

Surviving ‘*Stunde Null*’:
Narrating the Fate of Nazi Elite-School Pupils during the Collapse of the Third
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I. Introduction: The Uses of Eyewitness Testimony

The image of the eyewitness as the historian’s enemy (‘*der Zeitzeuge als Feind des Historikers*’) has become something of a commonplace in German scholarship in recent years—seemingly part of an amorphous (yet nonetheless very real) anxiety among professional historians that popular perceptions of their discipline are all too easily dominated by media-driven affect and emotive stimuli, rather than the drier, more sober products of ‘rational enquiry’.¹ Yet, at the same time, figures such as Konrad Jarausch and Robert Moeller have made an appeal for a less divisive, more analytical approach towards the evidence of these contemporary eyewitnesses (‘witnesses of time’), which can ‘treat individual tales as stories, asking about their emplotment to unlock their meaning’.² In this context, Robert Moeller has particularly stressed the importance of collecting the testimonies of those who experienced the end of the Second World War, in order to provide insights into individuals’ construction of meaning from the ‘patchworks’ (*Gemengelagen*) of their lives, and facilitating the construction of a history of the war’s end ‘in which some Germans were victims, some Germans were perpetrators, and some Germans were both’.³

We might detect a certain similarity here with oral history methodologies of the kind put forward by Alessandro Portelli in his seminal work *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (1991), which argues for the ‘psychological truth’ (and hence the inherent sociological and historical value) of narrations which may not be

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3 ‘historically’ accurate, yet which can often illuminate underlying preconceptions and
4 assumptions more tellingly than factually accurate accounts: ‘The importance of oral
5 testimony may often lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it,
6 as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge.’⁴ Or, as Paul Thompson has put it, ‘the
7 discovery of distortion or suppression in a life-story is not...purely negative. Even a
8 lie is a form of communication; and it may provide an important clue to...psychology
9 and social attitudes.’⁵ Such perspectives, which imply that seemingly untrue or bizarre
10 statements may reveal much more than conventionally ‘factual’ accounts about the
11 witnesses’ underlying psychological relationship to or preoccupation with the past,
12 encourage the researcher to put cynicism and radical scepticism to one side, since
13 these attitudes may lead to an unsatisfactory underestimation of the value of the
14 material in question.⁶

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16 In accordance with this paradigm, the following essay seeks to provide a
17 detailed case-study of how such approaches to eyewitness testimony might profitably
18 work in practice—deliberately interrogating a diverse selection of ego-documents
19 which testify to the experiences of a little-explored subsection of the generation who
20 experienced the end of the Second World War as adolescents—pupils of the National-
21 Political Education Institutes (*Nationalpolitische Erziehungsanstalten* – otherwise
22 known as *NPEA* or *Napolas*), the most prominent type of Nazi elite school.⁷

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24 As both Konrad Jarausch and Mary Fulbrook have noted, by subjecting such
25 ego-documents to this type of analysis, we can begin to grasp some of the ways in
26 which the narrators have attempted to reconstitute their personal pasts, ordering their
27 experiences into ‘narrative molecules’ which give some meaning to the chaos through
28 which they lived.⁸ This can provide a useful starting-point for exploring former pupils’
29 strategies of self-presentation, and the extent to which they may have been affected by
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fundamental or incremental developments in German post-war (and post-wall) memory culture. Additionally, we can gain revealing insights into some of the recurring themes or *topoi* which distinguish these ‘war stories’ from those told by members of this generation who did not attend a Nazi elite school, and hence the degree to which the Napola-pupils (*Napolaner*) might be said to constitute a ‘community of experience’, in terms of the creation of a form of collective memory.⁹ Moreover, the autobiographical material under consideration can also potentially provide new perspectives on the fate of the *NPEA* themselves, since the schools have been relatively overlooked in historical scholarship to date.¹⁰

The first three Napolas were founded in 1933 as a birthday present for Hitler by the then Prussian Culture Minister (later Reich Education Minister) Bernhard Rust; by 1945, over forty schools were in existence throughout the ‘greater German Reich’, with the establishment of many more planned after the war’s end.¹¹ The *NPEA* aimed to train the future Nazi elite in all walks of life, rather than specifically training leaders for the Nazi Party (which was the aim of the Adolf-Hitler-Schools), or the military, and a generous system of bursaries and free places ensured that boys from all social classes were represented at the schools, though there still seems to have been a preponderance of middle-class pupils.¹² All boys who attended the schools had to possess the requisite racial attributes, as well as displaying great academic and physical prowess; character traits such as daredevilishness (*Draufgängertum*) and sheer courage were also considered paramount, and the week-long *NPEA* entrance examination rigorously put all these qualities to the test.¹³ Again, unlike the Adolf-Hitler-Schools, the Napolas did generally follow the standard secondary school curriculum, using the same textbooks as other schools throughout the Third Reich.¹⁴ However, a much greater emphasis was placed upon sport and pre-military training at

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3 the *NPEA*, and the tenor of boarding-school life was often most reminiscent of the
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5 tradition of the Prussian Cadet Corps, one of Rust's explicit models for the
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7 institution.¹⁵
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10 Those pupils who attended the Napolas, and who were still of school age in
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12 1945, do not easily fit the standard definitions of 'perpetrator', 'victim' or 'bystander',
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14 and their experiences during the death throes of the Third Reich are not a topic which
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16 has been frequently discussed in extant works on this period, although, in recent years,
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18 a significant amount of memoir literature has been produced which can give some
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20 insight into the experiences of this particular group of 'war children'.¹⁶ One might
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22 argue that this lack of interest is due to the essential ambivalence of these adolescents'
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24 status; Ian Buruma has described their entire generation as 'an odd one—too late to be
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26 Nazis, [yet] early enough to be educated as Nazis... "Late birth" has given them
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28 perhaps the most complicated perspective on the past of all generations: too young to
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30 be responsible, yet tainted with guilt.'¹⁷ Moreover, in sociological terms, the 'life
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32 projects' of the former *Napolaner*, their plans and dreams for the future, had not only
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34 been completely informed by Nazi socialization, but they had also been uniquely
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36 subjected to a 'total education for total war', exposed to more far-reaching attempts at
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38 ideological mobilization and paramilitary training than their older counterparts, or
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40 even than their contemporaries who had not attended a Nazi elite school.¹⁸
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45 Following Martin Sabrow and Heidemarie Uhl's theories of witnessing
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47 (*Zeugenschaft*), we might therefore conjecture that these adolescents are perceived as
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49 having approached the 'perpetrator' (*Täter*) category too nearly for their later
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51 testimony to be unproblematically included in a popular canon which necessarily
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53 excludes the evidence of perpetrators, and which systematically prefers to shoehorn
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55 historical actors into simplistic, manichaeian classifications of 'good versus evil',
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‘victims versus perpetrators’, or ‘the innocent versus the guilty’.¹⁹ This problem seems to be particularly acute when considering testimonies from *Zeitzeugen* who do not slot into these categories perfectly, but can rather be situated somewhere on the cusp between innocence and implication.²⁰

Conversely, as Uhl and Sabrow have argued, we find a growing ‘sacralization’ of the ‘cathartic’ testimony of concentration camp survivors, which only increases the closer that we come to the death of the last living witnesses of Nazi terror.²¹ Unlike the victims of the Shoah, however, former Nazi elite-school pupils cannot contribute in the same way to the discourse of ‘learning from history’, particularly when (as we shall see) they often still evince a certain pride in their education. Ultimately, they can never fulfil the definition of the ‘moral witness’ conceived by Aleida Assmann; any trauma which they may claim to have suffered is unlikely to be accepted as ‘authentic’ because of their exalted position within the Nazi regime’s hierarchy of life and death.²² Furthermore, there seems to be an underlying fear that, by giving those *Zeitzeugen* who were neither victims of the Holocaust, nor persecuted by the National Socialist regime, the opportunity to indulge in a form of ‘retrospective self-victimization’ which ‘reduce[s] personal agency to a morally innocent muddling through the constraints of dictatorship and war’, and portrays World War II as a conflict ‘that Hitler had started but everyone lost’, Germany’s claim to moral credibility in the present may be undermined.²³ And yet, as Nicholas Stargardt has noted, although reconstructing what children and young people experienced during the Second World War necessarily involves breaking a scholarly taboo, in that it obliges one to gain historical empathy and understanding for the actions of those on the ‘wrong side’ (such as a fifteen-year-old Hitler Youth guarding Jewish women waiting to be shot), not just for the ‘noble victims’, it can also provide us with an

