

Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika Study Guide

**Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days When God Wore a
Swastika by Alfons Heck**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	7
Chapter 3.....	9
Chapter 4.....	10
Chapter 5.....	12
Chapter 6.....	13
Chapter 7.....	15
Chapter 8.....	17
Chapter 9.....	18
Chapter 10.....	20
Chapter 11.....	22
Epilogue, The Aftermath.....	24
Characters.....	26
Objects/Places.....	30
Themes.....	32
Style.....	34
Quotes.....	36
Topics for Discussion.....	38



Plot Summary

A Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days when God Wore a Swastika is the reconstructed autobiography of Alfons Heck's experience as a heavily indoctrinated and ultimately high-ranking leader in the Hitler Youth from the beginning of the Nazi Regime to its demise. Heck later went on to speak publicly about his experience under the Nazi Regime and persistently maintains that despite the evil of Hitler's regime, he had nothing but absolute adoration for Hitler until the very end of the war. The book as a whole shows the incredible power of the Nazi youth propaganda machine.

Alfons Heck was born in 1928 in the Rhineland in Wittlich, Germany. At age 6, he entered elementary school just as the Nazi Party was coming to power. While his parents were anti-Nazi, Alfons's stubborn and powerful grandmother had managed to browbeat his mother into letting her and Alfons's grandfather raise him as their own. As a result, there was little to keep him out of the Hitler Youth. When Heck was ten he and some friends, along with other classmates, joined up with the Hitler Youth, that at the time had 5 million members. Half of his classmates met their end during World War II. Heck was not promoted much until he was fourteen, yet all the while he was being indoctrinated to love Hitler and serve the German state. He believed that he and his country had a bright future ahead.

At age fourteen, Hitler Youth members were forced to join the Hitlerjugend, or the Hitler Youth's senior branch. Heck wanted to avoid becoming a foot soldier, so he attempted to gain entry into the Flieger Hitlerjugend, or the elite Flying Hitler Youth. This required year-long glider training. While surviving the savage rule of his commanding officer, Alfons made a number of friends that he would later promote to high-ranking positions in the Hitler Youth leadership. Further, while Alfons grew up wanting to become a priest, after a year he wanted nothing more than to be a fighter pilot in the Luftwaffe. Glider training from 1942 to 1944 was the happiest period of Heck's life.

By age 16, Heck received his Aeronaut's Certificate in Sailplane Flying, but the Allies had made so much progress in France that his 180-member class, which Heck now led, were forced to go to Wittlich to set up anti-tank barriers behind the Nazi Westwall. Due to extreme losses in the battlefield, Heck quickly rose in rank, reaching Bannfuhrer, where Heck led 3000 Hitler Youth in Bann (a district) 223. Heck was responsible for a number of anti-aircraft cannons and ordered Hitler Youth to fight American soldiers.

Heck loved the power despite being desperate to be called back to the Luftwaffe to fly. He finally returned to the Luftwaffe base at age 17 but flight training was suspended. A Luftwaffe officer trying to protect Heck ordered him to get a troop to retrieve radar equipment near Wittlich and then go on furlough there for four days. Heck was still a devoted Nazi, but his aunt and a young girl helped convince him to don civilian clothes so that the coming American army would not kill him. Largely unaware that Heck was a member of the Hitler Youth, the Americans allowed Alfons to serve as an interpreter until the French came to govern the area. Heck was then arrested and did a month of hard labor, then lived on two-year restriction to his town. For a long time, Heck was unable to

believe what his country had done or to be angry with Hitler, but as his life progressed the guilt and horror of his experiences set in.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Under the Nazis, German children have to join the Jungvolk, the Hitler Youth's junior branch, though in fact basic training for membership in the army of the Third Reich begins at six, in elementary school.

Alfons Heck, the author, was born in Wittlich, twenty-five miles east of Franch in the Rhineland. His family emigrated from France in 1770 and in 1933, Wittlich has only 8000 or so people, yet is a count-set and a trade center. Under the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, the Rhineland has been placed under French occupation for 15 years. In 1936, Nazi troops march into Wittlich and the people cheer with joy. Alfons remembers being a young child watching the brown-shirts march through town. Hitler is there, in an open Mercedes. Hitler means a new Germany.

The children of the 1930s know nothing of the Weimar Republic's turmoil or freedom. The Nazis revolutionize education with little pushback. Indoctrination begins at age six, and children receive a daily dose of nationalism. They never question. In fact, if one is not Jewish, a gypsy, gay or a political opponent of the Nazis, 1930s Germany seems a place of promise.

In 1936, Alfons's grandfather, to whom he has been very close, dies. Alfons lives with his grandparents, for his parents have moved to a large city in Germany's industrial heartland, Oberhausen; they want him to remain in the countryside. Alfons has a twin brother, Rudi, who is six. They are only supposed to stay for a few weeks, but Alfons's grandmother keeps them anyway. Alfons begins to identify his grandparents as his parents, and he will run from his mother until his late teenage years as a result. His grandmother is an assertive and powerful woman.

In 1938, Alfons joins the Jungvolk, which is to become compulsory in 1939, though only for Aryan children and not the handicapped (they are typically euthanized). Alfons is already conditioned to accept that the Germanic-Nordic race is superior and that total submission to the state's welfare is his first duty. The Fatherland is a mystical yet real concept of the nation.

The children love the Hitler Youth for the action and the glamour. Alfons is impatient to join. Before the war, they are very much Nazi Boy Scouts. It is so appealing that even before it becomes compulsory, six and a half million boys and girls join. Alfons's childhood friend Heinz Ermann cannot join, though; later he and his family will be gassed in Auschwitz. However, no one could have predicted this at the time. All the entire half million German Jews know is that times will be hard. Many believe Hitler will moderate his stance when he comes to power. However, Hitler's obsession with the Jews lasts until his last breath.



Alfons remembers his elementary school teacher, Herr Becker, who deliberately discriminates against the Jews in his classroom by making them sit in the corner. All Catholic children, as Alfons is, know that the Jews killed Jesus, which seems worse than being Protestant. By 1938, Heinz is a fleeting memory.

Wittlich becomes a garrison town, which brings the town prosperity, as it ends unemployment. Alfons's parents are impressed by Hitler, who have brought full employment and economic order with stability to a nation with an inferiority complex.

Later that year, Alfons is chosen to attend the National Socialist German Workers Party Congress, the Nazi "high mass." He is a member of his home district's Hitler Youth delegation.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Hitler's Germany celebrates its German history and culture, symbolizing its regained sense of significance in the world. Even for a ten year old like Alfons, the Nuremburg Party Congress is a week-long feverish celebration of Germany. The Hitler Youth is the most fanatical Nazi organization and Hitler praises them to the skies because he knows he needs them. The Nuremburg Congress also contains many strictly organized marches.

