

Fledglings of the Third Reich: The National Socialist Flyers Corps

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ABSTRACT

Under the Nazi regime, the *Nationalsozialistisches Fliegerkorps* (NSFK – National Socialist Flyers Corps) instructed Germany’s ‘Aviation Hitler Youth’ boys and other aspirants of flight in all matters of aviation. Intended as a preparatory school for the main Luftwaffe, NSFK personnel delivered both theoretical and practical aeronautical training to these keen young aviators. More sinisterly, however, they also intertwined their instruction with virulent Nazi ideology and propaganda. That a considerable segment of Luftwaffe personnel either administered or received instruction via the NSFK renders the latter organisation highly pertinent to understanding the operational and political culture of the main German air force. As the NSFK has not yet been the subject of a truly focussed and expansive study, this paper rectifies a long-standing historiographical lacuna by delving into contemporary handbooks, organisational documents, and flight magazines to determine how the NSFK attempted to entice Germany’s youth into flying for both the *Führer* and the fatherland.

GLOSSARY

DLV	<i>Deutscher Luftsportverband</i>	German Air Sports Association
Flieger-HJ	<i>Flieger-Hitlerjugend</i>	Aviation Hitler Youth
NSFK	<i>Nationalsozialistisches Fliegerkorps</i>	National Socialist Flyers Corps
NSKK	<i>Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps</i>	National Socialist Motor Corps
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i>	National Socialist German Workers’ Party or Nazi Party
PK	<i>Propagandakompanien</i>	Luftwaffe Propaganda Companies
RPA	<i>Reichspropagandaamt</i>	Reich Propaganda Office
SA	<i>Sturmabteilung</i>	Storm Detachment - the Nazi Party’s original paramilitary wing
SS	<i>Schutzstaffel</i>	Protection Squadron - a major paramilitary organization under the Nazi Party
n.d.		No date

1 INTRODUCTION

‘The work of the National Socialist Flyers Corps is bearing its fruits for the benefit of the Luftwaffe — and thus for German air legitimacy — for the good of the German people and

their future.’⁽¹⁾ *Oberstleutnant* Hermann Adler’s wartime assessment of the *Nationalsozialistisches Fliegerkorps* (NSFK – National Socialist Flyers Corps) encapsulated its intended role as an effective preparatory school for the main *Luftwaffe*. Originally founded in January 1932, the NSFK was absorbed by the *Deutscher Luftsportverband* (DLV –

German Air Sports Association) in 1933 and then later revived from the DLV’s ashes on 17 April 1937. Its tasks were to provide pre-military aviation training to the German youth; to shape the in-practice attitude of the *Luftwaffe* reservists; to pool together and control the entirety of German air sports; and to promote and disseminate ‘*Flugbegeisterung*’⁽²⁾ (‘air-mindedness’) among the German people.⁽³⁾ To achieve this, NSFK members instructed young *Flieger-Hitlerjugend*

(*Flieger-HJ/FHJ*, Aviation Hitler Youth) boys in everything from aeronautical theory and wireless communications to maintenance work and gliding. It arranged concerts, youth gliding competitions, and meet-and-greets with veteran fighter pilots to entice Germany’s youth towards a life in the skies. At the same time, however, the NSFK also sought to intertwine this earnest *Flugbegeisterung* with quintessential Nazi ideology — from chanting antisemitic and pro-Hitler songs to printing racial diatribes against Germany’s Jewish population in its dedicated magazine, ‘*Deutsche Luftwacht*’ (‘German Air Watch’).⁽⁴⁾

Excluding a handful of secondary works on the NSFK’s command structure and uniform paraphernalia, the organisation remains vastly under-considered in both English and German historiography.⁽⁵⁾ In the latter, its study is often eschewed in favour of the *Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps* (NSKK – National Socialist Motor Corps). This lopsided scrutiny may stem from the fact that the NSKK appears to have been a much larger organisation than the NSFK. Though 2,400 NSFK members were present at the September 1938 Nuremberg rally (Figure 2), for instance, this figure was dwarfed by the 12,000 NSKK members that also attended.⁽⁶⁾ Indeed, the NSKK’s immense popularity could be seen in how its membership tripled from 100,000 to 300,000 between July and November 1933: this climbed to 500,000 members by the commencement of Operation BARBAROSSA in June 1941.⁽⁷⁾ Dorothee Hochstetter has attributed this numerical discrepancy to the fact that ‘since the [NSFK] members had to have their own aircraft, or at least a pilots’ licence, the potential membership was correspondingly small.’⁽⁸⁾ H. W. Koch adds that ‘the German government was loath to allocate additional funds which would have allowed the purchase of the amount of equipment



Figure 1. Balloonists of the *Deutscher Luftsportverband* (DLV), as denoted by the hot air balloon insignia on the sleeve, study a map [n.d.] (©Ailsby Collection/ War Relics)

necessary' and so 'the NSFK's endemic financial shortage brought about [the] rather undesirable development' of its members needing to buy their own gliders and aircraft.⁽⁹⁾