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3 invaluable framework for understanding the transformatory effect of war on the
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5 colonizers as well as the colonized.²⁴
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8 9 10 **II. Identifying Patterns in Former Napola-Pupils' Narratives**

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12 In order to remedy the current lack of scholarly engagement with testimony from Nazi
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14 elite-school pupils, this paper will analyse a particular corpus of original
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16 autobiographical material, collected over the past six years, in order to explore the
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18 narratives told by former Napola-pupils about their experiences during the final
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20 months of the Second World War. By surveying these former pupils' testimonies, I do
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22 not intend to provide a straightforward narrative depiction of the fates which befell
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24 the *Napolaner* as the collapse of the 'Thousand Year Reich' reached its chaotic and
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26 catastrophic close. Rather, I will analyse some of the ways in which the former pupils
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28 with whom I have corresponded have chosen to present their experiences of this
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30 period, by exploring both the *form* as well as the *content* of their narratives, using
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32 concepts and ideas derived in some measure from the work of scholars such as
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34 Konrad Jarausch, Nicholas Stargardt, Mary Fulbrook, and Harald Welzer.
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39 In a sense, this analysis can be seen as a continuation and radical expansion of
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41 Rolf Schörken's (rather cursory) remarks on the subject in *Die Niederlage als*
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43 *Generationserfahrung* (2004).²⁵ In his examination of 32 autobiographies by members
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45 of what he designates the '45' generation (also known as the Hitler Youth generation,
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47 the anti-aircraft auxiliary generation [*Luftwaffenhelfer-/Flakhelfergeneration*], or the
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49 '1929ers'—i.e. those who were adolescents or very young adults at the time of
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51 Germany's defeat), Schörken includes two works by former Napola pupils and one
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53 collection of reminiscences by ex-pupils of all the Nazi elite schools, Johannes Leeb's
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55 *Wir waren Hitlers Eliteschüler* (2005).²⁶ In the two passages where he discusses these
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works briefly, Schörken comes to the conclusion that the accounts by former elite-school pupils do not betray any particularly noteworthy characteristics, beyond a certain elite consciousness (*Elitebewusstsein*), and some pride in having survived the pressures of the tough training at these schools, which may then be translated into claims that one had learnt much at an *NPEA* which served one well in one's later postwar career.²⁷

To this point, regarding former pupils' praise of their Napola education for its utility in later life, I would add three other major themes which recur throughout the ex-pupils' accounts, all of which are arguably specific to this particular subsection of the '45' generation (or at least to those who attended any elite school). Firstly, and perhaps most surprisingly, we find a repeated emphasis on the care which the *NPEA* authorities supposedly took to look after their pupils throughout the chaos of the final months and weeks of the war, during the (sometimes piecemeal) serial evacuation of individual *Anstalten*. Secondly, as a corollary to Schörken's point, there are numerous occasions on which former pupils stress the role of their Napola education in instilling them with personal bravery or fitness, thus enabling them better to survive the rigours of survival in war-torn Germany unaided. Finally, we find a recurring series of what we might term 'narratives of victimhood', in which the *Napolaner* describe in detail not only their suffering during this time, but also the discrimination and prejudice which they suffered in the immediate postwar period (or even in later life) because of the stigma attached to their having been educated at an *NPEA*.

The most extreme examples of this trope, as might be expected, come from former pupils who ended up in the Soviet Zone and then the German Democratic Republic (GDR), many of whom were sent to labour camps to atone for the 'sin' of having attended a Nazi elite school, even if they were under 16. However, even in the

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3 Western Zones, pupils might be denied access to further or higher education, or be
4 barred from jobs for which they had applied. By analysing those elements of the
5 eyewitness narratives which appear to be specific to the reminiscences of Napolapupils
6 or former pupils of other schools of this type, I hope to demonstrate the ways in
7 which elite-school life had a particular impact—both positive and negative—on those
8 members of the ‘45’ generation that it touched.²⁸

16 The idea that former *Napolaner* might go out of their way to stress the care
17 and protection afforded them by their schools during the collapse of the Third Reich
18 might at first seem not only alien, but even a little bizarre. And it is undoubtedly true
19 that we also find narratives of extreme disillusionment with individual members of
20 staff who, in the eyes of their charges inexplicably and unforgivably, were ultimately
21 concerned only with saving their own skins, abandoning any pretence that they
22 wished to fight to the last to protect the fatherland—that inalienable duty which they
23 had ceaselessly drilled into their pupils’ heads before the crisis point had been reached.
24 The most blatant example of such behaviour can be found among the staff of *NPEA*
25 Rügen (Putbus); one of the masters, the Dutch class leader (*Zugführer*) Fritz Wiers,
26 simply stole one of the school yachts and fled with his hastily-married wife Erna,
27 ignoring all his pupils’ entreaties to lead them out to fight against the foe, while the
28 Headmaster (*Anstaltsleiter*), *Haupthundertschaftsführer* Lüders, who had also sought
29 to escape to sea with his family and a small group of pupils in a fleet of smaller boats,
30 disowned all responsibility for the boys as soon as they landed on the island of
31 Fehmarn.²⁹ Only being threatened at pistol-point by one of the older pupils eventually
32 coerced him into giving some of his hoard of food to the—now starving—band of
33 boys whom he had effectively abandoned.³⁰

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However, rather than concentrating on these tales of disillusionment, which are also common to many other autobiographies by authors of this generation, I wish to demonstrate that an opposing theme which emphasizes the caring nature of their *Anstalten* is often just as prevalent in the recollections of the *Napolaner*—even when later bitterness at their ‘betrayal’ by the higher *NPEA* authorities was extreme.

Sometimes, the figure of benevolent authority is merely a teacher (*Erzieher*) who saw fit to stick with his ‘lads’ through thick and thin. Thus Gerd-Ekkehard Lorenz of Napola Spandau:

That we...were deployed, as Obertertianer, i.e. 14- or 15-year-olds, to defend Berlin in April and May 1945, seemed logical to us, and was taken for granted. “Orders are orders!” As we tearfully buried the first of our dead..., Helmuth Heinrich, none of us was surprised. When our *Erzieher*, *Zugführer* Otto Möller, who had come to us from the Lietz-Schule in Bieberstein, fell likewise..., we understood for the first time what it meant to be a ‘role model’ (*Vorbild*). He had voluntarily reported to us from his ground command...in Schleswig-Holstein “because he simply couldn’t leave his lads alone now.” We loved him, and he had enfolded us in his heart.³¹

In general terms, Lorenz, and other surviving pupils of *NPEA* Potsdam and Neuzelle, were incensed by postwar denials by Inspector August Heißmeyer and his deputy, Otto Calliebe (*Anstaltsleiter* of *NPEA* Potsdam), that they had explicitly instructed the *Napolaner* to fight to the last to defend the area around *NPEA* Spandau, where Heißmeyer had made camp.³² Yet they were still more than ready to recall the true bravery and comradeship of *Zugführer* Möller, who had stood by them to the end. The perceived ‘betrayal’ by Heißmeyer was only seen as such after the event, while Möller’s loyalty and the value of his love were never brought into question.

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3 Rolf B. gives a similar—if more cursory—account of a teacher at his own
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5 *NPEA*, Bensberg, who had accompanied the boys on a whole series of evacuations,
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7 first from Bensberg to Ballenstedt, and then to Plön:
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11 [Our final] retreat...before the advancing Allied troops went via Berlin to *NPEA* Plön in Schleswig-
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13 Holstein, thence to the Flensburg area, where the last Reich government resided under Dönitz. Here we
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15 experienced the end of the war. There were plans or rumours that we...might have to be sent to an
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17 English re-education camp, however, these weren't realized. In the following months we then had to
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19 make our own way home individually. Our *Zugführer* from Bensberg (Heinrich M.) remained with us
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21 right to the end; I think that is very much to his credit too.³³
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25 A defining characteristic of these recollections seems to be the extremely high regard
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27 in which the *Erzieher* in question are held, almost seven decades after the event.
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30 However, other accounts explicitly highlight the important role which it was
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32 perceived that the school authorities had played in keeping 'their boys' safe. Thus
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34 Manfred G., a former pupil of *NPEA* Stuhm, stressed in his private memoirs that the
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36 Director of Studies, Dr. Wolf, had personally intervened to save pupils from dying in
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38 a hopeless battle against the advancing Red Army:
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42 Now it slowly became clear that the war would soon be at an end, and the question arose of how we
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44 should act. Some few of our *Erzieher* said that we had to defend ourselves against our enemies right to
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46 the end, but our Chief..., Dr. Wolf, conjured up a telex from a very exalted administrative office
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48 (*zauberte ein Telex einer sehr hohen Dienststelle hervor*), in which it was decreed that youngsters
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50 should by no means be embroiled in combat operations. I was and am still convinced today that he had
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52 faked it somehow; he was a very rational and considerate man (*ein sehr vernünftiger und besonnener*
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54 *Mensch*). Therefore he gave the order that anyone who still had the possibility of returning home
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56 should try to do so.³⁴
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Here, Wolf is implicitly ascribed a degree of almost supernatural power, if we take the word ‘*zauberte*’ at its face value; even the imputation that he actually tricked his colleagues by trumping them with a possibly spurious document ascribes to Wolf an act of minor resistance, portraying him as unafraid of doing the right thing in the interest of his pupils’ welfare, even though this might have had serious repercussions if such a forgery had been discovered.³⁵ Interestingly, this incident is also recalled, though in less detail, by another former pupil, Eckhard R.