When Hitler appears, the Hitler Youth are ecstatic. Hitler then begins one of his famous speeches, starting slowly and building to a fever pitch. The emotional impact of the speech is enormous; Hitler connects emotionally with the crowd and encourages the children to believe that one day they will rule the world. For minutes the children yell at the top of their lungs, crying, "Sieg Heil!" At the end of the 1938 Congress, Hitler gives a speech that is scrutinized worldwide and heard live on more than 100 American radio stations.

Upon Alfons's return, he passes the exams to enter the Gymnasium, the highest track of German education to which only 6% gain admittance. In November 1938, Alfons remembers witnessing Kristallnacht, when the SA and SS smash the windows of Jewish businesses and storm Jewish synagogues. Alfons remembers seeing it both as brutal and as exciting. His grandmother is baffled that the police do not stop the young Nazi destruction, but Herr Becker the next day claims that the attacks are a spontaneous action against the Jews for the murder of German diplomat, Ernst vom Rath. The Nazis are successful at demonizing Jews in part because many of the Bolshevik revolutionaries in Germany are Jewish and Hitler is able to tie the threat of communist revolution to the Jewish race.

The concentration camps have already begun, though they start out as detention centers for political enemies. Though many communists and social democrats "see the light" and become Nazis. Alfons's father never does. Oddly, Alfons's grandmother never gets involved. Many farm people love Hitler though, in part because they begin to prosper when Hitler restricts foreign food imports.

Alfons next reports his activities in the fanfare and drum platoon, which practice intensely and regularly. They march on Sunday mornings, though they are awful musicians. Also remarkable is that many of the Hitler Youth's leaders come from its own membership. The Hitler Youth extract obedience easily. However, the German people are naturally obedient and Hitler takes advantage of this. The Hitler Youth do not cause many parental complaints, particularly when Hitler puts the Hitler Youth boys and girls to "land service." However, Catholic parents often complain that senior Hitler Youth leaders mock religion, though Alfons usually serves mass wearing his full uniform, belt and dagger, beneath his altar boy robes.

The carefree life of the Hitler Youth ends September 1st, 1939 when Hitler attacks Poland. The German people, unlike Hitler, are not eager for war given the terrible slaughter of World War I. However, with the astonishing success of the Blitzkrieg, this unease disappears. Hitler teaches them that they are invincible.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

The winter of 1939-40 is extremely cold and is the time of the "phony war," the last time before the "storm broke loose." The Germans do not think the French and British will attack, despite their September 3rd declaration, nor do they think Hitler will attack France. That Christmas, Alfons's family still hopes for peace. Many try to avoid discussion, including in the Gymnasium. That said, over half of Alfons's classmates are killed before they reach 18.

Early May 10th, 1940, Nazi troops march across the borders of France, Luxembourg, Belgium and Holland. The Hitler Youth rallies of the summer are a nice break given how much Alfons works for his grandmother on the farm. There is a great labor shortage caused by the war. However, during the war, Alfons's grandmother hardly asks him for anything. Yet she refuses to participate in reverence for anything but the mass. By the summer of 1940, Alfons doubts that he will be "fortunate enough" to fight. Only England needs to be defeated and will be soon. He still expects to graduate at 18 or 19 then move into the labor service for six months and two years in the army.

After France falls, the farm people get to choose French prisoners of war for farmhands. Their farmhand, George, is a Parisian baker but he gets along with Alfons's grandmother. He is a great worker and she applies to get him out of prison camp. They succeed, though George cannot travel further than two miles from the city. Initially Alfons and George strongly dislike each other. George is a fiercely loyal Frenchman. Alfons does not report his disloyalty, but he would have reported any German. Next Alfons discusses his Uncles Gustav and Franz, along with his Aunt Maria. By 1940, each family is assigned a 15 or 16 year old Hitler Youth boy and girl.

German emotions are in check. Tears are shed at funerals. However, the emotions of the Jews cannot be contained. Their shops are taken over by Christians and their synagogue is desecrated. Alfons has to say goodbye to Frau Ermann due to his grandmother, but Frau Ermann hisses at him to leave. Jews later become lepers. Alfons's grandmother buys some of Frau Ermann's fine linen.

By 1938 the Gestapo is all-powerful and cannot be controlled by the regular judicial system. When the Jews leave Wittlich that year, nobody knows that they are off to a concentration camp, but instead think they will be sent to Poland to make Germany "clean of Jews."

In 1942, the "Final Solution," is decided upon at a top-secret conference in Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin. The German masses never know; to them, "the Final Solution" means deportation. The Hitler Youth wholeheartedly approve of deportation.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

In 1941, Alfons has his first doubts about going into the priesthood. He doubts his faith, though not due to the Hitler Youth many of whose leaders are Catholic. He and his friends talk about girls but they only masturbate. The Hitler Youth is puritanical because it wants strong men not in love with anything but war and conquest. Women are second-class citizens and Hitler teaches that women are mothers and guardians of the hearth.

The Hitler Youth activities keep Alfons busy. Frequent prayer and threats from the confessional usually combat lust but this becomes an uphill battle when his grandmother hires an 18-year-old female farmhand named Hanna. She often taunts him with her large breasts and one day they are alone in the vineyard when she pulls him off to the tool shed. Alfons is never in love with her, and she does not tell him she loves him. Hanna leaves at the end of the summer.

A month later, Germany is at war with the United States. Alfons is not worried since Germany is focused on Russia. Right before Moscow, the Nazi army has been stopped. Alfons thinks it strange that the Germans take the United States casually. The Hitler Youth think America is too soft to fight the Japanese and the Nazis. The British only exist as an American lifeline. The Soviets are key to victory. However, Hitler misunderstands American war potential.

At fourteen, Alfons has not risen far in the Hitler Youth and leaves for the Hitlerjugend, which takes place on April 20th, Hitler's birthday. Afterwards he meets a sixteen year old swimmer named Manfred who is highly ranked in the Flieger Hitler Youth. Manfred invites Alfons to join him in the chance to train as a combat pilot with the Flying Hitler Youth and enter the Luftwaffe.

Alfons joins up, though he is poor at flight mechanics. He is received into glider camp, though Alfons's grandmother is furious because he is too young, though the command has come from Berlin, so she cannot resist. Alfons next arrives at training camp and after a short time, he is forced to fly on the wings of a glider with other men. After flying, Alfons knows he can never become a priest. After several more weeks, Alfons has taken numerous flights. He wants to work hard for the first time in his life to become a volunteer for the Luftwaffe as a professional soldier.

Alfons quickly moves up the ranks, from the lowest class A to class B after his second flight course. He is now in charge of 15 of his peers. Alfons often flies with his friend Rabbit, who is an excellent pilot. They have a friendly competition to rise up the ranks.

