

Horst Wessel School Minutes (1933–1945)

Abstract

Horst Wessel (1907–1930) was an early Nazi party member and SA thug. In 1930, he was found dead, though the exact causes of his death remained a mystery. After the Nazis' seizure of power, Wessel was idolized as a martyr for the movement. Schools and streets were named in his honor. This excerpt, the school council minutes for the Horst Wessel School in Kassel, shows how Nazi ideology infected Germany's school system. Starting in 1933, the minutes show the gradual introduction of racial sciences, paramilitary extracurricular activities, the exclusion of Jewish students from various school programs, and the growing influence of Hitler Youth leaders over school administrators. As the school introduced and emphasized new programs, older ones ceased. Certain materials were banned, literature was Nazified, and most foreign texts were removed from library shelves. After 1939, the effects of the war take center stage. The Allied bombing of Kassel after 1942 forced the school to end classes early and relocate its operations.

Source

Conference Minutes

Horst Wessel School in Kassel

2 May 1933: In addition to portraits of the Reich president, pictures of the Reich chancellor may also be displayed in schools. Particularly honorable students shall be awarded the book *The Army and the Naval Fleet* [*Heer und Flotte*].

12 August 1933: The Nazi salute will be introduced as a form of greeting at this school. Jewish students will be excluded from instruction on Saturdays. The film *Sports and Soldiers* will be required viewing for all students. The Reich League of Air Security is recruiting members and will be offering a lecture series.

21 September 1933: Attempts to foster relationships with the Hitler Youth; a spokesman for the Hitler Youth will be appointed at our school. Theories of hereditary and racial science are to be promoted. We will begin commemorating Horst Wessel's birthday.

1 December 1933: In the future, every student will be required to make a financial contribution to the Association of Germanic Peoples Living Abroad. Sex education in the classroom is banned by ministerial ordinance.

18 December 1933: More emphasis shall be placed on the study of genealogy.

1 February 1934: More patriotic, nationalistic texts are needed in the school libraries!

15 March 1934: Complaints registered about excessive demands placed on students by extracurricular activities. A slide series is available for teaching racial science and genetics.

8 August 1934: All teachers shall pay their respects to our deceased Reich president by wearing a black band of mourning on their left forearm for two weeks.

20 September 1934: Mandatory payments from students will be used to fund the purchase of projectors. In addition, a fee will be charged for each screening of films. The involvement of the Hitler Youth in school affairs is discussed.

19 October 1934: The number of students has risen to 1,060. Middle-school principal G. goes into retirement. The Hitler Youth, Troop 83, thanks the school for supporting it with sales of the book *Will and Power* [*Wille und Macht*], The gymnasium will be made available for the SA to use on Monday and Friday evenings. Non-Aryan students will not be allowed to participate in certain school-sponsored activities. Herr B. gives instructions for the next air-raid-warning drill on 25 October 1934!

20 November 1934: Conference at the Forest School [*Waldschule*].^[1] Herr H. offered comments on the purpose and mission behind the Forest School. Sports activities in the schools are not as much about developing specific competencies as about developing certain capacities, not as much about our discipline as about our breeding. General principles should be drilled into our students—things like voluntary subordination, self-discipline and -control, orderliness, courage and self-confidence, willingness to sacrifice, camaraderie, patriotism, etc. It is more important that our students learn a sense of orientation and of direction, that they learn to gather information, to stay calm, to assess a situation in a flash, to act quickly and quietly, than it is for them to be able to describe a given survey of land or area. Afterward, we are given a tour of the property and allowed to observe various groups, and this is followed by a military discipline drill, a recess period, and listening exercises. The daily routine at the Forest School: 6 A.M.: rise, physical education, run through the forest, make the beds, clean the shoes, household chores; 8:00 A.M.: breakfast, garden work; 10:45 A.M.: outdoor chores; 1:00 P.M.: lunch and free time; 2:30 P.M.: roll call, followed by classroom instruction; 3:30 P.M.: target practice; 4:30 P.M.: coffee, free time until 7:00 P.M.: dinner, followed by laundry and repair of clothing; 9:30 P.M.: the Great Tattoo.^[2]