After the tank alarm we received small-bore guns with fifty bullets, and every fifth boy received a rifle with ten bullets. We didn’t have much hope of victory there. But we didn’t have to deploy them. Our beloved *Anstaltsleiter*, Dr. Wolf, refused to send the *Jungmannen* [Napola pupils] into the home guard (*Volkssturm*) when a Soviet attack was looming.³⁶

Again, Wolf is described here in glowing terms; he is ‘*beliebt*’ (beloved), and his refusal to deliver the boys to the *Volkssturm* is portrayed as a courageous act of common sense amid the violence and destruction of the Russian advance.

Another former Napola pupil, this time from *NPEA* Plön, repeatedly stressed the great efforts to which his *Anstaltsleiter*, Hermann Brunk, apparently went in order to ensure his personal safety, along with that of the other boys in his class who had already been called up to the Reich Labour Service (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*), but were still a year younger than their contemporaries:

With hindsight it has become clear to me that, because [Brunk] saw that the war was coming to an end, he tried to keep us older *Jungmannen* back as long as possible. So when we, the 1926 yeargroup, were called up, he actually got us back again... So I came back after the *Arbeitsdienst*, that came to an end in September, I believe, then I was still there [in Plön] during October, November, December, precisely because he had explained that he needed these lads... Otherwise I would have immediately been called

up then, like the other pupils too, but he actually had the possibility, the influence, and in this connection really looked upon us as his own children, that he knew the whole venture was madness [and thought] how wonderful, if only I could still hold onto them... So that they don't leave me too swiftly... But that is my interpretation, I don't know... I can't say, but you can see from this that there was a special relationship, in terms of this fatherly disposition of the *Anstaltsleiter*.³⁷

He went on to stress the heavenly nature of this short reprieve, which he and his companions spent either looking after the younger pupils (since all the rest of the older yeargroups had either been called up, or were serving elsewhere as *Flakhelfer*), or enjoying themselves in pursuits such as riding around Plön Castle's extensive grounds on the school horses. The five boys were even invited to Christmas dinner with Brunk and his wife.

In this account, the theme of the benevolent *Anstaltsleiter* and his 'special', quasi-paternal relationship with those boys whom he has momentarily held back from the front line comes to the fore even more strongly. In hindsight, Brunk is also attributed the power to 'fix' things in high places or pull the wool over the eyes of the military authorities in such a way that he appears a truly providential figure. Yet, as depicted in other sources, Brunk was one of the hardest taskmasters of all the Napola *Anstaltsleiter*; a convinced member of the SA, he would habitually ensure that any pupil who failed to gain a high enough score in sporting competitions would be expelled from his school.³⁸ We may never know how far these two sides of Brunk—loving father-figure and harsh martinet—can be reconciled; what is clear, however, is the decisive and highly positive effect which he is portrayed as having on his pupils' lives at this crucial point in the war.

Finally, we find this theme recurring once again in the account of a former pupil of *NPEA* Köslin, Martin Köhler, describing the school's evacuation to *NPEA*

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Rügen. The first and second class (*Zug*) were evacuated by train on 30 January 1945, a day after the decision to retreat to Putbus had been made; they reached the island of Rügen the next day. The third *Zug* (13- to 14-year-olds), despite leaving on the same day, were supposed to go as far as Kolberg on foot—a distance of some forty-two kilometres—and then continue their journey by ship.

The departure was scheduled for the small hours of 30 January. In the afternoon, bed rest was ordered, how awful, then we had our haversacks liberally filled, and a drink for our canteens into the bargain. Our luggage was left behind...to be brought to Kolberg on a lorry and then to Rügen on a fishing boat. That happened too, in accordance with the schedule... It was very cold, and deep snow was lying, as high as our boots, perhaps even higher. We were completely alone on the road, and cast about for a way where vehicles had driven through... Soon I began to flag, perhaps even after the first ten kilometres. I became unspeakably tired, and wanted to lie down to sleep in the beautifully soft snow. Then the sound of a motor could be heard, a military bus caught up with us, stopped and let us all get on, after we had explained who we were and named our destination... It is speculation today, whether the caring school authorities (*fürsorgliche Anstaltsleitung*) had sent the bus after us in all secrecy. Or had the bus been headed for the Bodenhagen airfield near Kolberg and made a little detour for us?³⁹

In this instance, it is not so much an individual *Erzieher* or *Anstaltsleiter* who is singled out for hagiographic treatment, but rather a disembodied notion of the ‘*Anstaltsleitung*’, whose good will and power for ameliorative action is automatically assumed, even in the most unlikely of circumstances. After all, if the authorities had had a bus at their disposal all along, it would have been far better for them to use it from the start, rather than forcing 13- and 14-year-olds to undertake a dangerous trek through the snow. The trek was presumably unnecessary in any case, since the younger year-groups had been evacuated unproblematically by train only a few hours earlier.

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Meanwhile, a little later on in the narrative, Köhler introduces a new variation on the ‘caring authorities’ theme, which is striking particularly because of its inclusion of the trope of having narrowly escaped the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a typical accretion in many survivor narratives from the ‘treks West’.⁴⁰

After a few days we had to leave the [hospital ship where we had been staying], because it needed to take refugees and the wounded on board. Or perhaps our *Anstaltsleitung*, who must have heard of the [sinking of the] *Gustloff*, had decreed that we should continue our journey westwards on the trains of the railway, however full they might be, for reasons of safety?⁴¹

However, in Köhler’s narrative, we also find an inkling of one of the other themes under discussion—that of pride in the Napola training, and the extreme endurance which it fostered. He continues:

The railway journey in the totally overfilled trains passed by chaotically, but none of us got lost. We had become enormously tough through the sport, trimming, honing, and discipline in the two-and-a-quarter years at Köslin; physically and also mentally fit.⁴²

This tendency is even more marked in the recollections of Paul S., a former pupil of *NPEA* Reichenau, who had already been forced to join the armed forces in January at the age of sixteen:

After my basic infantry training, which I completed as a naval officer cadet at Saalfelden..., I received marching orders for Stralsund... Because of the war situation, I was no longer able to get there, and quickly returned to Reichenau. There I received a massive dressing down, because I hadn’t reported to the nearest Wehrmacht administrative office. But on the same day, my class was incorporated into an anti-tank commando, the *Kampfgruppe* Bock, and sent into battle. In steady retreat we came to

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Sonthofen, where we were surprised by American tanks and torn apart. While the majority of my comrades decided to make a break for home, we tried, in pairs, to make our way over the snow-covered mountains to the Bregenzerwald. Against the advice of experienced mountaineers, we managed it. There, we discovered that the *Kampfgruppe* Bock no longer existed. We were then taken over by the remainder of the 405th E.u.A. Division. One day later, the so-called ‘Alpine Fortress Tirol-Vorarlberg’ surrendered, and the war—and with it, the time at the Napola—was at an end. Still, I could demonstrate once again that everything that we had learned and practised had not been for nothing. The five youngest in the company, of which I was the second-youngest, joined forces in order to get home unchallenged, as far as possible. The remaining four spontaneously voted me as their leader. The skills and virtues which had been instilled in me at Reichenau helped us, despite many days without food, and under the greatest possible stresses and strains, to make it unmolested through thick forest and trackless countryside to Bregenz on the Bodensee, and to get over the German-Austrian border, which had been re-erected in the meantime. From there, we each set off homeward. As I found out long afterwards, we were the only five in the company who returned home without becoming prisoners of war.⁴³