By the fall of 1942, the Nazis are at the height of their power. However, Rommel loses the battle of El Alamein and is stopped on the way to Egypt. Second, the entire 6th army



is decimated in Stalingrad. The war is getting closer to home and casualties grow. That winter, Alfons becomes friend with Gert, his Gymnasium classmate. They get along well. They are also promoted and put in charge of 50 boys and have the effective rank of army master sergeant. Hitler Youth headquarters eventually separate the two. Alfons is on his own again in a new flight training station with sixty others. Unfortunately due to rain, Alfons gets only five flights, though he learns to fly a single engine aircraft.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Gert is promoted, becoming second in command of the Flying Hitler Youth. Many of the pilots are young and will later be deployed in war due to enormous casualties. That summer, Gert, Rabbit and Alfons are placed on the same flight team. The commandant, Winkler, is a savage disciplinarian but they need his approval to move up in the ranks. As the weeks pass, they rarely see German planes flying, as the American 8th Air Force is engaging in bombing raids during the day and the British Royal Air Force at night. Hamburg has just been attacked for four nights. Cologne has just experienced its first 1000-bomber raid, and Ruhr, Germany's main weapons forgery, is attacked next. The small towns often ignore the air raid sirens.

The Allied bombings never shake the morale of the German people and few believe that the Allied forces can make progress on land. The future Luftwaffe pilots know that they are badly needed; they are thinly spread. Major General Adolf Galland is fighter arm inspector general and an outstanding ace. He tells them that they need the boys badly. The boys admire him enormously.

Later, Alfons has a bad flight and wrecks a plane and misses the field. He had been signaled by Winkler to circle but he had not been able. Winkler suspends him from flight duty and Alfons thinks his career is finished. Four days of misery later, Winkler gives him two more test flights and Alfons does well, earning his "C" ranking.

The next day, while Rabbit is flying, American enemy aircraft come in on a bomber raid. One of the other gliders distracts the American craft. Rabbit lands quickly and hurts himself. Sergeant Baum sacrifices his life, dying for a comrade. After a eulogy for Baum and several days more, they all leave training. Gert has received the aeronaut's certificate, a high honor and Alfons has his C rating. By fall 1943, Alfons is promoted to administrated rank. Gert is promoted one more step ahead of him.

Alfons passes to be a cadet officer of the Luftwaffe. No other service can claim him, safe in the last few months of the war. He is now obligated to serve in the Luftwaffe for life. The rest of the chapter explains how Alfons becomes friends with Roman Follman, Alfons's age and a leader in the Hitler Youth.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Germany is growing poorer in the winter of 1943. Every man is being called up to fight. The Soviet forces have pushed the Nazis back deep into the Ukraine. In January 1944, the Russians start to attack and Uncle Gustav, who has been called up, goes into action; Gustav is missing in action but on the Eastern Front, both sides kill their prisoners of war. By 1944, the Nazi empire has shrunk and no one underestimates the United States. Italy declares war on the Axis. Africa is lost and the Americans are moving into the war.

Propaganda cannot cover the massive losses. From then, anything not essential to war is not produced. The Hitler Youth are at the core of this effort. Alfons is ordered to attend a special weapons training camp so that he can handle infantry weapons. He then returns and starts training 10-man squads, who become proficient. His efforts keep him out of the Luftwaffe for some time, though he already has the "C" rating. Eventually he is called to serve, and it is his happiest time in the Hitler Youth.

In May, 1944, Alfons continues training for the Luftwaffe with Rabbit. At 16, Alfons expects the Luftwaffe to call him and Rabbit up at any time.

On June 6th, the Allies land at Normandy; initially they are not concerned because Goebbels says they will have a chance, finally, to get at the Americans, but this idea is quickly dispelled. The Hitler Youth are then called up to defend Westwall, which shocks them all. They are to free regular troops for front line duty. Alfons then finds out that he, rather than Gert, is made Manfred's successor. The Fuhrer, though, has ordered him to the Westwall, not the Luftwaffe.

Alfons's unit is to man anti-aircraft batteries and is told to expect mishaps. Alfons is decided upon because it is thought that he can get himself out of ticklish situations. He is also to maintain strict discipline, even having people shot. Alfons asks to pick his own assistants and suggests Roman. This is approved and Alfons starts on the payroll. Eventually Alfons's unit arrives in Remisch; they see that the war has started for them in earnest.

Alfons immediately asks the commanding officer if he can have a school and a convent to house his men; the commanding officer agrees. Over the next few days, the boys are instructed in the use of anti-aircraft weaponry. A month passes and Alfons tries to prevent his unit from getting bored. However, the borders are being reassembled. The boys are then assigned to dig a new trench and they have to move quickly. Paris falls on August 25th and the enemy is a mere 300 kilometers west, 45 minutes flying time. Discipline keeps, though, because the Hitler Youth have been conditioned to obey every order.



Alfons quickly becomes used to being responsible for his unit and loves the feeling of power. His men mature fast under pressed, most of them start to act like adults. Alfons becomes so hardened that he would have sent even Roman to a punishment camps for not following his orders.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

On an October afternoon, two Royal Air Force Spitfires come out of the hills. The planes come to disable supply vehicles. Most escape injury but two Hitler Youth boys are killed. The Unterbannführer Lammers are shot as well. He then appoints Alfons in charge, who would now command four to six units, about 600 to 800 members. By the time Alfons is recalled, he commands nearly 2800 boys and 80 girls.

In September of 1944, Hitler orders the "people's storm" to be organized. Every German male age 15 to 60 will fight. The Allied attack crawls to a standstill. They outrun their large supply line. This is the last chance for the Nazis to organize their defenses. Organization is difficult and there are many deserters. None are older than 15. Alfons has to deal harshly with them.

The SS deals far more harshly with deserters and poor leaders, often killing them on the spot. The regular army dislikes the SS's brutal methods, but they are excellent fighters. A few days later, Alfons is called up to handle a break in the line of Hitler Youth; Alfons thinks the SS will blow it out of proportion but instead he is invited to a top-secret location by the SS leadership.

Eventually Alfons arrives with an SS officer to a clearing with a locomotive full of 88 mm anti-aircraft guns and a platoon of SS soldiers with submachine guns. A major in the SS sits before them. Other Hitler Youth leaders are there. So is Albert Speer, Minister of Armaments and Ammunitions who had so organized German military production that Germany produced more war material in 1944 than in 1940.

Alfons is taken to a high position on the Westwall and can see the Americans on the front door. When Speer arrives, he tells the Hitler Youth leaders that they are in danger of immediately losing the war. However, victory can still be had if the Allies can be stopped at Westwall, Speer states, but this is completely false. Speer already knows the war is lost. When they are about to leave, Speer has a car arrive and Hitler is inside. They are able to meet him, but he looks older and frail.

Hitler tells them that the Hitler Youth are his "purest creation." This is the time, Hitler claims, that the Germans will turn the tide and split the American-British alliance. This is the Führer's final inspection before launching the last all-out attack on the Western Front. The Allies were already penetrating the Westwall. By early December infantry men are stationed with them and the Hitler Youth receive their first rifles. At the same time, the SS show Alfons directly how civilian saboteurs will be executed; two men and a woman are killed right in front of them. It causes him to grow sick.

