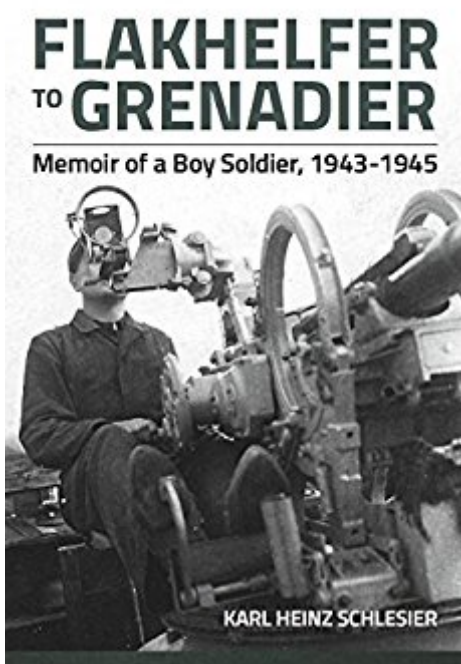


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# Flakhelfer To Grenadier: Memoir Of A Boy Soldier, 1943-1945



## Synopsis

On January 7 1943, the German Government, in order to free adult soldiers for frontline duty, ordered that all male students of secondary schools born in 1926 and 1927 be drafted into anti-aircraft service in the homeland. Students were to arrive in batteries on February 18 1943. After serving from one year (those born in 1926) to thirteen months (those born in 1927), the boys were transferred into the Reich Labor Service and from there into the armed forces. They were replaced by boys born in 1928 who served to the end of the war. About 200,000 boys became Flakhelfer. Most were called up at sixteen, but many, like the author, Karl Heinz Schlesier, were only fifteen. The boys served in batteries of light and heavy flak. Although the government insisted school programs continue for Flakhelfer, the effort was a sham, especially where heavy bombing occurred. Schlesier, a student of Rethel Gymnasium in Düsseldorf, served as Flakhelfer in the regions that suffered the most numerous and heaviest air raids of the war in the Rhineland (Düsseldorf) and the Ruhr (Recklinghausen). His is a coming of age story in a world gone mad, where a teenage boy launched shrapnel into a sky filled with bombers, where Christmas-tree-like flares marked cities about to burn, where working beside Russian POWs, protecting industries with slave labor, courting a girl among bombed-out ruins, and spending leave with family hiding in claustrophobic bomb shelters was unremarkable, as was finally being thrown, unprepared, into a disintegrating frontline only fifty kilometers from his childhood home. The memoir is based solely on Schlesier's diary notes and memories of that period. He has consciously avoided including what he learned after the war. His views, opinions, and interpretations of events are from inside the Germany of that time. If some are inconvenient today, they mirror the chaos of the world he experienced. Then, to live or not to live was accidental. Schlesier wrote this memoir as an old man in response to a granddaughter's question about what he did in the war. This is his answer. Perhaps, he also gives a voice to the silent generation of boys born in Germany in 1926 and 1927. This generation has been silent because the horror it knew pales in comparison to the horror of the Holocaust.

## Book Information

File Size: 21141 KB

Print Length: 159 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 1909384984

Publisher: Helion and Company (June 19, 2014)

Publication Date: June 19, 2014

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00WQ4QU3Y

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #62,152 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #23

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Germany

#41 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Europe > Germany #65 in Books >

Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Germany

## Customer Reviews

Flakelfer to Grenadier is a time line of this author's service in the German military from Hitler youth to his pre military service in the RAD. Once in the German army as an infantryman the author combats American units as part of the 116th Panzer division and ultimately being captured by the American. Easy to follow along with and understand makes the book worth the story. Interesting portion for me while reading is the author's service as a flak helper combatting the allied bomber streams over Europe. Vivid action seen is described in great detail. Great book on this soldiers life

Written from memory and his diary, Dr. Schlesier's detailed account of being a boy soldier made me feel I was walking the journey with him. From being taken from home at age 15 to his capture by an American Indian you can see the shaping of his life. The librarian who kept him supplied with books and him being allowed to keep a pencil so he could write poetry during his interment were very significant. I can not give a totally unbiased review as Dr. Schlesier was a professor and family friend to my husband and I. He helped shape our life's work also.

Much of the history of the air war against Nazi Germany centers around the bombing campaign... at least for Americans and British. Much is made of the courage of the bomber crews, the maddening difficulty in getting fighters to extend their range out to the Reich, the Allied strategy of American day bombing and British night bombing, all designed to bring down the Nazi war machine. But on the

ground, on the receiving end, were kids like Karl Schlesier. At just 15 years old Schlesier was drafted as a Flakhelfer, an antiaircraft auxiliary, and sent to a nearby 8.8cm flak battery to serve on an antiaircraft gun. Before he was drafted to the RAD (which then served as a basic training arm of the Wehrmacht) he had already earned a flak badge for engagements against British and American bombers attacking the industrial Rhineland. He watched as city after city were pounded to rubble and pounded again. Later, even as Germany went down in defeat, Schlesier would find himself a Grenadier in a German Army which was only a shadow of its former self. Karl Schlesier's story is fascinating, a personal recollection that puts a face on the many "flak helpers" who served the guns even as bombs rained down around them. I very much enjoyed the book but wish it had been edited better. There were some spelling issues and German words which should have been italicized. The text uses German placename spellings instead of English, but this does not detract from the information. The short glossary was immensely helpful but I think there are terms and usages which might have been included as well. Written from memory and from diary entries this book is an excellent addition to anyone studying the air defenses of the Reich, or those just interested in how ordinary Germans endured the bombing.

Written from the perspective of a German teenager forced into service at a very young age. There is a great deal of detail in book about the daily lives of youngsters manning flak installations during the war and most of it is interesting although some is just repetitive. It wasn't easy for these kids and those who survived were very fortunate. The German perspective is really interesting so I'm glad to see so many former soldiers, airmen and naval personnel taking the time write about their experiences before it's too late.

Not a heavy read, not light. Good glimpse into that time period.

This is the story of the Second World War's impact on the children of Germany. The author does a great job describing his transition and family interactions from schoolboy to Flakhelfer on 88 mm, 20 mm and other antiaircraft guns. The Nazi system then moves him to a labor battalion and on to Herre Recruit and to the battlefield. This book proved to be a page turner that educates the reader on a subject seldom discussed in WWII literature.

I really enjoyed this book. The author shows how well manpower planning occurred in Germany before and during the war. From ten years old and up. His writing has a genuine feel. It is worth the

read.

The experience of being on the receiving end of bombs dropped on civilians in Germany was interesting. Nothing said about of writing wanting me to read other works of his. Vern Renner

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