Figure 2. NSFK members march alongside the SS and the National Socialist Motor Corps at a Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg, 10 September 1938. (©Bundesarchiv)

Unlike the fastidiously documented NSKK, the NSFK's precise size is difficult to ascertain, although the 1938 Nuremberg rally attendance figure shows that its members certainly numbered into the thousands. Yet British intelligence estimated that nearly 45% of the Luftwaffe's personnel had received pre-military aeronautical training from the NSFK by September 1939.⁽¹⁰⁾ This wartime Allied documentation must be viewed with the potential for alarmist overstatement; the report's quantitative unreliability can be seen in how its cited number of 18,000 men serving in the Luftwaffe by the autumn of 1939 grossly underestimated the true figure of 15,000 officers and 370,000 ORs (Other Ranks).⁽¹¹⁾ However, failing to consider the NSFK's operational legacy merely simplifies our understanding of the prior skillsets brought by future Luftwaffe personnel that were later consolidated in the main German air force. The NSFK's political convictions and motivations, meanwhile, have received even less scholarly attention, with the dilapidated state of its study rendered evident by the fleeting and vague generalisations that plague its historiography. It is often repeated almost verbatim that the men who passed through both the DLV and the NSFK had a strong politicising influence on the Luftwaffe due to being inherently 'Nazified'.

Jean-Denis G. G. Lepage claims that 'many DLV members transferred to the regular military air force, and as many of these prior members were also staunch Nazi Party members, this gave the new Luftwaffe a strong ideological base.'⁽¹²⁾ Andrew Rawson argued similarly of the NSFK that many of its members 'transferred to the Luftwaffe when it was unveiled in March 1935, giving it a strong Nazi base'⁽¹³⁾, with Walter S. Zapotoczny and Erik Schmidt both phrasing this sentiment almost identically.⁽¹⁴⁾ Schmidt, the biographer of the precocious

German fighter ace Erich ‘Bubi’ Hartmann, has assessed that this popular notion of former NSFK personnel having strengthened Nazism in the Luftwaffe ‘seems to be recycled in various places online’, but he claims that it ‘offers promising clarity, though it is difficult to validate.’⁽¹⁵⁾ Admittedly, the NSFK’s inherently National Socialist name has perhaps suggested to historians that there is no political nuance to be perceived among its ranks. That both the DLV and NSFK were founded by the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP – National Socialist German Workers’ Party, or Nazi Party) has also perhaps led to the prevalent historiographical presumption that the degree of indoctrination in both organisations, along with their subsequent political impact upon the Luftwaffe, was identical.

The issue with such an assessment, however, is that it lumps the political origins and legacies of the two organisations together with little acknowledgement of their differences. Aside from the unquantifiable assertions that the DLV and NSFK alumni gave the Luftwaffe a ‘strong Nazi base’ — given that some Party members were ‘stauncher’ and more demonstrative than others — this statement is myopic in presuming that all DLV members were automatically *bona fide* Nazis. Though the National Socialist influence on the DLV was undeniable, an official NSFK guide from 1942 claimed that ‘the DLV had no direct relationship to the NSDAP’ and that ‘the individual DLV man found no local recognition of his work [and] especially not from the Party’, as the DLV had been structured in line with ‘the needs of the state and the Luftwaffe.’⁽¹⁶⁾ The DLV may have been created by the Nazis in 1932, but it was the pre-Nazi *Deutscher Luftfahrtverband* (DLV – German Aviation Association) — originally founded as the *Deutscher Luftfahrtverein* (German Aviation Club) in 1902 — which formed the bulk of the Nazi DLV. As Peter Fritzsche writes, certain members of this pre-1933 DLV had ‘chafed at the Nazis’ sudden domination of a sport with a long-established nationalist pedigree.’⁽¹⁷⁾

Despite being founded by the NSDAP, then, the DLV’s politicisation may not have been quite so absolute as Lepage has suggested. Indeed, for the National Socialists to dissolve the DLV in favour of constructing a dedicated paramilitary Nazi air corps arguably signified the Party’s increasing dissatisfaction with the DLV’s political consistency. The indolent generalisations made about the NSFK’s political makeup, meanwhile, leave no room for the fact that it too contained important political anomalies, despite having been constructed more tightly in line with a Nazi paramilitary wing than the DLV. Michael Eckert, for instance, has detailed how the renowned German physicist Fritz Bopp warned his colleague Arnold Sommerfeld in April 1947 that he had to go through a ‘de-Nazification’ tribunal before he could accept the latter’s offer of work as an associate professor at the University of Munich. Eckert writes that Bopp had been automatically transferred from a nondescript gliding club to the NSFK in 1937, but it was independently verified that he had never joined the Nazi Party and ‘from 1938 onward [he] gradually left’ the NSFK.⁽¹⁸⁾

That some rogue individuals in the NSFK were officially reprimanded for holding opposing political views to the Nazi regime also does not conform to the generalised narrative perpetuated by Rawson, Zapotoczny, and Schmidt.⁽¹⁹⁾ This begins to illustrate how not all NSFK members were inherently Nazified or had autonomy in the increasing ‘Nazification’ of the organisation. Invoking these individual cases does not alter the fact that the NSFK was heavily drenched in Nazi ideology and influence. However, they paint a more accurate picture of how political opinion in the NSFK may have been dominated by National

Socialism, but that it was neither unanimous nor homogeneous in the way that previous scholars have claimed. In any case, political characterisation of the NSFK cannot be convincingly asserted without contemplating *how* the organisation differed from the DLV, pinpointing the ways in which it attempted to instil its members and *Flieger-HJ* (Aviation Hitler Youth) boys with National Socialist values, or determining the extent to which this was successfully achieved.