Life in the Forest School is communal labor in a community that is separate from school or home life. The daily service routine becomes supreme law to the student, and it requires the complete commitment of all human faculties. The body, still drunk with sleep, is strengthened in the fresh forest air of the morning; the lungs are purified. Refreshed and alive, it enjoys its first bite of bread in the morning. For many of our students, this is the first time they've ever worked the soil of their homeland with spade and hoe. There is a constant back-and-forth between physical and mental training. The art of firing weapons is practiced with a steady hand and an iron will; the recruit can take pride in reviewing his accomplishments in the art of throwing grenades—by distance and accuracy. The field exercises present the most strenuous challenges to body, mind, and spirit. The student participates with heart and soul. It is here that the written lessons of the Great War are put into practice and made flesh. Even a late-night air-raid alarm cannot squelch interest in the field exercises. There are excellent training opportunities for the troops and intermediary leaders. Successful external and internal strengthening of all our young men—this is required of us in these times. In terms of the field sports, the Forest School is able to provide an extension and development of the material that cannot currently be offered by the Hitler Youth to all of our young men as it should be, due to a shortage of trained leaders.

14 December 1934: Ordinance concerning ceremonial flag raising at the start and end of the school day. The literary works that have been donated to the school (for example, Hindenburg's testament) are to be used accordingly in classroom instruction.

11 March 1935: Allowing students to take a leave of absence in order to attend Hitler Youth seminars during the school year is not something that can be avoided altogether. The national director of sports for the Reich will be able to attend physical education classes at all schools. Parents are obligated to pay fees for films—if need be, measures must be undertaken to force them to do so. In general, we can say that very difficult work is being performed here at the Horst Wessel School despite the small, overcrowded classrooms and poor ventilation.

7 May 1935: Hitler Youth duty rosters will allow us to monitor the transfer of duty on the National Day of Youth through the schools. Failures to report for duty will henceforth be addressed using the same policies and procedures as school absences. In the coming weeks, leaders of youth groups in the classes will recruit youth for enrollment in the Hitler Youth. The names of Jewish students who shall be

dismissed from instruction on the National Day of Youth were announced.

4 September 1935: A curriculum for hereditary and racial science will be developed. A series of lectures will be offered by the Office of Racial Affairs.

19 August 1936: The whole teaching colloquium will facilitate an ideological training camp in Bad-Sooden-Allendorf. In the beginning of February, the school will sponsor an event to benefit the Winter Relief Works; the event will consist of gymnastic presentations by all the classes.

25 November 1936: The Wehrmacht requests that we concentrate particularly on those areas that will be required of youth later in their army training and that we thus take a substantial load off their work. We have already put together the materials and should immediately incorporate them into the curriculum.

1 September 1937: Germans living abroad are to be remembered in a special school-wide celebration. We need to stress the importance of having proof-of-ancestry cards [*Ahnenpass*] for all students (if need be, filling out the genealogies together in classroom instruction). Dissolution of all civil service associations is mandated.

26 January 1938: We are reminded of the obligation of any civil servant who intends to marry to provide documentation of German ancestry and blood for the future spouse.

1 March 1938: The mayor of the city has determined that gymnasiums and classrooms must be abandoned during air-raid alarms since it is impossible to turn out the lights in them.

21 April 1938: The Municipal Audiovisual Archive [*Stadtbildstelle*] will monitor showings of mandatory-viewing films.

6 September 1938: Ministerial edict: students in their final classes will be required to fill out genealogical charts [*Ahnentafel*]. Any changes in curriculum made to support the aims of the Third Reich shall be outlined and registered in departmental meetings in various subjects. These must then be made available for classroom use.

25 January 1939: A high-ranking government official spoke to the teachers' colloquium about the Law for the Restoration of Professional Civil Service. The legislation considers the core of civil servants a pillar of our entire state and bestows upon them the obligation to maintain the racial purity of the entire body of German civil servants – keeping its bloodline free from alien, genetically unrelated elements. Every *völkisch* ordinance we pass is necessary for securing the apparatus of power. Holding an office is something that is impersonal, but that is why this office must be occupied by those national comrades who are German in flesh and blood. The office is an organ of state, the executor of the national estate. The constitutional law of the Third Reich rests on the following foundations: We do not live in tyranny, not in a dictatorship, but rather in a Führer nation. Hitler is the Führer of the *Volk* the state, and the party. He is at the same time the Supreme Lawmaker. The reason we don't have a written constitution is that the *völkisch* state cannot so much as imagine constricting its thought by anchoring it in specific forms that may be valid for the next ten years but not for the long run. And yet, the following principles are clearly definitive: (1) The sovereignty of the *Volk* (2) The totality of the state's mandate. (3) The *Führerprinzip*. (4) The unity of party and state. (5) The Reich is a uniform state. (6) The *völkisch* order is our foundation (maintaining racial purity of German blood).