Alfons then goes to talk to Leiwitz, saying that he is bothered that the partisans had no trial. Leiwitz laughs and tells them that every day they are killing tens of thousands of



Jews and "other subhumans" back in Poland and Russia. He then says that they serve a mass murderer. Alfons cannot believe it and plans to report him.

Leiwitz sits him down that night and tells him about his experience on the Russian front, seeing the indiscriminate killing of civilians, and how he had seen a mass execution of hundreds of Ukrainian Jews in 1941, including women, children, babies and old men. Alfons cannot accept a planned genocide; later he reflects that knowing about the Holocaust would not have affected his loyalty since he believed that surrender would lead to life-long slavery. Leiwitz ends Alfons's blind zealotry but can never turn me against Hitler.

One Saturday afternoon, their three anti-aircraft guns start to hammer for the first time. A massive Allied bomber is destroyed.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8 opens with Alfons being notified that Dr. Robert Ley, the head of the German Labor Front (the union of German workers that replaced the others), is going to do an inspection. Alfons cleans up his boys, who are excited. When Ley arrives, he compliments Alfons for his leadership and promotes the boy that shot down the Flying Fortress, giving him an Iron Cross II. Ley also tells Alfons that his men will be pulling back to the southern sector by the end of the next week because some American tanks broke through the Westwall the previous night. They will also have to pull back to defend Wittlich, Alfons's hometown. He will not be able to join the Luftwaffe.

Alfons eventually receives orders to retreat. Leiwitz encourages him not to die for Nazi Germany if he can avoid it. It turns out that after the war, Alfons discovers that Leiwitz has been shot by the Gestapo for being anti-Nazi. The boys retreat on the rail line along the Saar; nearby areas are being attacked as they retreat. When they arrive, Alfons greets his Aunt Maria and his grandmother. Alfons will now have to treat the new drafted soldiers around Wittlich. Two days later, training begins. Weapons instruction begins; they are short on weapons. The men are not enthusiastic, but they are now regular army and desertion means death. Alfons has the authority to kill them.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Many think that the only reasons Germans fought by late 1944 was because they deluded themselves into thinking they could win. However, Alfons claims they fought because they knew that their enemies did not want to destroy merely National Socialism but the German people themselves. They are convinced of this in particular by the fire-bombing and deliberate killing of civilians in their population centers. The renewed German energy brings the American advance to a near standstill.

On December 16th, Hitler launches Germany's last major offensive in World War II. The enemy is caught by surprise. Hitler hopes to split the ultra-capitalist American and Britain from ultra-Marxist USSR, which he regards as an unstable alliance. Stalin mistrusts his Allies and if Hitler can stabilize the Western Front and send troops to Stalin, Stalin might relent.

The offensive is partly successful, but once the weather clears, Allied air raids resume. Some of the German leadership relax a bit and one tells Alfons that they might not need the old men to fight. He is then ordered to give his troops four days holiday for Christmas. Alfons is able to share Christmas with his family. However, part-way into dinner, a massive Allied bomber raid begins and Alfons and some of his men are trapped in a building. After the six minute raid, they are able to escape and have to dig Alfons' family out of a pile of rubble that covers the cellar they are in. When Alfons' grandmother sees the destruction, she curses Hitler's name.

Wittlich is devastated and the German offensive is decisively halted that day. The Allies send out 2000 bombers to bomb every connection between the parts of the German supply lines. 69 people in Wittlich died. Alfons's family's farm is totally destroyed, and his dog Prinz is killed. At that moment, he realizes he cared nothing people, not even his own. On New Year's Eve, Wittlich is dark and frozen.

A few days later, the Luftwaffe finally claims Alfons, as a result of the Battle of the Bulge. 400 enemy planes are destroyed and only 90 German aircraft. On that day, the Luftwaffe basically cease to exist as a viable force. Alfons is a little sad to leave his family but cannot wait to get into "real" action. He then has to travel to a small Luftwaffe base. There Alfons meets up with old friends, many of whom are already pilots. Their goal is to get a load of men across enemy fire and land them anywhere. As a result, they have to practice pinpoint landings, which they find degrading.

The Soviet offensive has broken loose all along the Eastern front. By January 17th, Warsaw falls. The drive west fails due to fuel shortages and because Allied air operations pulverized supply lines. Hitler refuses his commanders' pleas to fall back. When they finally prevail, tens of thousands of irreplaceable men have died, and a thousand armored vehicles lost. The German people are not informed. The Allies,



however, have suffered severe losses, yet the Germans are down to children and old men.

By February 4th, all the gains of the Battle of the Bulge are eliminated. No Germans fight in Belgium and the Soviets reach Oder, 50 miles east of Berlin. At that time, the Allies meet in Yalta to divide their conquest; Stalin will get the lion's share. Patton and the 3rd Army arrive in Bastogne. Alfons's friend Franz wants to go to the Eastern Front. He notes that the Bolsheviks are true monsters and that they have far more in common with the Americans and the British. In Franz's view, one day the Americans will wake up and realize that they had cooperated with the devil and had chosen the wrong side.

However, Alfons counters with the Allied firebombing of Dresden where 120,000 civilians died in a horrific firestorm. Goebbles was right—there would be no mercy. Luftwaffe pilots are so enraged that they ram Allied bombers, though this is done mostly by Hitler Youth leaders. Before Alfons can get in the air, Hitler temporarily detaches him back to the people's army. Alfons leaves Franz and finds out in 1947 that he died over Berlin.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

Alfons returns to Wittlich via a disjointed and nightmarish journey. When he arrives, Wendt says that the people's army is a joke. Many of the citizens claim to be invalids. The remaining Nazi forces are amassing on the right bank of the Rhine and many believe that this is where they will stop the Americans. Alfons is promoted to Bannfuhrer, commander of the forces in one of the Germann Bann's, or military districts, of which there are 224. He finds that in Wittlich, many people are not getting enough to eat. Alfons's family is resigned to the reality of Allied conquest.

The next day Alfons finds out from Wendt that over half the Volkssturm/People's Army have disappeared through desertion or ineptness. The military is in chaos and when the bombing starts, no one in the People's Army has instructions on where to regroup. Radios are out, so Alfons supposes that half of his men never know that he is their commander. Still he is able to amass 400 Hitler Youth boys, the core of the People's Army. They are short weapons as well. Over the next ten days, fortifications are prepared. During that time, Alfons travels to a nearby Bann, centered around Bitburg. The Americans are already shelling the area.

When Alfons returns, on the dawn of the second day, the Americans attack. His men obey him, for the Hitler Youth indoctrination has worked well. Alfons helps the boys fight and uses a machine gun. The first brush through is simply an Allied probe; half an hour later, two dozen fighter bombers fly over the trenches. Alfons learns from fighting the Americans that some are as brave as they are, and they are not fighting for their nation's survival or their way of life. Their response to German action is out of proportion and cannot be matched.