This paper redresses a long-standing historiographical lacuna by focussing on the NSFK's organisational history and political legacy in their own right. It seeks to determine how the NSFK wedded aviation training and popular *Flugbegeisterung* with the Nazi 'Weltanschauung' ('world view') in an attempt to craft optimal aviators for the Third Reich. Such an endeavour can only be achieved through conducting a rigorous investigation into both the peacetime and wartime mindsets of the NSFK between 1932 and 1945, as evidenced by their training programmes and propagandic materials. This, in turn, allows us to identify how its militaristic psyche and hardening politicisation were influenced by the everchanging national situation in Nazi Germany. As a result, this case study intends to offer valuable contextualisation of the Luftwaffe's operational culture — both prior to and during the Second World War — through examining the technical and political instruction that some of its recruits had previously received or given in the NSFK.

2 INITIAL FORMATION OF THE NSFK AND EXPANSION OF THE DLV

Following Germany's defeat in the First World War, Article 198 of the Treaty of Versailles decreed in 1919 that 'the armed forces of Germany must not include any military or naval air forces.'⁽²⁰⁾ The 4,500 men who had once been at the cutting edge of German aviation in the *Deutsche Luftstreitkräfte* (Imperial German Air Service) now had to stand down⁽²¹⁾: as the future gliding advocate Oskar Ursinus phrased it, German aviation 'lay in ruins, crushed underfoot.'⁽²²⁾ The restoration of German aviation to the skies thus gripped the nation's aviators in the immediate post-war period, but it became an especially pressing area of concern for the National Socialists because, as Fritzsche has written, German aviation served as 'an effective allegory for their own movement'⁽²³⁾ in coalescing modern innovation with traditionalist values. Consequently, the Nazi Party founded its own paramilitary *Fliegerstürme* ('aviator storms') within the Nazi *Sturmabteilung* (SA - Storm Detachment) and *Schutzstaffel* (SS - Protective Echelon) between 1929 and 1932. Initially, they had to be classified as separate air organisations to the SA, the SS, and the NSDAP in order to circumvent Versailles' ban on any (para)military air forces in Germany.⁽²⁴⁾ The storms *were* militaristic in nature however, and they required at least several squadrons and three operational aircraft to be on active duty at any time, and the SA flight instructors were obliged to prove their extensive flight experience from 16 February 1932.⁽²⁵⁾ By April 1932, the storms had become sophisticated enough to possess both dedicated *Fliegerstürme* and *Fliegerlehrstürme* ('Training *Fliegerstürme*').

As Georg Cordts — a future Luftwaffe *Flakhelfer* (anti-aircraft assistant) — recounted, the *Fliegerstürme* numbers began to swell because 'in these years, many unemployed and desperate people, but also *Hasardeure* ('chancers') and *Landsknechtstypen* ('mercenary types'), sought their salvation in the NSDAP's *Sturmabteilung*.'⁽²⁶⁾ Nevertheless, the Nazis

began to recognise the importance of streamlining their ongoing aeronautical efforts and casting their net towards flying talent beyond the SS and SA. Thus, in an SA High Command decree of 30 November 1931, Adolf Hitler outlined the beginnings of a dedicated *National-sozialistisches Fliegerkorps* (NSFK) in considerable detail. The NSFK's prescribed task was

... the promotion of German aviation, particularly the nurturing of air sports. It is to create the technical and administrative conditions for the preparation of the *Fliegerstürme* [aviator 'storm' divisions] and *Staffeln* [squadrons] of our *Sturmabteilungen*.... Since this goal can be achieved only with the tightest amalgamation of all forces, it must be endeavoured that all SA and SS men who are involved in flying are inserted into the NSFK as far as this is possible, along with those who were active in aviation organisations before and during the war, and those who were or are active as pilots, observers etc.⁽²⁷⁾

The NSFK was to be founded '*als eingetragener Verein*' ('as a registered association'), which technically rendered the organisation separate from the direct political administration of the Nazi Party.⁽²⁸⁾ Nevertheless, as Cordts has outlined, 'as early as 1933, with the forced establishment of the DLV and the creation of the *Flieger-HJ* as a special unit of the Hitler Youth, air sports were subjected to the state's claim of exclusivity.'⁽²⁹⁾ Indeed, the fact that its applicants were required to declare their previous membership to the NSDAP constituted an early attempt at National Socialist inclusion and exclusion within its paramilitary ranks.⁽³⁰⁾