The emphasis on Paul S.’s preternaturally-developed leadership qualities, and his hardiness and ability to withstand all the perils and dangers of his flight, are highly typical of former pupils’ expressions of pride in the rigours of their Napola education. Interestingly, Paul S.—and other eyewitnesses—would also commonly stress the applicability of such training to their later careers (thus bearing out Schörken’s analysis of some of the published literature):

In my sport (table tennis) I trained our youth team for many years. In this training I applied exactly the same criteria that I had learned in Reichenau. And lo and behold, it worked brilliantly. I not only brought forth good players; most of them also pursued creditable careers. When I meet one of them, they gladly remember the time when they were toughened up by youth coach (*Jugendtrainer*) S.⁴⁴

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3 Mike M., a former pupil of *NPEA* Spandau, also attributed his scholastic
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5 achievements in the immediate postwar period to the quality of the education which
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7 he had received at the Napola:
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11 A classroom of former soldiers, *Sitzenbleiber*, people from the *Kinderlandverschickung* (children's
12 evacuation programme)...tussled with each other. Much chaff was cast upon the murky waters, and
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14 many were left behind. The *NPEA* preparatory training paid off. The form teacher could be sure of that
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16 after two years; out of the whole class, only two pupils were capable of further study: Herr K. and the
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18 author.⁴⁵
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22 Yet there were also times when being educated at an *NPEA* could have its
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24 disadvantages—and these narratives also find their way into the recollections of the
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26 *Napolaner*. As mentioned above, in the Western Zones which were under French,
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28 British and U.S. administration, official penalties usually only amounted to exclusion
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30 from further education, or from certain careers. Thus, Paul S. remembers that as a 16-
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32 year-old he was not permitted to attend school any longer, because of a decree from
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34 the local government in Baden. When it was made clear to him by the government
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36 that a 'pardon' might be granted him if he applied for one to President Wohleb, he
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38 replied to the administrative agency in question that President Wohleb 'could meet
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40 him at the Badischer Bahnhof'—apparently a euphemistic substitute for a colloquial
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42 expression not commonly used in polite society. 'Of course, after that, the topic of
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44 school was at an end.'⁴⁶ He also believes that he encountered discrimination when he
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46 applied, along with a work colleague, to become a naval officer cadet. While his
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48 friend was accepted immediately, he himself heard nothing for an entire year, after
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50 which he received the (unwanted and rather demeaning) offer of a position as an NCO
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with the Pioneers. ‘I am certain that my having attended a Napola was decisive in the process.’⁴⁷

However, other ex-pupils remember having to undergo experiences which smack rather more of the witch-hunt. Thus Rolf B:

The following months [after the war’s end] were very hard; our home was a flat in Wuppertal in a working-class quarter, where, all of a sudden, many inhabitants ‘outed’ themselves as Social Democrats and Communists! I was hunted through the streets, beaten too; the Protestant Church, which had heard of the problems of the young man and former *NPEA*-pupil, helped me a lot. Initially, the Gymnasium made trouble at the end of 1945/beginning of 1946 because of my Napola-past, though I was then taken on. The goal of taking the Abitur was not possible; family very poor, father dead, mother with five children...⁴⁸

In Peter B’s narrative, both of these elements—witch-hunt and career-oriented discrimination—can be discerned:

My father was dismissed from service as a long-time Nazi, and had to be ‘de-Nazified’ (he was only a small-time policeman). In contrast, I, who always put my time at the Napola on applications, was *not* de-nazified. Until 1951, I couldn’t ‘land’ anything in the public sector, rejected by the police (my dream), railways, postal service, local government, also schools, etc. After going to a former prison-camp in the Neustadt area for my official demobilization (otherwise I would have had no right to ration-cards!), I worked as a fisherman, a farm labourer, a smith, in a bakery and as a long-distance lorry driver... Formerly admired by all, I was now *denounced* as a (16-year-old) *NAZI*. There was hate mail. I couldn’t go around the town [Fehmarn] without a crowbar. I was completely ostracized, I had no friends any more. In the town, dogs were set on me with the cry: ‘Sick him—get him! Nazi!’⁴⁹

However, in the Soviet Zone and later GDR, the official penalties for having attended a Napola appear to have been far severer. Karl-Heinz L. (formerly of *NPEA* Rügen)

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recollects that great placards were immediately erected which displayed decrees from the Soviet Administration; one of these proclaimed that even the parents of former pupils of the Adolf-Hitler-Schools and *NPEA* were to be sacked from any public sector post. As a postal official, Karl-Heinz's father was affected, and removed from his job.⁵⁰

Perhaps the most extreme example of postwar persecution, however, comes from Karl L., formerly of *NPEA* Naumburg. Originally from the Sudetenland, his family were later subjected to the 'wild expulsions' carried out by the Czech militia—but the worst had, in a sense, already taken place.⁵¹

[The] two...former *Jungmannen*, Kurt and Oskar, were denounced to the Czechs in their Sudeten-German homeland in June 1945—by their fellow countrymen!—as alleged Adolf-Hitler-School pupils. The Czechs imprisoned the 13-year-olds (!) and took them to the Maltheur internment camp, north of Brüx (Most), which later became known in the Federal Republic of Germany as the 'Maltheur death-camp'. During the war, prisoners were accommodated here, who had to work in the hydrogenation plant ('*Hermann-Göring-Werk*')... In this camp, from June 1945, 'Nazis' were accommodated; they had to do hard labour. The demands of the camp were extremely harsh; the unbearable hygienic conditions and the assaults of individual Czech guards got to one most. When the two boys were taken ill with typhus, they were delivered to the isolation ward of a normal hospital near Teplice—they still didn't actually want to have any children dying in the camp. Here they were selflessly looked after by a very young Czech nursing-sister ('Vlasta') and treated properly by an understanding doctor. This Czech doctor also didn't allow the two boys to be taken back to the punishment-camp after they had recovered. On the contrary, he brought them back to their home village, by night, in his own car with a contagion-flag fixed to it, and thus saved their lives! He will later have put it about that the two of them had escaped.⁵²

Interestingly, this account also chimes with two of the other sub-themes which Schörken has identified in the corpus of autobiographical literature which he

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analysed—that of realizing that people do not necessarily fit ingrained stereotypes (such as evil Russians or, in this instance, brutal Czechs), and the heightened memory of the outstanding good acts that people are capable of, even within a horrific general atmosphere of human cruelty.⁵³

When questioned about his experiences in an interview, Karl L. explained that he still had nightmares about this time, and had been unable to include a full account in his memoirs because the memories which he would have had to recollect were too painful (during this part of the conversation, he became visibly distressed).⁵⁴ Therefore, though I have designated this a ‘narrative of victimhood’, this is by no means intended to belittle or deny the fact that Karl L. obviously suffered greatly, and that the pain engendered in remembering this period was real. By his reckoning, it was only much later, in the 1960s, that previous attendance at a Nazi elite school no longer had such grave political implications in the GDR.

In essence, these observations also raise the question of how far testimonies such as these simply recollect a reality which just happened to contain recurring instances of certain types of behaviour. For instance, there seems no reason to suspect that some teachers did not go out of their way to protect the ‘uniformed children’ under their charge; rather, what is noteworthy here are the often highly providential or paternal qualities which are ascribed to the *Anstaltsleitung* in these accounts, whether in the guise of a teacher, a headmaster, or merely a generalized benevolent force (as in Martin Köhler’s memoir).⁵⁵ We might wonder, however, whether some attempt (subconscious or conscious) is being made here to exonerate the ‘beloved’ leaders in question from being called fully to account for their actions in the service of the National Socialist regime, or to differentiate them from ‘real’ Nazis. This would then implicitly disassociate the former pupils from the excesses of the regime, as well as