27 November 1939: We have been directed to introduce colonialist thought into instruction. Colonies are, for a great and powerful *Volk* like the Germans, a matter of honor and provide the youth of such a people with a lesson in character building.

14 December 1939: Current curricular offerings and materials are to be adapted to promote the military

mind-set. This way, military training is not merely a consideration of the mind; instead, it already assumes concrete form. The military mind-set cannot be but an empty challenge written on the page; it should be the foundational principle for action in every individual.

3 May 1940: Ministerial directive: Instructors must file reports concerning what they are doing to promote air flight in class: building model airplanes in shop class; teaching principles of aviation in math class; promoting the notion of flight in physics and chemistry classes, in geography, and in biology; using foreign-language instruction to spark enthusiasm for flying; and fostering that enthusiasm in art classes.

23 January 1942: School library: translations from American, British, and French literature shall be removed from circulation. The ban on Russian literature remains in place.

10 November 1942: Directive concerning mixed bloods mandates that all first-degree mixed bloods shall be barred from enrolling in any public educational facility. Songs that are considered mandatory in the classroom (1) "Do You See the Red Sun Rising in the East?" (2) "Rise, Raise the Flags of the Reich!" (3) "Our Lives Belong to One Thing Alone: Freedom," (4) "Forward, March! To the East!"

14 December 1942: In a confidential memorandum, the school council requires all instructors to remind their students in the first week of class that they should not show any kindness toward prisoners of war. Any signs of violations of this rule, especially those that appear politically motivated, must be reported immediately.

5 March 1943: It is the task and the duty of each individual educator to elicit and sustain the endurance, conviction, and the will to see this through to the final victory in our students.

9 August 1944: Indefatigable commitment to the war effort is demanded of everyone.

15 September 1944: A conference had to be called to address a single point on the agenda. School superintendent announces that any changes in the class schedule must receive prior approval from the superintendent's office due to the exigencies of wartime operation (air-raid alarms, etc.).

24 November 1944: The rector, Mr. Z., reports on negotiations with school council member B. over the relocation of our school from Gersfeld to Großenlüder.^[3] A petition filed by school administration to stop the relocation to Großenlüder based on the argument that the move will place students at risk of air raids has been rejected. A meeting with party representatives confirmed that the rejection came as a result of the current situation in general. At the moment, the most important concern is not the safety of the youth but rather their training! Teachers have been instructed to refrain from agitating against the relocation with the students and with their parents.

27 March 1945 (still in Gersfeld): Middle-school teacher K. reads aloud the order of the *Bannführer* in Fulda outlining the mandate to immediately move the camp compound at Gersfeld to the barracks compound at Waldkappel. The school will not comply with this ridiculous order because: (1) Under current highly dangerous conditions, it would be impossible to determine whether the Waldkappel fulfills the technical requirements for housing the youth there. It is furthermore likely that the enemy will penetrate the vicinity of Waldkappel even before the transport arrives there. (2) The school director points out that we cannot fulfill our obligation to the parents given the tremendous danger involved in the transport and the risk of air raids. Therefore, we have decided that all students shall be dismissed and sent home tomorrow after third period. Middle-school teachers W. and H. will escort the students in their departure.

NOTES

[1] The *Waldschule* was a European-wide open-air boarding school movement created by Karl

Triebbold in the 1920s and appropriated by the Nazis as a means of physical and mental training for pupils. There were many such campuses throughout Germany, including one in Kassel—eds.

[2] The Great Tattoo was a ceremony for the lowering of the flag before the massed faculty and student body—eds.

[3] The Horst Wessel School had been relocated to Gersfeld after the bombing of Kassel—eds.

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