Yet, according to Cordts, the development of both the NSFK and its neighbouring SS- and SA-*Fliegerstürme* was hindered in the early 1930s due to Göring's distraction by his 'hectic political activity, with gruelling election campaigns and growing economic hardship.'⁽³¹⁾ Such operational neglect, then, may have partially contributed to the NSFK's swift absorption into the *Deutscher Luftsportverband*, which was founded on 25 March 1933. As demonstrated by the German Reich government's *Deutscher Luftrat* (German Air Council), formed in 1924 to centralise the scattered air sport associations and aviator veteran groups in Weimar Germany, the amalgamation of such aviation organisations was sometimes required to simply aid their cohesiveness, rather than to sinisterly extend political control alone.⁽³²⁾ The DLV's task was similar, with an issue of '*Der Adler*' ('The Eagle') — an official Nazi propaganda magazine for the Luftwaffe — writing on 2 March 1942 that

When the National Socialists came to power, there was a pre-existing type of aviation sport that was badly fragmented, albeit developed to a considerable level, but it needed to be combined and standardised. This happened on March 25, 1933 with the founding of the *Deutscher Luftsportverband*, which, by order of the then Reich Commissioner for Aviation, Hermann Göring, took the place of the *Deutscher Luftfahrtverband*, which had previously absorbed - as an interim solution - all existing associations and clubs. This founding of an association that stood outside of the state and Party was necessary at the time for political reasons.⁽³³⁾

An NSFK guide from 1942 echoed this sentiment regarding the DLV's origins, claiming that 'in 1933, many people did not want to understand why, after the Nazi takeover of power, a National Socialist air corps was not set up immediately as a [Party] structure but for aviation instead, which was already recognised as particularly important at the time.'⁽³⁴⁾ Admittedly,

it was in the interest of Nazi propagandists to retrospectively downplay the political orientation of the DLV in order to fully legitimise its subsequent replacement by the NSFK. Moreover, the fact that Göring — as Hitler's 'truest paladin' — was originally at the helm of the nascent DLV as its chairman illustrated the organisation's early slant towards National Socialism. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that assistance with bolstering German aviation remained at the forefront of the DLV's initial purpose.

As such, Nazi ideology within the early DLV was perhaps not so dogmatically observed as it was in the NSFK — especially as the Nazi metamorphosis of the pre-Nazi *Deutscher Luftfahrtverband* into the *Deutscher Luftsportverband* did not come without its political challenges. Most notably, Fritzsche has pointed out how a minority of DLV aviators initially requested a non-partisan branch to be set up away from Nazi influence.⁽³⁵⁾ Given that some former *Luftfahrtverband* members were automatically transferred to the new DLV, then, it is possible that some of the latter's newest recruits did not keenly embrace its heightening politicisation as much as other members. In addition, certain SS or SA *Fliegerstürme* members who had been transferred to the DLV allegedly saw their reassignment as a 'self-sacrifice'. Joining a voluntary flying corps, according to Cordts, constituted a loss in political status for these men by not 'belonging to a recognised structure of the victorious NSDAP' and that 'for the *alte Flieger-Kämpfer* ['old fliers', the early Nazi aviators], it was a terrible idea: membership of a club instead of their home in the SA or the SS.'⁽³⁶⁾

On the other hand, it could be argued that the transferral of such politically hardened idealists to the new DLV illustrates that it certainly was not devoid of Nazi influence. Moreover, perhaps the most insidious consequence of the DLV having been contemporarily portrayed as an 'apolitical' organisation is that some of its politically complicit personnel later used this characterisation to distance themselves from the Nazi regime and its structures after the war. *Generaloberst*⁽³⁷⁾ Bruno Loerzer — a senior Luftwaffe general who harboured a capricious friendship with Göring — had served as an *NSFK-Obergruppenführer*⁽³⁸⁾ in the 1930s. After the war, he vehemently denied that the DLV had been 'Nazified' and claimed that

The DLV had nothing to do with the Party. Its members did not need to be P.G. [*Parteigenossen* – Nazi Party Members]. Young people in the DLV were merely involved in aviation and air sport matters. Ideological interference was strictly prohibited and was reserved in writing to Hitler's Reich Youth Leadership.⁽³⁹⁾

However, Loerzer's apolitical portrayal of the DLV is upstaged by his contribution of a chapter on the DLV to a Nazi youth book, *Deutsche Fliegerei: Ein Appell an Deutschlands Jugend* (1933), in which he unequivocally declared that 'German aviation is called to be the most lively bearer of National Socialist performance in the new German Reich.'⁽⁴⁰⁾ 'The DLV,' he continued, 'has set the goal of the *Luftfahrtminister* [Minister of Aviation] Göring as the aim of this endeavour: the German people must become a nation of fliers!'⁽⁴¹⁾ Thus, whilst the DLV's politics were more inconsistent and indistinct than previous scholars have suggested, this incriminating snippet demonstrates that they had still been designed in line with Nazi ideals from its inception. This highlights the danger of simply dismissing the original DLV as having been largely apolitical prior to its absorption into the NSFK.