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3 lessening any cognitive dissonance between fond memories of their teachers (or their
4 *Anstalt*) and their knowledge that the education which they had undergone was deeply
5 questionable, and subject to extreme censure in both post-war Germanies.⁵⁶
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9 Similarly, it is not impossible that the tough physical and mental training
10 instilled by the Napolas did prepare pupils in some way for the trials and tribulations
11 visited upon them in the chaos of the collapsing Reich. Even guests from foreign
12 countries often commented on the advanced physical development displayed by the
13 *Napolaner*, which is also clearly visible in contemporary photographs of school life at
14 the *NPEA*. Meanwhile, the academic education provided by the Napolas, though still
15 ideologically oriented to a high degree, was certainly of a more advanced level than
16 that found at the Adolf-Hitler-Schools.⁵⁷ And it is also undeniable that former
17 *Napolaner* were subject to real prejudice—both personal and political—on both sides
18 of what was to become the Iron Curtain—even if the effects of this may be somewhat
19 exaggerated with hindsight in some cases. For instance, we might wonder whether
20 Welzer's concept of 're-framing' or 're-conceptualization' (*Wechselrahmung*), where
21 images more reminiscent of sufferings undergone by the victims of the National
22 Socialist regime are inserted into narratives of German post-war persecution, might
23 play a role here.⁵⁸
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43 However, it is the way in which narratives which highlight these occurrences
44 are deployed in a similar fashion throughout the corpus of evidence under analysis—
45 whether in interviews, correspondence, or consciously-constructed memoir
46 literature—which is particularly noteworthy in this context. These strands of thought
47 explicitly and repeatedly come to the fore in the recollections of former Napola-pupils,
48 in a way which seems to distinguish their accounts quite sharply from those told by
49 adolescents of this generation who did not attend a Nazi elite school.
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We can therefore interpret such narratives as making a unique contribution to this particular group’s attempts to ‘make sense of their past’ with hindsight.⁵⁹ In this reading, the former pupils ultimately wish to convince their readers that the Napola education, despite its disadvantages, cannot have been utterly good for nothing, if it enabled its adherents to endure in the harshest circumstances, to persevere and win out (both at the time and in later life), or even ensured their survival, due to the caring nature of the *NPEA* authorities, at a time when hundreds of thousands of Germans were perishing as they fled the Allied (and particularly Russian) advance. Perhaps we might wonder whether these narratives would have been framed differently if they had been expressed before the ‘new Germans-as-victims debate’ gained ground at the turn of the millennium.⁶⁰ However, I suspect that if the new readiness to stress ‘positive’ memories of the Third Reich stems (as Stefan Berger has suggested) from a migration of private memory culture into the public sphere, then these tendencies would still have been prevalent in many of these ego-documents, which were for the most part constructed in a private or familial context.⁶¹

Ultimately, elements of (perhaps subconscious) self-justification, along with a pressing desire to make their own fates comprehensible, are as inextricably entwined in the discourse of these former elite-school pupils as they are in those of the rest of the ‘45’ generation. However, the narratives told by the *Napolaner* are most often embedded in a very specific set of implicit or explicit assumptions about the value of their education which are generally unparalleled elsewhere in the autobiographical literature, and which also reflect the ways in which elite-school life had a particular impact—both positive and negative—on those members of the ‘45’ generation that it touched.

III. Conclusion

In an article published in 2010, Dirk Moses emphasized the dichotomy between those inhabitants of the Federal Republic who attempted to convince the world that they had created a new collective identity completely cut off from an unbearable past (the ‘un-German Germans’), and those who vigorously defended their previous identity, attempting to make that past bearable through manifold strategies of repression (the ‘German Germans’).⁶² The *Napolaner* whose testimonies have been discussed here clearly belong to the latter category.

Like many other Germans after the war’s end, former Napola-pupils began to construct their experiences in terms of ‘survival stories’—and yet, unusually, they often present their actions during the collapse of the Third Reich and after capitulation not merely as passive, but as a series of active steps at the beginning of the first chapter of their post-war life. Their accounts are not simply immersed in a narrative of wholesale victimhood, but have been reframed in a positive way which stresses both their strength and capability.⁶³ Similarly, while the ‘success stories’ which the *Napolaner* tell about their achievements later in life have much in common with those told by their civilian counterparts, they are often predicated on the very specific advantages which their Napola education had (allegedly, if not actually) instilled in them.⁶⁴ We might even see these recurring themes as constituting the basis of the former pupils’ own miniature master narrative (*Meistererzählung*)—which could perhaps, if disseminated widely enough, form the basis of a specific form of collective identity.⁶⁵

At the same time, the former Napola-pupils’ unwitting recourse to somewhat Nazified (or at least ‘Nazi-friendly’) paradigms of thought can afford an interesting perspective upon the debate over continuities and discontinuities between pre- and

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post-1945 mentalités.⁶⁶ As Nicholas Stargardt has noted, National Socialism ‘inculcated an excessive sense of moral commitment [in the young], a personal responsibility to contribute to the war effort’, which ‘can be measured by the ways in which habits of thought remained intact long after [the Third Reich’s] outward symbols and structures had been dismantled.’⁶⁷ As the Second World War neared its end, Moritz Föllmer has argued that Nazi propaganda and practice began to rely ever more on personal initiative, achievement and conviction, with an emphasis on ‘decisive personal intervention in states of crisis and emergency’.⁶⁸ However, following the disintegration of the National Socialist regime’s institutional and ideological framework during the war’s final stages, this Nazified image of the strong individual quickly became subsumed by a stronger, exculpatory tendency to ‘[dissociate] personal self-help and responsibility from the image of the Third Reich as a regime that had rested on stifled, passive individuals.’⁶⁹ Now, this idea of ‘legitimate individuality’ could be used to prove that the individuals in question had somehow demonstrated a resistant stance to Nazism merely through their recourse to personal initiative—a phenomenon which could conceivably have informed the testimonies of *Napolaner* such as Paul S.

Yet, just as the ‘elites’ from Hesse whom Michael Hayse surveyed in his study of the de-Nazification and ‘democratization’ of civil servants, doctors and business leaders in the post-war period had done, the *Napolaner* of the *Flakhelfergeneration* were often able to avail themselves of a form of ‘evasive selective memory’ which ultimately cast themselves as victims of the Nazi regime, and allowed them to make their own (sometimes very successful) way in post-war society without falling back into—or creating—an anti-democratic sphere of influence.⁷⁰ The complex relationship between the former Napola-pupils’ pre- and post-1945 attitudes—neither

merely hypocritical in their adherence to the new political system, yet not entailing a complete rejection of past patterns of thought—can surely help us to comprehend in more general terms the simultaneous ruptures and continuities of experience which the collapse of the Third Reich (and its psychological and ideological hold) necessarily entailed.⁷¹

This paper represents an initial attempt to find a suitable paradigm for dealing with these contested and multi-faceted testimonies—one which can fulfil the recent demand by historians such as Martin Sabrow and Sybille Steinbacher for a ‘historicization’ of the *Zeitzeuge*, attempting to get to the bottom of such highly complex narratives, which are always determined to a greater or lesser extent by personal and political concerns in the present or the more recent past.⁷² While the movement to check or to redefine the alleged ‘competition’ or ‘enmity’ between *Zeitzeugen* and the adherents of *Zeitgeschichte* may still only be in its infancy, it is certainly the case that the the historian can bring what Sabrow terms ‘historical meta-reflection’ (*fachhistorische Metareflexion*) to bear on testimonies of this type, stepping to one side in order to identify and consider the ‘soundlessly changing frameworks within which [such] conversations about the past take place’.⁷³

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¹ See in particular M. Sabrow and N. Frei (eds) *Die Geburt des Zeitzeugen nach 1945* (Göttingen, 2012), especially the contribution by Martin Sabrow (‘Der Zeitzeuge als Wanderer zwischen zwei Welten’, pp. 13-32); also K. Jarausch, ‘Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerung. Deutungskonkurrenz oder Interdependenz?’, in K. Jarausch and M. Sabrow (eds), *Verletztes Gedächtnis: Erinnerungskultur und Zeitgeschichte im Konflikt* (Frankfurt/Main, 2002), pp. 9-37, p. 10; N. Frei, *1945 und wir: Das Dritte*

Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen (Munich, 2005), p. 15, and A. Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. J. Stark (Ithaca, 2006), pp. 130-1. N.B. The word ‘Zeitzeuge’ is a difficult one to render effectively in English, given the complex set of associations which it encompasses—the most common translation, ‘contemporary witness’, does not fully succeed in communicating the inherent pathos of the witnesses’ having lived through such (often implicitly terrible) times. On the difficulties of defining the term adequately even in German, see Sabrow, ‘Der Zeitzeuge’, p. 13.

² K. Jarausch and M. Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, 2003), p. 319; R.G. Moeller, ‘Germans as Victims? Thoughts on a Post-Cold War History of World War II’s Legacies’, *History and Memory* 17, 1-2 (2005), pp. 145-94, p. 181.