Several Hitler Youth boys die, but in nowhere near the numbers as on the Eastern Front. They die by the tens of thousands there in ferocious resistance. They commit suicide by the hundreds rather than be caught alive. The Americans are far more humane; for one, the Nazis have not devastated their country. They adhere to the Geneva convention as well as they can. If soldiers surrender to the Americans, they can expect to survive. When the Allies break through Westwall, desertions increase dramatically.

In the ensuing battles, the Hitler Youth fanatics suffer the heaviest casualties, though many children are spared from battle when it becomes clear that loss is imminent. On the Russian front, things are dramatically worse. Alfons knows they are going to lose but cannot stomach unconditional surrender. After two more days, though, Alfons knows that Wittlich will soon be conquered. The Moselland is lost.

Finally, Alfons is called to the Luftwaffe again. On the way, he finds that the right side of the Rhine is near chaos. He is then picked up by a Luftwaffe major on his way to



Frankfurt. For a moment, Alfons feels useful, but not for long. The air base is constantly under attack and Berlin orders them to send every extra man to the Rhine. Soon they will all be infantry. The Luftwaffe soldiers at the base are far more informal than the Hitler Youth and the next morning he is told that he will not fly but be used to evacuate equipment. All the while, the Allies move forward.

The major orders Alfons to not see him again until March 11th (when he presumably figured it would all be over). He tells Alfons to go see his family but Alfons wants to keep fighting. Alfons recognizes later that the major, whose name he cannot remember, probably saved his life. Alfons's mission is then described. One of his men deserts, but Alfons does not have the will to shoot him. They travel back to Wittlich and Alfons goes to his Aunt Otilie's house in Burg Strasse, who is glad to welcome him.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

The next day, the Wehrmacht bombs the railroad bridge through Burg Strasse to stop the Allies from getting through. However, then Wittlich's defense is abandoned. The remaining Nazi armies do everything they can to slow the enemy's advance to the Rhine. Wittlich is a ghost town and everyone left (which is almost no one) is encircled. He then meets the final member of Bann 244, a girl, Monika Mohn, whose is Wendt's secretary. She is burning documents.

Monika informs him of the bad news and then tells him to come with her to her dad's shooting hut; there are supplies there to last for months. They will hold out and hope the Americans are humane. At that moment, Alfons accepts Germany's defeat and will no longer die unquestioningly. Yet, Alfons turns her down.

When Alfons returns home, his aunt encourages him to wait for the Americans. She has burned his uniform so they will not know he is an officer, along with everything that would suggest he was a member of the Hitler Youth. Alfons just goes to bed; when he wakes up the last artillery bombardment of Wittlich begins. It is not much, but then over a dozen Sherman tanks appear, along with files of infantry. Alfons is not a deserter but he cannot escape, so he changes into a pair of dirty coveralls, burying his Luftwaffe uniform under the chicken coop. The Shermans enter the town and not a single shot is fired.

Alfons leaves the house, walking toward the tanks; his heart is racing. The enemy ignore him. The Americans think he is a child and while Alfons is relieved, he is embarrassed as well. Not a single American loses his life in the conquest of Wittlich.

Eventually a soldier stops him and asks him if there is any wine around. He responds in English and the soldiers are surprised. Alfons thinks he has given himself away, but they want him as an interpreter; he says he learned English in school. Alfons then has to read American instructions to his townspeople in Germany. There is to be a strict curfew; any violators will be shot. Citizens have to deliver all weapons, including old hunting rifles. They also want binoculars and cameras, and then they want everyone in town assembled.

The Americans then tell everyone to go home and they are all able to leave except him. He then explains that most people left town during the air bombings. The soldiers are suspicious because they have been in Germany a month and have not met a single Nazi. The Americans are also interested in looting.

Afterwards, a Lieutenant Smith makes small talk with him until he decides to ask if Alfons is one of "these young Nazi werewolf bastards." Alfons tells him that his aunt's house is right by him but that he is on furlough from the Luftwaffe. The Lieutenant

reaches for his .45. Alfons then shows him his pass. Smith calms down and is shocked to find out the Alfons is a German officer.

As time goes on, Alfons starts to fear for his life less. The Americans seem to trust him, though he receives an order to turn himself in to the next unit that comes through Wittlich. He is then told not to run or he will be killed and that he will be sent to a P.O.W. camp. Smith said he might end up in the United States one day and to look him up if he ever finds himself in Cincinnati. Alfons is stunned at the dignity accorded to him. On Alfons's way back to his garden hut, he finds his grandmother, alive and relatively well.



Epilogue, The Aftermath

Epilogue, The Aftermath Summary and Analysis

Alfons initially feels no guilt for his allegiance to Hitler. He is only sad that they lost the war. It will be years before he feels anything for the millions that have been killed. An occupation unit quickly settles in the city hall and rules through military decree. Alfons is never sent to the P.O.W. camp but instead to a field hospital to serve as an interpreter. The soldiers are not savage and Alfons sees no physical abuse. They have good food. Power is restored in Wittlich in May. Radio Hamburg says Hitler has died and Admiral Karl Doenitz has taken over. Hitler committed suicide.

Towards the end of May, Alfons loses his job for being Hitler Youth; he is denounced. However, he is protected by his age. By July, Eisenhower relaxes restrictions on associating with the enemy and the curfew is extended to 10:00 pm. Alfons has to report twice a week and helps his family rebuild. Alfons's grandmother suffers, not knowing her sons', Gustav and Franz's, fate. The Soviets commit insane brutalities against German refugees; two million German refugees die.

As time progressed, Alfons is no longer so devastated by defeat; school might reopen. He loses his desire to shoot Americans and comes to admire them. He even befriends an American officer who says that American do not hate Germans; they just cannot understand why they fell for Hitler and why they killed so many Jews. At first, Alfons balks at the charges, but the American becomes furious and says the Germans will never shake off the burden. He is right in the end.

The French will eventually occupy Germany and arrive with force and pomp. Alfons is arrested; they are not gentle. He is imprisoned with a group of Nazi Party members of low rank. It is announced that they will be executed and Alfons is terrified and enraged. The rage is directed toward Hitler. He also feels like one of Hitler's victims.

Alfons next asks a French sergeant if he can go to confession before he dies, but the sergeant assures him he will not be shot because they are hostages. The next day Alfons goes to solitary confinement and then after 12 days he is led into the captain's office. Over time the French seize everything valuable in Wittlich, but they are dramatically better off than the Germans under the Soviets. 22 of Alfons's family in the east vanish without a trace. In August, Alfons's twin brother Rudolf arrives; they eventually find they have much in common, though Rudolf never believed fanatically in Hitler. Before his death, Alfons will grow close to his father.