3 POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING OF THE DLV AND THE NSFK

With the unveiling of the Luftwaffe as part of the National Socialist Wehrmacht (armed forces) in the spring of 1935, the DLV's importance in further stoking 'airmindedness' and shaping the future of German aviation increased exponentially.⁽⁴²⁾ The *Der Adler* article from 2 March 1942 noted that 'workshops were set up in which gliders and sailplanes were built and at the same time the men were trained in this work. Through gliding, young people were introduced to and won over by flying. Model aviation was set up and built up for the younger generations. Of course, powered flight was also included in the task assigned to the DLV.'⁽⁴³⁾ As German rearmament ramped up from 1934, the pertinence of civil flight as an accessible gateway for the military aviators of tomorrow had not been ignored. The *Der Adler* article continues that

In the course of the two years leading up to the founding of the Luftwaffe, all the men of the DLV quietly, yet all the more eagerly, contributed to the fact that not only aviators, but also a much larger number of technically trained personnel, were available and could be drawn upon by the new Wehrmacht branch. However, the founding of the Luftwaffe also brought new tasks for the DLV. The training of young people, which had already been carried out up to now, had to be continued on an even larger scale. It was also important to keep members of the older generation in practice, in order to create a tangible reserve for the Luftwaffe that was being built up.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Once the DLV had expanded in both quantity and quality, however, Hitler later dissolved it and incorporated all of its resources into the standalone NSFK on 17 April 1937. This was because, as John Angolia and David Littlejohn write, it had 'lost its identity within the DLV.'⁽⁴⁵⁾ The NSFK handbook later claimed that the DLV's main task had been 'clear and distinct, but also huge: "cooperation in the reconstruction of German aviation".'⁽⁴⁶⁾ In reality, after ironing out some of the DLV's operational kinks over the last four years, the NSDAP could now finally attend to its political convictions. The NSFK's handbook later boasted that 'everything had to be developed out of the slightest beginnings, almost out of nothing.'⁽⁴⁷⁾ This was hardly true, given that even the pre-Nazi *Deutscher Luftfahrtverband* had already amassed over sixty thousand members by 1932.⁽⁴⁸⁾



Figure 3. Two young glider pilots of the NSFK - Bodecker (L) and Zander - pose for a photograph after setting a new world record of 50 hours, 15 minutes in the air with their two-seater glider, December 1938. (©FPG/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)



Figure 4. ‘Learn To Fly!’: A NSFK youth gliding propaganda postcard by Werner von Axster-Heudtlaß [n.d.] (©Akpool)



Figure 5. A *Flieger-HJ* (‘Aviation Hitler Youth’) member preparing to launch his model glider (©Germania International/Historical Boys’ Uniforms)

Yet such rhetoric surrounding the Nazis’ apparent restoration of German aviation resonated strongly with many *Luftstreitkräfte* veterans who had resented its dismantlement after the First World War. The Treaty of Versailles’ total ban on German civil aircraft started to lift in 1922, but even then, severe restrictions remained in place until 1925 that limited Germany’s single-seat aeroplane motors to 60 horsepower, their aircraft’s speed to 170 kilometres per hour (106 miles per hour), and their altitude to 4,000 metres (13,123 feet).⁽⁴⁹⁾ Such limitations led to the rise of the ‘glider craze’ in Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s. This was a reflection of, in the words of Hermann Steiner, the German aviators’ defiant intention ‘to go on flying — no matter what.’⁽⁵⁰⁾ Notwithstanding these contraventions, the organic development of the *Deutscher Luftfahrtverband* — and, to some extent, the *Deutscher Luftsportverband* — was still hindered by Weimar Germany’s diplomatic need to appear to be toeing Versailles’ lines. The NSFK, on the other hand, wielded the distinct advantage of being revived two years after Hitler had publicly unveiled the *Luftwaffe* in March 1935: consequently, its pilots could acquire more powerful aircraft and create a more ambitious training programme. The significance of this was that the more conspicuous operation of the NSFK appeared to corroborate the Nazi narrative that *they* had been the ones to truly resurrect German aviation.

As Fritzsche has argued, the NSDAP was able to claim that ‘only the Nazi state could properly look after the cause of German aviation, which had supposedly been weakened in the Weimar years by personal vanities, political fragmentation, and insufficient funding.’⁽⁵¹⁾ The National Socialists soon hijacked the long-standing patriotic slogan that ‘if we can’t fly

with motors, we'll fly without them!' ⁽⁵²⁾ The existing values of patriotism, national defiance, and technical prowess instilled into many young German glider pilots, balloonists, and amateur engineers of the *Deutscher Luftfahrtverband* meshed favourably with the overarching Nazi vision of national palingenesis. As Fritzsche continues, this allowed the best interests of Germany's once-scorned aviators 'to fit snugly with the National Socialist ideology of self-sacrificing and tough-minded nationalism.' ⁽⁵³⁾ Cordts alleged that the founding of the NSFK had 'evoked immense joy amongst all of the *DLV-Sturmmänner* ['storm men']' ⁽⁵⁴⁾, with the issue of *Der Adler* from 2 March 1942 stating that 'for the *DLV-Sturm* men, this change meant more than the adjustment of ranks and uniforms - while retaining the basic Luftwaffe blue cloth - to those of the SA. It was recognition by the state and Party for the services rendered.' ⁽⁵⁵⁾

