

Background: Horst Wessel was one of the “martyrs” of the Nazi movement, though the circumstances of his death were not particularly edifying. He wrote what became the “Horst Wessel Song,” the Nazi Party’s anthem. Rudolf Hess gave this speech on 13 June 1936 at the launching of a training ship named after Wessel. It is an example of how the Nazis built their pantheon of heroes.

The source: “An das Schulschiff ‘Horst Wessel’,” in Rudolf Hess, *Reden* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1938), pp. 191-194.

The Launching of the Training Ship *Horst Wessel*

by Rudolf Hess

This ship is to bear the name of the poet and fighter at the front lines of the German revolution, “Horst Wessel,” just as its sister ship the *Gorch Fock* bears the name of the poet and fighter in the war at sea.

These naval training ships bear the names of two fighters and poets who stand for the same idea, of men who gave their lives for this idea.

The idea is “Germany.”

It is the Germany that millions longed for as they fought for Germany in the Great War;

the Germany that they saw in their mind’s eyes as the coming Germany;

the Germany born of their common experiences of struggle, of sorrow, of the deaths of German men;

of the Germany for which it was worthy to die.

They hoped that by sacrificing their individual lives, a German community worthy of their lives would grow.

They believed in a Germany in the spirit of the Front, of a National Socialist Germany, even if they did not know the words “National Socialism.”

The Front soldiers brought this idea of Germany home with them. The front soldier Adolf Hitler made this idea of Germany the idea of the homeland, the idea of the German people, thus realizing the legacy of the Front. From this idea of Germany Adolf Hitler created the proud reality of the Third Reich. Had Adolf Hitler not lived, the idea of the Front soldiers would have died with them.

During Adolf Hitler’s battle to make this idea the idea of Germany, during the struggle for the Third Reich, Horst Wessel gave his life in the service of the Führer and of his idea.

Horst Wessel is the model of National Socialism.

To spread the faith in National Socialism to the workers, the student Horst Wessel became the worker Horst Wessel. He united intellectual and physical workers, he united the nationalist of the idea with the socialist of the deed.

So that he could spread the faith in National Socialism to those whose lives were hard, he gave up his middle class life and lived among the workers, among the unemployed.

So that he could show his readiness to give his life for the idea, he carried high the flag at the head of his unit through the Berlin Communist neighborhoods, though he knew that the Red Front had determined to kill him.

Because Horst Wessel was one of National Socialism's most effective fighters, they wanted him dead. But Horst Wessel's death only gave him greater strength.

Shot by the leaders of the Marxist revolution, Horst Wessel became a symbol of the German Revolution, and a powerful model for German revolutionaries.

Horst Wessel's lips fell silent, but his song became the song of the German Revolution, the song of the Germany the Revolution brought about.

Horst Wessel died, but "Horst Wessel" became immortal.

Carry, oh ship, his immortal name across the seas, carry it under the flag for which Horst Wessel fought and died.

Carry with you Horst Wessel's spirit.

Imbue with Horst Wessel's spirit the boys who will become men while serving under you.

Imbue them with the spirit of the Front.

Imbue them with the knowledge that the greatest nationalism and the truest socialism are the same: the spirit of simple service to the community.

Imbue them with the spirit of camaraderie, free from the old concepts of class and ancestry, with the spirit of community, of the sacrifice of each for the other, of the spirit to accept privation for the sake of an idea —

of the spirit that values truth above appearance —

of the spirit willing to give one's life for Germany,

Imbue them with the spirit that will hold the flag high to the last breath, though the ship may sink!

Imbue them with Horst Wessel's love, imbue them with Horst Wessel's loyalty to the Führer.