³ Moeller, ‘Germans as Victims?’, pp. 180, 182. See also Mary Fulbrook’s recent analysis of the value of a more varied selection of ego-documents in her monograph *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford, 2011), particularly pp. 16-17, and Martin Sabrow’s consideration of the uses of testimony by *Zeitzeugen* in ‘Der Zeitzeuge’, p. 14. The use of the term *Gemengelage* in this context has its roots in the work of Alf Lüdtkke and other pioneers of *Alltagsgeschichte*; cf. A. Lüdtkke, ‘Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and who are its Practitioners?’, in A. Lüdtkke (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, trans. W. Templer (Princeton, 1995), pp. 3-40.

⁴ A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, 1991), p. 51.

⁵ P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (3rd edn, Oxford, 2000; 1st edn, 1978), p. 169.

⁶ For more on this, see e.g. R. Göpfert, ‘Oral History: Über die Zusammensetzung individueller Erinnerung im Interview’, in C. Wischermann (ed.), *Die Legitimität der Erinnerung und die Geschichtswissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1996), pp. 101-11; L. Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London, 2010). Similar ideas regarding the contingency and multi-layered nature of eyewitness testimonies have also come to the fore among scholars who have worked closely with Holocaust survivors, such as Mark Roseman and Jürgen Matthäus—cf. M. Roseman, ‘Surviving Memory: Truth and Inaccuracy in Holocaust Testimony’, in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (2nd edn.; London, 2006; 1st edn, 1998), pp. 230-43; J. Matthäus, (ed.), *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimony and its Transformations* (Oxford, 2009).

⁷ On the concept of political ‘generations’ in German history, see e.g. U. Jureit and M. Wildt (eds), *Generationen: Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs* (Hamburg, 2005); U. Jureit, *Generationsforschung* (Göttingen, 2006); also, from a more critical perspective, W. Kansteiner, ‘Generation and Memory: A Critique of the Ethical and Ideological Implications of Generational Narration’, in Berger and Niven, *Writing the History of Memory*, pp. 111-34.

⁸ Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*, p. 481; Jarausch, ‘Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerung’, p. 27.

⁹ M. Fulbrook, ‘History writing and “collective memory”’, in S. Berger and B. Niven (eds), *Writing the History of Memory* (London, 2014), pp. 65-88, especially pp. 75-83.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the sources and literature currently available on the Napolas, see H. Roche, *Sparta’s German Children: The Ideal of Ancient Sparta in the Royal Prussian Cadet Corps, 1818-1920, and in National Socialist Elite Schools (the Napolas), 1933-1945* (Swansea, 2013), pp. 4-9—and, in due course, H. Roche, *The Third Reich’s Elite Schools: A History of the Napolas* (Oxford, forthcoming).

¹¹ There also existed a small number of *NPEA* for girls, which were established from the late 1930s onwards—cf. S. Jodda-Flintrop, ‘*Wir sollten intelligente Mütter werden*’: *Nationalpolitische Erziehungsanstalten für Mädchen* (Norderstedt, 2010). However, I will only be considering the experiences of pupils from the boys’ schools here.

¹² Himmler was particularly adamant that the *NPEA* should not become mere ‘cadet schools’ for the *Wehrmacht*; he himself wanted to appropriate the schools as SS training institutions, although he never quite fulfilled his ultimate ambition to gain control of the whole system. Although the second Inspector of the *NPEA*, August Heißmeyer, was an SS Officer with certain responsibilities to Himmler, in his inspectorial capacity he was directly responsible to Bernhard Rust alone (cf. Roche, *Sparta’s German Children*, pp. 182, 191, 194-6). On the *Adolf-Hitler-Schulen*, see B. and W. Feller, *Die Adolf-Hitler-Schulen: Pädagogische Provinz versus Ideologische Zuchtanstalt* (Wien, 2001). These were founded in 1937 by Reich Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach and Reich Leader of the Party Organisation Robert Ley, in part as competition for the *NPEA*.

¹³ Roche, *Sparta’s German Children*, p. 181.

¹⁴ However, four of the *NPEA* followed a humanistic curriculum which included both Latin and Greek; namely Ilfeld, Schulpforta, Neubeuern and Haselünne. For more on the state of affairs at Schulpforta and Ilfeld, the longest-standing humanistic Napolas, see H. Roche, ‘“Wanderer, kommst du nach

Pforta...”: The Tension between Classical Tradition and the Demands of a Nazi Elite-School Education at Schulpforta and Ilfeld, 1934-1945’, *European Review of History / revue européenne d’histoire*, 29, 4 (2013), pp. 581-609.

¹⁵ The first three Napolas were even founded on the sites of former Prussian Cadet Schools (Plön, Potsdam, and Köslin—now Koszalin in Poland). See Roche, *Sparta’s German Children*, pp. 182-8, for further discussion of the continuities and discontinuities with cadet-corps life. Other explicit models for the *NPEA* included the English public schools and the educational practices of the ancient Greek city-state of Sparta (*ibid.*, pp. 188-232).

¹⁶ Some published examples include A. Heinich, “Niemand entgeht seiner Zeit”: *Erziehung, Lernen und Leben in der Nationalpolitischen Erziehungsanstalt (Napola) Bensberg bei Köln. September 1942 bis April 1945* (Norderstedt, 2007); K. Montanus, *Die Putbusser: Kadetten unter dem Hakenkreuz. Ein Napola-Schüler erzählt* (Frankfurt/Main, 1998); H. Müncheberg, *Gelobt sei, was hart macht: Aus dem Leben eines Zöglings der Nationalpolitischen Erziehungsanstalt Potsdam* (Berlin, 1991); K. Schikore, *Kennungen: Landmarken einer Wandlung* (Aachen, 1993); H. Vahl, *Napola Schulpforta 1933-1945: Erinnerungen eines Schülers* (Hamburg, 2000)—see also n. 26 below.

¹⁷ I. Buruma, *Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (London, 1994), p. 245.

¹⁸ Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*, p. 232. Although Fulbrook is not referring specifically to elite-school-pupils, her remarks apply particularly well to them. The post-war trauma for these children must also have been particularly great, given that they were seen not only as ‘the guarantors of the future’ but as future leaders of the ‘Thousand-Year Reich’—cf. G. Rosenthal, *Die Hitlerjugend-Generation: Biographische Thematisierung als Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Essen, 1986), pp. 16-17. See also R. Schörken, *Die Niederlage als Generationserfahrung: Jugendliche nach dem Zusammenbruch der NS-Herrschaft* (Weinheim, 2004), pp. 13-14: ‘It was easier...if one’s National Socialist education had seemed merely superficial and implausible...; it was [harder] for those who had believed in this community as something new and full of promise for the future.’

¹⁹ Sabrow, ‘Der Zeitzeuge’, pp. 27-31; H. Uhl, ‘Vom Pathos des Widerstands zur Aura des Authentischen: Die Entdeckung des Zeitzeugen als Epochenschwelle der Erinnerung’ in Sabrow and Frei, *Geburt des Zeitzeugen*, pp. 224-46, p. 243. Alf Lüdtke’s observation also has some relevance in this regard: ‘All too frequently, the act of taking historical subjects seriously is mistaken for boundless sympathy. There is a corresponding restriction of aperture, limiting attention to those who can be

considered “pure” victims’ (Lüdtke, ‘Introduction’, pp. 24-5). On the problematic nature of these simplistic dichotomies, see H. Welzer, ‘Vom Zeit- zum Zukunftszeugen: Vorschläge zur Modernisierung der Erinnerungskultur’, in Sabrow and Frei, *Geburt des Zeitzeugen*, pp. 33-48, p. 36; also Jarausch, ‘Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerung’, p. 18.

²⁰ cf. M. Rothberg, ‘Trauma Theory, Implicated Subjects, and the Question of Israel/Palestine’ *Profession* (2014): <http://profession.commons.mla.org/2014/05/02/trauma-theory-implicated-subjects-and-the-question-of-israelpalestine/>; M. Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, forthcoming). The idea that the categories of ‘Täter’ and ‘Opfer’ might be anything other than mutually exclusive was certainly one which held little appeal in both post-war Germanies (cf. Moeller, ‘Germans as Victims?’, p. 171). Indeed, it is completely comprehensible that such a deliberate abrogation of judgement should be surrounded by a far greater firewall of sensitivity in Germany than elsewhere, given the inherently contested nature of the post-war histories of today’s Federal Republic. For, implicitly, every personal ‘story’ which appears to be erroneously exculpatory can be interpreted as a piece of the past which has yet to be ‘worked through’ or ‘mastered’.