Forming such organisations like the DLV and the NSFK helped to further stoke existing notions of brotherly camaraderie and the *Fliegergemeinschaft* ('Fliers' Community') that were similar to, as Jason Crouthamel describes, 'the *Männerbund* ('Male Bond') in the army and in youth movements like the *Wandervogel* [that] provided a sense of belonging and emotional support outside traditional social structures.' ⁽⁵⁶⁾ Such nationalistic rhetoric validated the worries of both the *Luftstreitkräfte* veterans from the First World War, who had experienced aviation being ripped away from them first-hand, and the younger generations who had missed out on wartime flying. The NSFK's first *Korpsführer* (Corps Leader) — *General der Flieger* Friedrich Christiansen, the acclaimed World War I *Marinekorps* (Marine Corps) fighter ace and prominent Nazi — immediately bestowed the organisation with the authoritative prestige it needed to be a credible preparatory school for the Luftwaffe. In addition, as Lepage writes, 'the NSFK managed to rally World War I-veteran pilots for propaganda aims. Heroes such as Bruno Loerzer and Ernst Udet joined and played a significant role in the creation of the Luftwaffe in 1935.' ⁽⁵⁷⁾ That the organisation inserted numerous veteran instructors into its ranks, along with later hosting lectures from esteemed *Ritterkreuzträger* ('Knight's Cross recipients') during the Second World War, enshrined the rebranded NSFK with further historical legitimacy and military precedent. ⁽⁵⁸⁾

Such measures had already been employed during its first inception; what ensured the longevity of the 1937 version, however, was the organisation's ability to learn from its earlier mistakes regarding its societal prestige. Having been restructured into a paramilitary organisation resembling the ranks of the SA — complete with dedicated uniforms and heightened 'iron discipline' ⁽⁵⁹⁾ — the Nazis had rectified the earlier issue of certain pro-Nazi members not regarding either the 1932 NSFK or the 1933 DLV as truly National Socialist institutions. Instilling a more discernible militaristic edge into its ranks thus steeled the NSFK's determination to secure '*eine starke deutsche Luftfahrt*' ⁽⁶⁰⁾ ('strong German aviation') for the benefit of the Luftwaffe and, ultimately, for the Third Reich in general. Thus, the considerable Nazi influence within the NSFK could be seen in how it became even more heavily politicised by 1937 to give it a more official status in line with the wishes of its more fanatic members.

4 RECRUITMENT IN THE NSFK AND THE *FLIEGER-HJ*

Restructuring the NSFK into an appealing proto-Luftwaffe encouraged flying instructors and

enthusiasts to join its ranks from the age of eighteen. Kitted out in redesigned uniforms that retained the DLV's envied shade of Luftwaffe grey-blue cloth, the NSFK remained a voluntary registered association throughout its tenure.⁽⁶¹⁾ Nazi ambitions to boost its membership were illustrated by the fact that it was made a high priority among other voluntary Nazi organisations: 'service in the NSFK enjoys preference; whosoever is fit for the NSFK and desires admission into this formation is to be transferred to it.'⁽⁶²⁾ The NSFK was also open to any male citizens who were trained pilots, observers, balloonists, or reservists of the Luftwaffe, provided that they were of pure 'German' ('Aryan') ancestry; sufficiently fit, and under 45 years of age; and that they had an unblemished character that embraced National Socialism.⁽⁶³⁾ Such attributes were especially desired because the NSFK personnel worked closely with the *Flieger-HJ* to train its boys in both aeronautical and political matters. As Lepage has written, the purpose of the *Flieger-HJ* and NSFK partnership had been 'to channel energy, to exploit youth enthusiasm [and] to train potential pilots for the Luftwaffe.'⁽⁶⁴⁾

The NSFK's influence in training Germany's youth should not be understated, given that the *Flieger-HJ* alone numbered 78,000 by 1938.⁽⁶⁵⁾ By the outbreak of the war, as Cordts estimated, the NSFK was responsible for the instruction of 100,000 *Flieger-HJ* boys.⁽⁶⁶⁾ The NSFK confessed that it 'prefers these excellently trained [*Flieger-HJ*] boys to volunteer or officer candidates' due to both their political and technical malleability.⁽⁶⁷⁾ NSFK members frequently instructed *Flieger-HJ* boys between the ages of 14 to 18 in gliding and constructing model aircraft, competitive sport, *Pflichtflüge* ('mandatory flying'), and fitness classes. An example of such lessons is given by a 15-year-old Leipzig boy, Werner Lehrmann, who informs his American pen pal Howard Steel on 11 April 1937 that 'my service in the Hitler Youth runs in the week: Monday we have swimming, Wednesday is training and Friday I have *Luftlehrgang* [aviation instruction].'⁽⁶⁸⁾ *Der Adler* magazine claimed in an issue from 18 April 1939 that 'many thousands of Hitler Youth boys are ready to fly for the Luftwaffe and, once they are old enough, will follow the call of the Luftwaffe Commander-in-Chief and rush under his banner.'⁽⁶⁹⁾