Eventually Alfons is sentenced to town restriction for two years, six months expulsion from college and one month of hard labor. Hard labor is the only difficult part. The worst is excavating a mass French grave. The French also order them to watch documentary films from the death camps. However, the Germans think they are fakes. Only a long

while later does Alfons accept the reality of the Holocaust and it is three more decades until he can write or speak about it.

At the time, the Germans count their losses. Rabbit has died, but Roman survives, as does Gert. Wendt is killed as well. Uncle Franz, against all odds, makes it home, weighing 90 pounds. Four years after the war, the Soviet hostage program trades Uncle Gustav and allows him to return to Germany.

The worst thing for Alfons though, is that a civilized, humane people became indifferent to brutality. They were cowards and, at worst, brutes. Through during the Hitler years, Alfons never thought of himself as anything but decent and honorable with a glorious future. However, then he became a tainted citizen of the most hated country on earth. Over the years, Alfons developed a deep resentment towards his elders and the educated. They allowed children to be deceived and delivered them to Hitler. Alfons does not regret that the Nazis lost, but he will never shake his legacy in the Hitler Youth. He forever belongs to a generation of Germans that must bear the horrendous guilt of the Holocaust.



Characters

Alfons Heck

Alfons Heck is both *A Child of Hitler's* author and protagonist. As protagonist, Alfons is born in 1928 in the town of Wittlich, Germany where he grows up for four years under the Weimar Republic, the government that collapses as the Nazis take over German politics. With the Nazis in power, Hitler quickly sets up youth propaganda organizations united as the Hitler Youth. It is Alfons's time in the Hitler Youth that is covered in the book. *A Child of Hitler* primarily focuses on Alfons's life between ages 10, in 1938, and 17, in 1945, at the end of World War II.

While much of the book covers Alfons's history, perhaps the most important feature of Alfons's story is the transformation of his psychology. As a little boy up to age 5, Alfons has a relatively normal childhood for a German boy in the early 1930s, but once Hitler comes to power, things change dramatically. In elementary school, Alfons's teacher, Herr Becker, propagandizes the students on Hitler's behalf and deliberately discriminates against Jewish pupils.

After Alfons enters the Hitler Youth he is constantly propagandized to worship Hitler as God. Other religions fall by the wayside, and the explicit worship of Hitler is promoted. The Hitler Youth are to be the absolute subjects of the Nazi Regime. As such, Alfons is totally taken over mentally and is ready to kill and be killed for the Fatherland. It is not until the very end of the war that Alfons's fanatical devotion to the Nazis begins to crack and only years later until he can accept the reality of the Holocaust.

Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler was the leader of the National Socialist Workers Party in Germany, known as the Nazi Party. He was the dictator of Germany from 1933 to 1945, when he committed suicide. Hitler had joined the Nazi party in 1919 and became its leader in 1921. He became popular by advocating a set of political doctrines, including German Nationalism, anti-Semitism, both anti-capitalism and anti-communism and propaganda. As is well known, Hitler was a serious proponent of social Darwinism and a belief in racial supremacy, particularly of the German people. He also pushed Nazi hegemony in Europe. When Hitler came to power he quickly formed the Hitler Youth in order to prepare a new generation of soldiers and leaders who had never known anything but his rule.

Hitler is not a constant presence in the book personally. Instead, he only makes two brief appearances at the book. The first is at the Nuremberg Congress in 1938, where Alfons represents his town in the younger section of the Hitler Youth. Hitler gives a speech that overpowers the audience, including the Hitler Youth, and converts Alfons into an absolute fanatical devotee of Hitler's. The second appearance is when Alfons



has become a leader in the Hitler Youth and is taken by the SS to a clearing where many Hitler Youth leaders are able to meet Hitler personally. For Alfons, that is the greatest moment of his life up until that time.

However, Hitler's presence is constant throughout the book in a spiritual and historical factor. Hitler is Alfons's God, a God who later he comes to regard as a traitor and a criminal. Alfons comes to believe that Hitler victimized the entire German people.

Alfons's Grandmother

Alfons's grandmother was a strong and matronly woman who basically functioned as his mother when she manipulated her daughter into letting her raise him. She survived throughout the war, encouraged Alfons to retain his Catholic Faith and silently was skeptical of the Nazis until Wittlich was bombed by the Allies. She then came to curse Hitler openly.

Alfons's Uncles

Alfons's Uncles Gustav and Franz fought for the Nazis on the Eastern and Western Fronts and yet both somehow survived, even after imprisonment.

Rudolf and Alfons's Parents

Alfons was separated from his parents on his grandmother's instruction. As a result, he saw little of his mother and father or of his twin brother Rudolf until after World War II.

Herr Becker

Alfons's anti-Semitic elementary school teacher.

German Jews

Half a million German Jews were ruthlessly persecuted, tortured and murdered by the Hitler Regime.

Manfred

An older member of the Hitler Youth that Alfons befriended.



Roman Follman

Alfons's friend in the Hitler Youth, Roman was another regional leader in the Hitler Youth. He also served as one of Alfons's deputies as Alfons was promoted. Roman survived the war.

Gert Greve

Gert was a good friend of Alfons's early on in flight training and his friendly competitor. However, when Alfons had a bad flight, Gert distanced himself from Alfons and their friendship crumbled. Later Alfons would be promoted over Gert. Gert also survived the war.

Rabbit

One of Alfons's good friends in flight school who was killed over Berlin.

The Bolsheviks

The ideological communists that ran the Russian government during World War II. The Nazis despised them and they were known for incredible savagery. When most Germans realized the war was lost, they were desperate for the Americans to conquer Germany rather than Russia.

The People of Wittlich

Wittlich is a relatively small town where everyone knows each other; the people of Wittlich are a constant present in the book.

The Amis

The German term for the Americans.

Leiwitz

One of the infantry leaders that Alfons got to know and that risked his life telling Alfons about the Nazis.



Luftwaffe Lieutenant

An unnamed lieutenant that tried to save Alfons's life by sending him to Wittlich on furlough.

Aunt Ottilie

Alfons's aunt who housed him when he went on furlough to Wittlich.

Monika Mohn

A secretary for the local Hitler Youth office that helped Alfons survive when the Americans conquered Wittlich.

Lieutenant Smith

The American lieutenant that befriended Alfons.



Objects/Places

Nazi Germany

From 1933 to 1945, the Nazi party ruled Germany. This was the Germany Alfons came to know as his own.

Wittlich, Germany

Alfons's hometown and the setting of most of the book.

National Socialist Workers Party Congress

The 1938 Nazi Congress where Hitler gave a world famous speech and electrified audiences. Alfons was in the audience.

The Gymnasium

The most elite group of German public secondary schools, to which Alfons gained entry.

KZ/Concentration Camp

Concentration camps were littered across Germany and the countries it conquered. Millions died there, particularly Jews and anti-Nazi resisters.

