing factories. In reality, the bombers dropped their payloads at high altitude, destroying Coventry's cathedral and residential areas. The volume employs jibes about "English gentlemen" as hypocrites and snobs. One of the Ju88 crewmen on the raid had worked in the city before the war, and still nurses a grievance against the British: "I didn't get along with them all that well. That stiff, arrogant society."

HUSSAR PRANKS

Some stories are more fanciful than others. "Stop-off Landing in England" is No. 118 in the series. It depicts a Luftwaffe Ju 88 night-time raid destroying an RAF Bomber Command airfield. Damaged by flak, a Ju 88 makes an emergency landing in England to fix a fuel line when the injured Luftwaffe crewmen spare the life of an interfering farmer, despite English accusations "...that these Nazis murder civilians", before returning to France and naturally downing and evading several pursuing Spitfires along the way.

"Hussar Prank on English Soil" is No. 73 in the series and depicts a Heinkel III bomber during the Battle of Britain. After tangling with Spitfire

■ Above left: Book 73 told the implausible tale of a Heinkel 111 crew landing in England to repair a fault and then capturing a British officer before flying off with him as a POW. The cover artwork is somehow redolent of British 'war comics', popular in Britain from the 1950s.

■ Above centre: An illustration of a page from issue 118 shows how the pages and artwork were laid out.

■ Above right: Most fronts and campaigns were covered, this issue looking at the invasion of Crete.



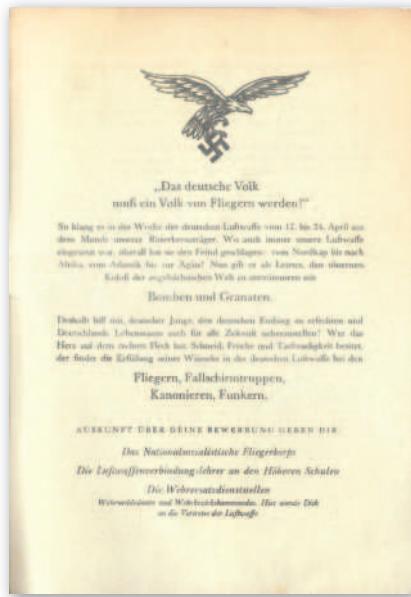
■ Again, the artwork in issue number 73 was eye-catching.

and Hurricane fighters - sending several "to the devil" - the crew make an emergency near Cambridge to fix a damaged engine. Making repairs, the crew capture Commander MacAllan, a British officer riding in his country estate, avoiding the "day and night" bombing on London but unable to escape the Luftwaffe's "buzzing bees" interrupting the "splendid isolation" of southern England.

The story describes Britain's predicament in 1940-41: London in rubble "collapsing like Carthage"; the Royal Navy's "Grand Fleet in port, targets for Luftwaffe bombs" and the British Army defeated in Europe, with the RAF resorting to bombing German civilians at night. It transpires that MacAllan had been a POW in Flanders in 1918 and "treated as a fallen knight" by German soldiers. He is reunited with his former captor at the story's conclusion, when the squadron's commanding officer greets the returning crew and their unlucky prisoner.

U-BOAT LIFE

Not all the books are so silly. The early great victories are described, however gleefully, including a slew of volumes devoted to the triumphs of the U-boats, S-boats, destroyers and other warships.



“That was the Courageous!” is No.2 in the series, about U-29’s sinking of aircraft carrier HMS *Courageous* in September 1939. “Direct Hit on the *Glorious*” is No.59, depicting the aircraft carrier’s sinking by battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* in June 1940. Number 81, “The *Empress of Britain* Goes to its Death”, marks the sinking of the liner in October 1940. (See pages 118 – 124)

Number 136, “Dust Cloud and Neptune: Hunting Convoys in the Mid-Atlantic” contains a dose of reality about the Atlantic campaign against Britain, characterised by frustration and ultimately failure for the U-boats. “After days and nights of dogged hunting, the convoy is lost,” writes author Herbert Sprang. “The weeks that follow, are really typical of submarine life. For every moment of battle, there are a hundred moments of ordinary life.”

■ Above left: An exception to the coverage of most fronts and campaigns was the limited acknowledgment of action on the Eastern Front. Issue number 108 was an exception, entitled ‘We hunt the Soviets’.

■ Above centre: Each issue carried a recruitment advert for the arm of the services feature in that issue. This is a recruitment advert for the Luftwaffe which appeared in issue 118.

■ Above right: The Arctic war was a topic covered in issue number 130.

OSTFRONT

Not surprisingly, only a small number are set on the Eastern Front, despite Barbarossa getting underway by the series’ half-way point. Fewer than 20 titles exist, all needing sanitisation for a youth audience. However, these stories do concede problems facing the men fighting on the Ostfront. “Onward, Ever Onward”, No.135, was

published in mid-1942, its stark tone unlike many stories describing the war in the west. “They were done by now in France a year ago,” the advancing infantry complain. “Day after day, the achievements were astonishing, but the country was entirely different.”