The boys who illustrated extraordinary potential as aviators were marked by their instructors as a future *Fähnrich* (officer cadet) to ensure that the Luftwaffe had priority over their selection once they were old enough for military service.⁽⁷⁰⁾ For some *Flieger-HJ* alumni and youths from other backgrounds, however, learning to instruct in the NSFK once they reached adulthood signified a more realistic chance to further their flying careers than joining the Luftwaffe outright. Dean Andrew claims that only 5% of applicants passed the entrance examination required to even get to the interview stage for both Luftwaffe NCO and officer ranks.⁽⁷¹⁾ In the face of such low acceptance rates within the main air force, then, membership in the NSFK posed a more feasible and immediate opportunity for many Luftwaffe aspirants to refine their knowledge of flying. Notably, membership in the NSFK was often associated with higher chances of being accepted by the main air force. The future Luftwaffe bomber pilot Karl Engel remembered how his fellow Luftwaffe applicants suddenly crowded around him after his admissions interview and eagerly asked, 'what about the National Socialist Flyers Corps — do [the Luftwaffe] want to know if you're a member?'⁽⁷²⁾

Members of the NSFK thus possessed a myriad of reasons as to why they joined its ranks — to find a sense of community and stability, to prepare for potential careers in the Luftwaffe, to

support the National Socialist cause by any means possible, and, most emphatically, to hone and pass on skills related to the art of flying. Whilst it is not known how many *Flieger-HJ* and NSFK personnel ended up serving with the main Luftwaffe, the strong interconnectivity between the organisations in the interwar period is irrefutable. As Harry R. Fletcher once emphasised, ‘most German pilots went through the Hitler Youth glider schools, the secret flying school at Schleissheim, and were in one way or another associated with the National Socialist Flying Corps before entering the German Air Force.’⁽⁷³⁾ How far this was still true later into the Second World War, as the Luftwaffe increasingly prioritised the hasty training of Germany’s callow aviators on the frontline itself, is harder to assess. Nevertheless, as Patrick G. Eriksson notes, ‘NSFK officers carried double ranks, with their NSFK rank always one higher than their Luftwaffe rank.’⁽⁷⁴⁾ The NSFK, then, was not above inveigling existing Luftwaffe personnel into becoming affiliates and instructors for their organisation.

5 PRE-LUFTWAFFE TRAINING IN THE NSFK

The first year of NSFK training offered instruction in navigation, meteorology, aviation instruments and motors, aviation geography, international aviation laws and regulations, and air currents.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The second year covered glider flying and parachute jumping.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Its students were also drilled in *Wehrsport* (‘paramilitary exercises’) modelled on those of the SA. Competitive sports were highly encouraged, with skiing promoted due to its need for core strength, balance, and coordination — physical attributes that were thought to lend favourably to flying practice.⁽⁷⁷⁾ This training did not come cheap in post-Great Depression Germany: for example, obtaining just the second A2 gliding proficiency certificate cost 3,000 Reichsmarks (around £16,800 or \$21,500 in today’s money).⁽⁷⁸⁾ Such was the ardent desire of the NSFK’s young students to learn to fly, however, that many either used up savings or borrowed money in order to chase their dream.⁽⁷⁹⁾

Generalleutnant⁽⁸⁰⁾ Adolf Galland, an esteemed Luftwaffe ace who held the rank of *Gruppenführer*⁽⁸¹⁾ in the NSFK from 1944, had joined a similar *Luftsportverein* (Air Sports Association) in Gelsenkirchen a year before the NSFK was originally formed in 1932. He recalled how ‘25% of the adolescents were pupils [and] the remaining 75% were artisans, workers or employees, most of them unemployed. They came together for the one great goal to which they sacrificed all their time, strength and money. And that goal was: fly!’⁽⁸²⁾ The NSFK was split into three sections — powered flight, gliding, and ballooning — and it awarded a variety of gliding, wireless operation, aircraft modelling, ballooning, and skiing proficiency badges. The glider proficiency badges in particular were an immense source of pride for the young aviators (Figure 6). During his training at his local *Luftsportverein*, Galland spoke of how ‘the deep blue badge with the white seagull, which I was allowed to wear proudly in my buttonhole after passing the so-called A-Test, was much more important’ to him than the more prestigious glider qualifications he subsequently achieved.⁽⁸³⁾

The NSFK consistently stoked a sense of competitiveness within its members by holding a variety of both local and national contests. These young aviators often flocked to the interwar epicentre of German civil flight — the Wasserkuppe mountain in Hesse — in order to partake in glider flight altitude, speed, and endurance competitions, along with launching model aircraft. The NSFK ran sixteen dedicated glider construction workshops and aviation

schools, operating on Luftwaffe airfields where space allowed.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Its students were thus meant to be prepared for life in both the Luftwaffe and the Third Reich by shaping them into a diversely-trained ‘*ganzer Mann*’ (‘whole man’ – a well-rounded individual) of aviation. Working closely with Luftwaffe personnel, from sharing aircraft and airfields to instructors and examiners, undoubtedly exhilarated both the less senior NSFK members and the *Flieger-HJ* boys who wanted to enter the main air force. After the outbreak of the Second World War, it was of growing importance to align the NSFK’s training more directly with that of the Luftwaffe. Tight cooperation between the two institutions was crucial for establishing a constant supply of semi-trained personnel for the main air force.