Flying Hitler Youth

Alfons was a member of the Flying Hitler Youth. They prepared to enter the Luftwaffe when they became adults.

Hitler Youth

The Hitler Youth was Hitler's organization of German children who were to be indoctrinated to worship him and to kill and be killed for the Third Reich.

The SS

The most ruthless branch of the Nazi armed forces, the blackshirts, many of whom were Hitler's right-hand men.



The Luftwaffe

The German Air Force that Alfons desperately wanted to join.

Glider Training

The Flying Hitler Youth trained to fly with glider aircraft.

Bannfuhrer

A high paramilitary rank in the Hitler Youth.

The People's Storm

The organization of all men from ages 15 to 60 that were supposed to prevent Allied Conquest of Germany.

Westwall

The Westwall or Siegfried Line was a line of defensive forts and anti-tank defenses to block the conquest of Germany. Alfons and his men had to maintain part of the Westwall.

The Holocaust

The murder of six million Jews and millions of others in Nazi concentration camps.

Anti-Aircraft Guns

Alfons's men manned anti-aircraft weaponry to shoot down Allied planes.



Themes

Indoctrination and Obedience

Alfons Heck's story primarily concerns his life between ages ten and seventeen, while he was a member of the Hitler Youth. The Hitler Youth was a paramilitary organization of young people, boys and girls, that was a wing of the Nazi Party. It was created in 1922 and lasted until 1945. Initially it was simply a branch of the Nazi Party, before the Nazis came to power, but once Hitler became chancellor the Hitler Youth was made a national organization. As time progressed, membership in the Hitler Youth became compulsory.

Alfons joined the Hitler Youth around age 10, before it became compulsory. However, for the first four years of his membership in the Hitler Youth he did little for the organization and rose very slowly through the ranks, coming to lead a mere ten other boys. The Hitler Youth were viewed as the future leaders of Germany and Aryan supermen. They were indoctrinated in the ideals of National Socialism. Alfons's experience in the Hitler Youth was no different. He was taught to worship Hitler as a God. As a result, the Hitler Youth were some of Hitler's most ardent supporters and brutal soldiers, despite their young age.

Alfons was among the most fanatical members of the Hitler Youth and realized later that he would have even reported family members in Hitler's service and murdered those who were disobedient to him. Only after the war ended was Alfons able to shake the indoctrination, and it remained with him even until the book was written, at least to some degree.

German Nationalism

Nazism was a form of National Socialism. Socialism held that the state should own the means of production and manage them for the good of society. However, in some ways, Nationalism was the stronger of the two ideologies that were combined into National Socialism. Nationalism holds that some ethnic identity is identical with the state. Thus, for German Nationalism, the German ethnicity would be identified with the German state. The German state would thereby represent all Germans.

Hitler promoted German Nationalism by promoting the love of Germany and German culture, language, art and history. However, he also identified the nation with the state such that if you loved the nation, you must also love the state. This is how Hitler used patriotism and love of country to produce absolute loyalty to his regime.

Alfons was a lover of his country and the German people were as well. Love of country was increased particularly by the tragedy of World War I. The German people regarded themselves as oppressed by the Allied powers and the Treaty of Versailles. This produced a great sense of resentment and a national unity produced by joint suffering that Hitler took advantage of. The entire book occurs against the backdrop of German



Nationalism. Under Hitler, service to his regime came to be service to the German people themselves.

Guilt

Indoctrination led to Alfons's identification with the Hitler Youth and Hitler's regime, along with his deep admiration of and loyalty to Adolf Hitler himself. German Nationalism produced a sense of unity among Germans and loyalty to the German State as represented by Hitler. Hitler then imposed his values on the German people which they largely accepted with great enthusiasm. Hitler employed vast amounts of unemployed Germans in the government and armed forces, revived Germany's industrial base and currency and promoted a profound hostility to those deemed subhuman—invalids, the handicapped, racial minorities and particularly and above all, the Jews.

As is widely known, during World War II, it was not enough for the Nazi regime to persecute political dissenters, Jews and other minorities. Instead, it sought to annihilate the entire Jewish race. Not only were half a million German Jews oppressed and murdered but all in all six million Jews were killed during the Holocaust. The Nazis killed around 15 million refugees, racial minorities, and political and ideological dissenters. These were not war casualties.

Alfons had no idea that this was going on for the vast majority of the time he was a member of the Hitler Youth. He knew that the concentration camps were unpleasant but had no idea that they were deliberately killing people rather than simply imprisoning those who opposed the Third Reich. Towards the end of the war, Leiwitz informs him that the Nazis are killing Jews en masse, but Alfons will not believe it. Ultimately he comes to accept it, but only years after the war ends. Alfons comments in the epilogue that the Germans of his generation must bear the shame of the Holocaust as a "life sentence."

Style

Perspective

The perspective of *A Child of Hitler* is that of Alfons Heck, a German-born survivor of World War II and former highly-ranked member of the Hitler Youth. Alfons serves both as narrator and protagonist, though decades of age separate the two experiences. Alfons narrates from his perspective as a child and teenager as he can best recall though he often reports events in the future and discusses the fates of people he encountered that he had no way of knowing at the time.

The young Alfons was a German nationalist, ardent Nazi and a fanatical devotee of Hitler. He was prepared to kill or be killed for the German Reich, which he identified both with Hitler and the German nation as a whole. Alfons grew to associate the Russian Bolsheviks with the Jews and saw them both as dangerous, racially inferior and savage. Consequently, he had no opposition to the early oppressions of the Jews, though he had no idea about Hitler's plan for a Final Solution. Since Alfons ranges between ages 10 and 17 during the book, much of his perspective at this time is immature and shaped by others. He somewhat comes into his own later on but is still hopelessly naïve.

The older Alfons survived the war and escaped to Britain, Canada and then the United States. It was decades before he could talk about the war and publicly admit his association with the Nazis and his deep guilt over his participation. One of his acts of atonement was to admit his guilt in the book and claim that the Holocaust was the punishment hung around the necks of his generation of Germans for their support of Hitler. Despite this, Alfons portrays himself and the German people as Hitler's victims.

Tone

The tone of *A Child of Hitler* follows its divided perspective between the Young Alfons and the Elder Alfons. When the Elder Alfons presents his childhood, he sees himself as happy and well taken care of by his grandparents. While alienated from his parents, Alfons has a good life and can expect to enter the Gymnasium. However, with Hitler's rise to power, Alfons's life changes forever. At age 10, Alfons enters the Hitler Youth. At the time, Alfons seems interested in becoming a priest, on his Grandmother's prodding. And from ages 10 to 14, Alfons is not terribly involved or prominent in the Hitler Youth. The tone throughout these periods reflects the naivete.