²¹ Uhl, ‘Pathos des Widerstands’, pp. 226-7, 242; Sabrow, ‘Der Zeitzeuge’, p. 28. See also D. Moses, ‘Der nichtdeutsche Deutsche und der deutsche Deutsche: Stigma und Opfer-Erlösung in der Berliner Republik’, in D. Fulda, D. Herzog, S.-L. Hoffmann, and T. van Rahden (eds), *Demokratie im Schatten der Gewalt: Geschichten des Privaten im deutschen Nachkrieg* (Göttingen, 2010), pp. 354-79.

²² Uhl, ‘Pathos des Widerstands’, p. 242; cf. A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Munich, 2005), pp. 88-92.

²³ Jarausch and Geyer, *Shattered Past*, p. 338; M. Föllmer, ‘The Subjective Dimension of Nazism’, *The Historical Journal*, 56, 4 (2013), pp. 1107-32, p. 1108; R.G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2001), p. 3. cf. Moeller ‘Germans as Victims?’, p. 171: ‘For those who insisted that the Holocaust was central to what defined post-war German identity, claiming victim status was immediately suspect because it implied the denial of responsibility for German crimes’; on the debate in post-reunification Germany, see A. Schildt, ‘The Long Shadows of the Second World War: The Impact of Experiences and Memories of War on West German Society’, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute London*, 29, 1 (2010), pp. 28-49, esp. p. 46.

²⁴ N. Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under the Nazis* (London, 2006), pp. 16-17.

Elsewhere, Stargardt also warns against the danger of 'shunning the child's experience completely in the name of methodological sophistication' ('German Childhoods: The Making of a Historiography', *German History*, 16, 1 (1998), pp. 1-15, 12).

²⁵ Admittedly, the evidence with which I will be dealing here comes less from published autobiographies than from unpublished memoir literature and my own private correspondence with former pupils; nevertheless, the principle remains the same.

²⁶ J. Leeb (ed.) "*Wir waren Hitlers Eliteschüler*": *Ehemalige Zöglinge der NS-Auslaufeschulen brechen ihr Schweigen* (7th edn, Munich, 2005; 1st edn, Hamburg, 1998). On these 'cohorts', see Schörken, *Niederlage*, p. 19; Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*, p. 488. Incidentally, in his brief summary of the autobiographies which he has analysed, Schörken erroneously states that Hans-Günther Zempelin, author of *Des Teufels Kadett: Napola-Schüler von 1936 bis 1943. Gespräch mit einem Freund* (Frankfurt/Main, 2000) attended *NPEA* 'Schloss Hohenems bei Dietz (Westerwald)'—the school in question was actually *NPEA* Oranienstein bei Diez an der Lahn.

²⁷ Schörken, *Niederlage*, pp. 47-50, 63-4.

²⁸ This also serves to highlight and corroborate Schörken's point regarding the huge variety of experiences suffered by this generation during the collapse of the Third Reich (*ibid.*, pp. 21-2); cf. R. Schörken, "'Schülersoldaten' —Prägung einer Generation", in R.-D. Müller and H.-E. Volkmann (eds), *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität* (Munich, 1999), pp. 456-73; Rosenthal, *Hitlerjugend-Generation*, p. 21. N.B. In the discussion which follows, I will only be considering the experiences of boys who were still nominally of school age (i.e. under 18) at this time, rather than those who had already left the schools and had become fully-fledged soldiers in *Wehrmacht* and SS units. For some older pupils' recollections of the Third Reich's collapse, see e.g. K. Kleinau, *Im Gleichschritt, Marsch! Der Versuch einer Antwort, warum ich von Auschwitz nichts wusste: Lebenserinnerungen eines NS-Eliteschülers der Napola Ballenstedt* (Hamburg, 2000), pp. 77-86; P. Meuer, *Linien des Lebens: Eine Kindheit und Jugend im Schwäbischen und anderswo* (Stuttgart, 1991), pp. 164-8; L. Steinbach, *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Glaube? Ehemalige Nationalsozialisten und Zeitzeugen berichten über ihr Leben im Dritten Reich* (Bonn, 1995), pp. 151-6 (quoting Klaus E.).

²⁹ For a full account of Wiers' voyage, including accounts from the *Jungmannen* who helped him man the yacht, see H. Menge (ed.) 'Chronik der ehemaligen Nationalpolitischen Erziehungsanstalt Rügen in

Putbus für die Zeit von Oktober 1944 bis Mai 1945' (unpublished typescript, 1999), Anhang A29
passim.

³⁰ Menge, 'Chronik', Anhang A26, p. 2. Jürgen S. tells this story from a bystander's perspective ('Blown Away' [unpublished typescript], pp. 103-4): 'The Napola boys, however, were short of food while we had most of the supplies that had been on board the cutters. One day, Henner Menge and some others of the Napola boys who had sailed us to safety reappeared and begged Lüders to share the victuals. Lüders wasn't interested and tried to turn them away. He declared the Napola officially "closed" and washed his hands of them. The boys got angry, and one of them, playfully, pulled a gun just to show he meant business. Lüders wasn't a hero and decided to be "nice". A deal was struck after the boys assured him that they wouldn't take anything Frau Lüders might need to feed the kids.'

³¹ G.-E. Lorenz, 'Erziehung zur "Elite der Nation" —Faszination und Verführung am Beispiel der NAPOLA Potsdam (1940-1945)', speech given on 31 October 1995 at the Buchenwald Youth Education Centre and memorial site as part of a conference on 'Children and Youth in the National Socialist State'. Lorenz (b. 1931) later gained a doctorate, and went on to become a teacher of History, Politics and German.

³² G.-E. Lorenz (ed.), 'Bis zum bitteren Ende. "Kadetten" des Führers in der Schlacht um Berlin (April/Mai 1945). Ein Beitrag zum Ende der NAPOLA POTSDAM' (unpublished typescript), pp. 7-8, 35. On the denials of Calliebe and Heißmeyer, see also H. Ueberhorst, *Elite für die Diktatur: Die Nationalpolitischen Erziehungsanstalten 1933-1945. Ein Dokumentarbericht* (Düsseldorf, 1969), pp. 421, 434-5.

³³ Rolf B., private correspondence, 14 July 2011. Rolf B. (b. 1931) later made a career working for Senior Experten Service (SES), a German non-profit organization dedicated to worldwide development aid; he saw service as a plant manager in a wide variety of locations, ranging from Africa and Argentina to Russia and the Baltic states.

³⁴ Manfred G., 'Erinnerungen' (unpublished typescript, 2005), p. 7. This was a private memoir of some fifteen pages, written primarily for friends and family. Manfred G. was probably born in 1929 or 1930, and subsequently made his career in engineering.

³⁵ We might wonder whether this incident can be considered in a similar light to those small acts of resistance ascribed to witnesses or their close friends and relatives in the evidence collected by Harald Welzer *et al.*, which can be interpreted as a bid to exonerate those in question from all active

participation in the Nazi regime. cf. H. Welzer, S. Moller, and K. Tschuggnall, “*Opa war kein Nazi*”: *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt/Main, 2002), pp. 54-5.

³⁶ Eckhard R., private correspondence, 25 February 2012. Eckhard R. (b. 1929) studied at the TU Berlin, and went on to establish a career as a television engineer with Siemens.

³⁷ Interview with Harald R., 22 August 2011. Harald R. (b. 1926) went on to study theology; he was later ordained as a protestant pastor.

³⁸ cf. M. Paustian, *Die Nationalpolitische Erziehungsanstalt Plön 1933-1945* (Rostock, 1995), p. 28.

³⁹ M. Köhler, ‘Als Jungmann in der Napola Köslin 1942 bis zum bitteren Ende 1945’ (unpublished typescript), pp. 10-11. Köhler’s sixteen-page account appears to have been written at some point during the 1990s or early 2000s, and was probably composed for the edification of friends and family as well as his former school-mates.

⁴⁰ The *Wilhelm Gustloff* was a German ship crammed with thousands of evacuees, which had just been torpedoed by a Soviet submarine on its way from Gotenhafen to Kiel. The sinking of the *Gustloff* was also immortalized in Günter Grass’ novel *Im Krebsgang* (Göttingen, 2002). For more on the *Gustloff*’s role in survivor narratives, see M. Röger, *Flucht, Vertreibung und Umsiedlung: Mediale Erinnerungen und Debatten in Deutschland und Polen seit 1989* (Marburg, 2011), pp. 3, 5, 245-52.