Above all, the story emphasises a Soviet foe to be feared and hated: “They know the enemy, a threatening monster beyond human understanding. The decayed and brutish air of Bolshevism surrounds them, full of hatred and malice. The mass of the enemy are dull and vicious, armed with primitive weaponry. But their weaponry, their tanks, their guns, their planes, their landmines, are inexhaustible. Thrown back a thousand times, they were always back for more.”

Published in late 1942, “Waffen-SS in the fight against Leningrad” is one of the last books, and one of only few

“By order of the Reichsjugendführer, and in agreement with the High Command of the Army, the Kriegsmarine and the Supreme Commander of the Luftwaffe, the first four issues of the “Kriegsbücherei der deutschen Jugend” have recently been published. The Reichsjugendführer announced the reasons for publishing these books in a radio broadcast yesterday. It will serve to foster the proud confidence of the youth, showing them a sense of self-sacrifice and growing a deep affinity with the men and deeds of the frontline.” GÖTTINGER TAGEBLATT No. 290, Monday 11 December 1939



■ *Left:* Luftwaffe night-fighter 'ace', Wolfgang Falck, was a guest writer for the series and penned the story in issue number 20, 'Messerschmitt Destroyers Attack!'



■ *Right:* From August 1940 to the war's end, Reich Youth Leader, Artur Axmann, presided over the organisation which published the booklets. Here, he is being subjected to interrogation after capture by the Allies immediately after the war.

depicting SS troops (another features 'tank-hunting' troops). The SS men engage in a battle for one small village after another. The story admits to problems facing the infantry, including casualties, climate and terrain and taking on KV1 and KV2 heavy tanks without adequate anti-tank weapons.

Despite factual 'concessions', the spin stays resolutely 'on message' and Soldiers find a Volksdeutsche woman living close to Leningrad. She cooks for the SS men, telling the sad story of her family, lost to Bolshevik cruelties. But then, many welcomed the invading Germans as saviours.

Faith in final victory also remains unerring among the troops, predictably: "They showed the hard exertions of weeks of war, but their eyes gleamed. They proclaimed confidence and victory. Victory! Victory!"

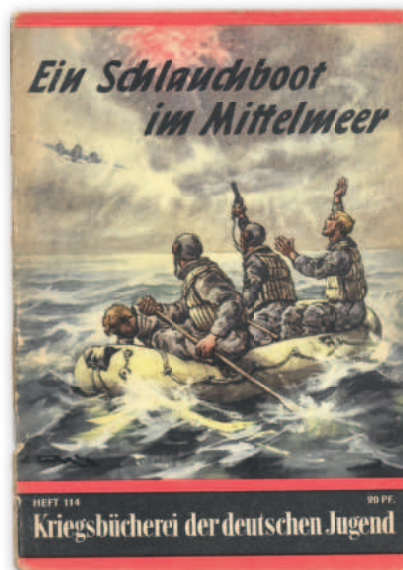
PROPAGANDA MEN

Some of the authors enjoyed literary and journalistic careers before and after the war, including Peter Supf and Fritz Otto Busch. Josef Müller-Marein authored No.52, "Panzer Thrust to the Sea". A Luftwaffe war correspondent, he wrote for "Völkische Beobachter" and "Das Reich". Postwar, he became editor-in-chief of the German daily

"Die Zeit".

Knights Cross holder and night fighter pilot, Wolfgang Falck, wrote No.20, "Messerschmitt Destroyers Attack!" In June 1940, Falck led a night fighter wing and postwar served as the German representative of US aircraft manufacturer McDonnell Douglas, dying at the age of 96, in 2007.

Credited in each book until No.115



■ Issue 114 told the story of the heroic rescue of a German bomber crew from the Mediterranean after they had been adrift for some while in their life raft.

was press secretary for Reich Youth Leadership, Günter Kaufmann. In later books, his name is replaced by Gustav Memminger. In 1942 he took over press and propaganda for youth organisations.

Working for Axmann, Memminger is nearly forgotten to history. The closest he came to notoriety was his role in 'Werwolf', the late-war plan to stir guerrilla warfare in Allied-occupied Germany. From February 1945, Memminger was tasked with coordinating Hitler Youth Werwolf cells to fight the Allied occupiers in the Rhineland. Adolescents who had consumed the war library's propaganda stories were now urged to commit acts of violence and sabotage: to fight and die for a lost cause. Memminger continued his underground work after Germany surrendered, and both Memminger and Axmann were arrested in December 1945. They were caught by Operation Childhood, an Anglo-American intelligence operation that crushed the remains of a Nazi underground movement.

A publication of its time, these fictional accounts of combat must have resonated with German youth – many of whom would later get to taste the terrible realities of warfare and battle. ☠