Surprising to Anglo-American readers is the presentation of Alfons's experiences in the Hitler Youth from his perspective at the time. Alfons is proud of Germany, eager for the Nazis to take their rightful place in the world and conquer Europe and beyond. In the Gymnasium he sees himself as having a bright future and is proud to believe that he will one day become a pilot in the Luftwaffe. However, as World War II begins and the war



progresses, the tone darkens. While Germany's initial successes are great, the war turns against them, and the tone gradually darkens as German losses mount.

Throughout the second half of the book and even before, Alfons loses faith in his people, although complete faith is not lost until the very end when he discovers that Germany was to be conquered and dismantled. Even worse was when he discovered the horrors of the Holocaust. In the Epilogue the tone is darkest because it explains how Alfons came to deal with the guilt of the criminal regime he had participated in.

Structure

A Child of Hitler is a autobiographical narrative written by Alfons Heck about his membership in the Hitler Youth between ages 10 and 17. While the story begins with his birth and early childhood, the focus of the book and thus the majority of its content cover the late pre-teen years and most of Alfons's teenage life. Alongside Alfons's growing up is the story of the rise and fall of Nazi Germany. This occurs between the years 1933 and 1945, when Alfons is ages 5 through 17.

A Child of Hitler contains eleven chapters and an epilogue. Chapter 1 explains the pre-history of the Hitler Regime and its early years, along with Alfons's early childhood. It also covers his early years in the Hitler Youth. Chapter 2 starts when Alfons is age ten and discusses the structure and purpose of the Hitler Youth and Alfons's early induction into the organization. It also covers Alfons's visit to the Nazi Congress in Nuremberg in 1938.

Chapter 3 starts at the beginning of World War II in 1939 and explains Germany's many early victories and the attitude of the German people at the time, which was largely positive. It also discusses the beginning of the concentration camps. Chapter 4 covers Alfons's coming to love flying and his dream of becoming a Luftwaffe pilot, along with his training for Luftwaffe membership in the Flying Hitler Youth. Chapter 5 continues to expand on this story, with Alfons acquiring higher rankings. In Chapter 6 it is Christmas of 1943, when Germany's fortunes change and the Allies and Soviets begin their offense.

In Chapter 7, Alfons discusses the first attacks from the Allies that Wittlich endured and his growing role in the Hitler Youth creating defenses against allied attacks. Chapter 8 discusses Alfons's many promotions and the formation of the People's Army. Chapter 9 discusses the fall of the German Westwall and the assault on Wittlich that Alfons and his townspeople endure. He is called up to the Luftwaffe in this chapter and sent home.

Chapter 10 covers Alfons's final days in Wittlich as it is conquered by the Americans, as does Chapter 11, which covers how Alfons is treated by the Americans. Next comes the Epilogue which discusses Alfons's fate after the Americans hand over government of parts of Germany to France and Alfons's adult struggles with his involvement in Hitler's regime.



Quotes

"The very ordinariness of his starting point, and of his voices, is part of this book's power." (Foreword, p. ii)

"In Hitler's Germany, my Germany, childhood ended at the age of 10, with admission to the Jungvolk, the junior branch of the Hitler Youth." (Chapter 1, p. 1)

"'You, my youth,' he screamed hoarsely, 'never forget that one day you will rule the world!' ... From that moment on, I belonged to Adolf Hitler body and soul." (Chapter 2, p. 22)

"But even then I was convinced that a mysterious, infinitely dangerous Soviet-Jewish conspiracy was constantly plotting against us. Why else would our government declare them to be non-Germans?" (Chapter 2, p. 29)

"Over half my classmates were killed before they reached 18." (Chapter 3, p. 39)

"That incredible, incomprehensible decision to wipe out a whole race was always kept secret from the German masses. To us in the Hitler Youth, the 'Final Solution' meant deportation, but not annihilation." (Chapter 3, p. 50)

"It's strange how casual we took our new enemy, the United States, at that time. ... The Soviets were the key to our victory." (Chapter 4, p. 54)

"The whole flight had taken less than half a minute, but from that moment on, I knew I could never become a priest." (Chapter 4, p. 61)

"Do you accept total war, people of Germany, or annihilation by the hands of the Soviet-Jewish beast?" (Chapter 6, p. 88)

"You are from the Moselland, my boy. I know I can depend on you." (Chapter 7, p. 114)

"Do you know that we are slaughtering tens of thousands of Jews and other subhumans every day back in Poland and Russia?" (Chapter 7, p. 119)

"I want you to remember, Alf, that dying for the Fatherland is not as noble as living for it, no matter what anybody tells you. For God's sake, keep that in mind when the time comes and you do have a choice." (Chapter 8, p. 135)

"The average German was now realizing that our enemies were not out to destroy merely National Socialism, but the very existence of the German people." (Chapter 9, p. 141)

"Heil Hitler, you murderous bastard." (Chapter 9, p. 147)



"I realized in that moment that I no longer cared deeply for people, not even my own." (Chapter 9, p. 149)

"You mark my words: one fine day the Amis are going to wake up and realize they've been fighting the wrong enemy." (Chapter 9, p. 157)

"You'll be back, boy. I know that as sure as I'm sitting here. You're a survivor." (Chapter 10, p. 163)

"Our dream of Grossdeutschland is finished. It's mere survival now. Are you going to shoot me for saying that?" (Chapter 11, p. 180)

"At that precise moment I did the unthinkable: I accepted the defeat of Germany." (Chapter 11, p. 181)

"Here I was, finally face to face with the enemy, and he ignored me." (Chapter 11, p. 187)

"I don't hate the average German. Christ, there is some terrific quality in you people, but you also scare the hell out of me. How could you have fallen for that maniac Hitler? Did you really believe you could conquer the world?" (Epilogue, p. 200)

"But for the first time, I felt betrayed by the man who had become my God." (Epilogue, p. 202)

"We, a civilized, humane people, had allowed ourselves to become indifferent to brutality committed by our own government on our own citizens. At best, that seemed to make us cowards, at worst brutes ourselves. And yet, I never once during the Hitler years thought of myself as anything but a decent, honorable young German, blessed with a glorious future." (Epilogue, p. 206)

"Tragically, now, we are the other part of the Holocaust, the generation burdened with the enormity of Auschwitz. This is our life sentence, for we became the enthusiastic victims of our Fuhrer." (Epilogue, p. 207)



Topics for Discussion

What was the Hitler Youth? Why did Alfons become a member?

Contrast Alfons's hometown and family with his devotion to National Socialism.

To what extent is Alfons culpable for his participation in the Hitler Youth? Why or why not?

What was the happiest time of Alfons's life? Why?

Give three examples of how Alfons is hardened to brutality as the book progresses.

Who were Alfons's closest friends? What does Alfons's human connection with them have to do with Nazism? Is it because of such connections that Nazism thrived or despite them?

Why could Alfons not accept the reality of the Holocaust?

What is the guilt that Alfons's generation's must bear their whole lives?

Do you think Alfons's portrayal of the German people as Hitler's victims is fair?