⁴¹ Köhler, ‘Köslin’, p. 13.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Paul S., private correspondence, 29 April 2010. Paul S. (b. 1929) trained through distance-learning courses and work experience as a carpenter, brick-layer, and iron-worker, before working his way up to become a construction manager with an architecture firm.

⁴⁴ Paul S., private correspondence, 23 February 2010. See also n. 46 below.

⁴⁵ Mike M., ‘Napola—Ethos und Pathos’ (unpublished typescript, 2011), p. 19. Mike M. (b. 1930) made his career in the West German armed forces (*Bundeswehr*), eventually reaching the rank of Colonel on the General Staff.

⁴⁶ Paul S., private correspondence, 2 August 2011. He ends this paragraph, interestingly, with the observation that ‘if, despite this, I was able to work my way up career-wise, then I have the training in discipline and assertiveness at the Napola to thank for that.’ Once again, the bravado with which he describes his encounter with the political authorities may be a little over-emphasized for the sake of effect.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Rolf B., private correspondence, 14 July 2011.

⁴⁹ Peter B., private correspondence, 7 September 2011 (emphasis original). Peter B. (b. 1929) eventually achieved his dream of joining the police, reaching the rank of detective chief superintendent.

⁵⁰ Karl-Heinz L., private correspondence, 29 September 2011. Karl-Heinz L. (b. 1932) trained as a civil engineer at the TU Dresden, and made a highly successful career as a chief engineer for structural analysis and construction; in 1987 he was awarded the GDR's National Prize for Science and Technology. After the Wende he became active in local politics with the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and served as Councillor for Construction (*Senator für Bauwesen*) in his hometown between 1990 and 1994.

⁵¹ For more on the expulsions in general, see e.g. R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane. The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (London, 2012); also n. 55 below.

⁵² Karl L., private correspondence, 1 February 2010. Karl L. (b. 1932) and his family moved to Thuringia after their expulsion from the Sudetenland; he subsequently studied at the university of Jena and became a doctor. It should be noted that the recollections quoted here were written many years before my correspondence with him, and formed part of a failed attempt to write his memoirs—hence the author's use of the pseudonym 'Kurt' to distance himself from the narrative.

⁵³ Schörken, *Niederlage*, p. 37.

⁵⁴ Interview with Karl L., 13 August 2010.

⁵⁵ Interestingly, it is possible to compare former pupils' experiences of their westward evacuation treks favourably with those of families or individuals, which seem to have been characterized by total terror, chaos and helplessness—cf. M. Schwartz, 'Ethnische "Säuberung" als Kriegsfolge: Ursachen und Verlauf der Vertreibung der deutschen Zivilbevölkerung aus Ostdeutschland und Osteuropa 1941 bis 1950', in R.-D. Müller (ed.), *Der Zusammenbruch des deutschen Reiches 1945. Zweiter Halbband: Die Folgen des zweiten Weltkrieges* (Munich, 2008), pp. 509-656; T. Schieder (ed.), *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa* (Bonn, 1953-1962) (8 vols.); also W. Rellecke and E.-M. Zehrer (eds.), *Unauslöschlich. Erinnerungen an das Kriegsende 1945: Ein Lesebuch* (Dresden, 1995); Stadtmuseum Schwedt/Oder, *Wir wollten eigentlich nicht fliehen... Schwedt im Frühjahr 1945* (2007). Meanwhile, the *Napolaner* were always fleeing to a goal as well as from the enemy; they did not have to leave their home territory and all hope of return to their families behind, and hence their

flight was far less marked by what Albrecht Lehmann has termed ‘existential impact’ (*Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus: Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in Westdeutschland 1945-1990* [Munich, 1991], p. 199).

The evacuations of the *NPEA* also seem, for the most part, to have taken place in a fairly orderly and unpanicked fashion (for more on this, see Roche, *The Third Reich’s Elite Schools*; on evacuation plans, see Ueberhorst, *Elite für die Diktatur*, pp. 421-5, 434-5).

⁵⁶ cf. e.g. Welzer *et al.*, “*Opa war kein Nazi*”, pp. 54-5; G. Rosenthal, “*Als der Krieg kam, hatte ich mit Hitler nichts mehr zu tun*”: *Zur Gegenwärtigkeit des “Dritten Reiches” in Biographien* (Opladen, 1990), pp. 238-9. We might also surmise that a mechanism could be at work here similar to that which Marc J. Philipp discovered in the recollections of many former *Wehrmacht* soldiers, who would always ascribe a perfect atmosphere of cameraderie and benign efficiency to their own unit—probably in large part due to the positive connection which they still felt to that particular group in the present; cf. M. J. Philipp, “*Hitler ist tot, aber ich lebe noch*”: *Zeitzeugenerinnerungen an den Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 2010), pp. 469-73.

⁵⁷ cf. Feller, *Die Adolf-Hitler-Schulen*.

⁵⁸ cf. Welzer *et al.*, “*Opa war kein Nazi*”, pp. 82, 104.

⁵⁹ On the importance of ‘making sense of what has happened’ in autobiographies by this generation in general, see Schörken, *Niederlage*, p. 34; G. Rosenthal, ‘German War Memories: Narrability and the Biographical and Social Functions of Remembering’, *Oral History*, 19, 2 (1991), pp. 34-41, p. 37.

⁶⁰ My thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for raising this important point. On the debate, see e.g. B. Niven, (ed.), *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* (Basingstoke, 2006), in particular Stefan Berger’s contribution (S. Berger, ‘On Taboos, Traumas and Other Myths: Why the Debate about German Victims of the Second World War is not a Historians’ Controversy’, pp. 210-24); also more generally B. Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London, 2002).

⁶¹ Berger, ‘On Taboos, Traumas and Other Myths’, p. 223.

⁶² Moses, ‘Der nichtdeutsche Deutsche’, p. 357.

⁶³ Jarausch and Geyer, *Shattered Past*, p. 318; M. Geyer, ‘Die eingebildete Heimkehr: Im Schatten der Niederlage’, in Fulda *et al.*, *Demokratie im Schatten der Gewalt*, pp. 72-96, esp. p. 78; cf. also Marc J. Philipp’s analysis of a vast array of televised evidence from *Zeitzeugen* recalling the Third Reich (“*Hitler ist tot, aber ich lebe noch*”, pp. 470-1), which suggests that the majority of *Zeitzeugen* who

experienced ‘*Stunde Null*’ as adolescents frame their memories rather less positively than the former Napola-pupils examined here.

⁶⁴ cf. Fulda *et al.*, *Demokratie im Schatten der Gewalt*, p. 9; E. Domansky, ‘A Lost War: World War II in Postwar German Memory’, in A.H. Rosenfeld (ed.), *Thinking about the Holocaust—After Half a Century* (Bloomington, 1997), pp. 233-72, pp. 234-5.

⁶⁵ cf. J. Withuis, ‘Zeitzeugen des Zweiten Weltkriegs in den Niederlanden’, in Sabrow and Frei, *Geburt des Zeitzeugen*, pp. 157-75, pp. 159-60; Fulbrook, ‘History writing and “collective memory”’, pp. 75-80.

⁶⁶ cf. M. Fulbrook and U. Rublack, ‘In Relation: The “Social Self” and Ego-Documents’, *German History*, 28, 3 (2010), pp. 263-72, pp. 267-8.

⁶⁷ Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, p. 11.

⁶⁸ M. Föllmer, *Individuality and Modernity in Berlin: Self and Society from Weimar to the Wall* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 160-3.

⁶⁹ Föllmer, *Identity and Modernity*, p. 189, cf. also p. 209.

⁷⁰ M. Hayse, *Recasting West German Elites: Higher Civil Servants, Business Leaders, and Physicians in Hesse between Nazism and Democracy, 1945-1955* (Oxford, 2003).

⁷¹ cf. Hayse, *Recasting West German Elites*, esp. pp. 2, 9; Föllmer, *Identity and Modernity*, p. 10; also Jarausch and Geyer, *Shattered Past*, p. 11.

⁷² Sabrow, ‘Der Zeitzeuge’, pp. 20-21; S. Steinbacher, ‘Zeitzeugenschaft und die Etablierung der Zeitgeschichte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland’, in Sabrow and Frei, *Geburt des Zeitzeugen*, pp. 145-56, p. 145; cf. Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*, p. 2.

⁷³ Sabrow, ‘Der Zeitzeuge’, pp. 21, 32.