Figure 6. An NSFK Glider Proficiency Badge, Class C (three seagulls). Note the inclusion of the NSFK ‘Icarus’ emblem at the bottom. (© Ailsby Collection)

As Lepage notes, ‘the Luftwaffe supported close relationships with these highly popular organizations as they developed future combat pilots for fighters and bombers, as well as ground personnel for technical and administrative duties.’⁽⁸⁵⁾ He continues that ‘the *Flieger-HJ* and the other flying associations provided future *Fallschirmjäger* (paratroopers, including glider-borne troops) and *Flakhelfer* (anti-aircraft gunners and searchlight personnel).’⁽⁸⁶⁾ This sentiment was naturally supported by the NSFK itself, with its handbook declaring that ‘the *NS.-Fliegerkorps* has now been given the task of carrying out pre-military aeronautical training and securing young people for the *Fliegertruppe* [flying troops], whose good training enables the Luftwaffe to turn these offspring into pilots who meet all requirements in a short timeframe.’⁽⁸⁷⁾ *Oberstleutnant* Adler would later proudly claim of the *Flieger-HJ* that ‘the careful selection of suitable boys, their guidance by teachers of the NSFK and their pre-military training have found confirmation and recognition in the war...great is the number of boys annually growing in this way in the Luftwaffe.’⁽⁸⁸⁾

As a staunch National Socialist, however, Adler’s assessment of the NSFK’s contribution to the Luftwaffe must be cautiously analysed. Cordts claimed that the organisation actually produced ‘highly motivated, if insufficiently developed offspring for the Luftwaffe’⁽⁸⁹⁾ — particularly when the NSFK became severely depleted after 1939 due to the war drawing many of its best instructors away. The NSFK’s somewhat amateur nature could be seen in how its *Korpsführer* by the end of the war, *Generaloberst* Alfred Keller, intended to remedy the Luftwaffe’s mounting losses by throwing NSFK-trained *Flieger-HJ* boys into battle more quickly. According to Galland, Keller ‘intended tackling the problem without any technical knowledge, merely aided by his NSFK *Standartenführer* and *Gruppenführer*.’⁽⁹⁰⁾ Furthermore, the extent to which the training in the NSFK translated successfully into Luftwaffe service is somewhat debatable. Admittedly, the NSFK’s *Bordfunkerschein* (‘wireless operator’s licence’) matched Luftwaffe requirements owing to the *Luftnachrichtentruppe* (Air Signals

Troops) being particularly committed to ‘providing as uniform a training of all students as possible, so that they know the foundations on which they can continue to build.’⁽⁹¹⁾

Further evidence of a technical disparity between the two organisations, however, was that the Luftwaffe did not formally recognise NSFK pilot licences, even though the NSFK and the Luftwaffe’s instructors often trained one another’s students. This resulted in a patchy, non-standardised level of pre-military aeronautical training, compounded by the Luftwaffe’s wartime commandeering of NSFK aircraft and the latter’s need to coexist with the independent flying associations it had absorbed in 1937. The *Hochschulinstitut für Leibesübungen* (HifL – University Institute for Physical Exercise) attempted to instil special NSFK factions into existing university flying associations. Yet *Die Abteilung für Luftfahrt* (AfL – Department of Aviation) at the Philipps-Universität Marburg ended up clashing with the HifL and the NSFK over this practice. According to Alexander Priebe, there were chronic issues regarding ‘aircraft storage and use, the sharing and repair of excessively strained aerodromes [and] the validity of NSFK training plans regarding the proportion of workshop training allocated.’⁽⁹²⁾ Despite these shortcomings, the NSFK undoubtedly served as an effective springboard for some Luftwaffe aspirants by equipping them with fundamental aeronautical knowledge and transferable skills.

6 FLUGBEGEISTERUNG AND THE ‘FLIEGERGEMEINSCHAFT’

On 17 November 1934, the Reich Ministry of Education had decreed that the promotion of aviation and *Flugbegeisterung* in German schools was in the ‘national-political’ interest. Frontline personnel often became schoolteachers to strengthen the connection between German education, youth, and future military service.⁽⁹³⁾ Thus, *Flieger-HJ* boys often enjoyed many exciting aeronautical opportunities through school as well as extracurricular activities — from aircraft modelling and visiting Luftwaffe airbases or aircraft manufacturers, to a lucky few even being taken up in the air on commercial *Lufthansa* aircraft or as passengers on bomber and transport aircraft. Göring had long promoted the NSFK as the perfect intermediary for the youths who yearned to serve in the Luftwaffe, asking in a speech from 1936

And you, German boy, do you not want to match the men who are leading the fighting machines from victory to victory? Does the desire to fly not live within you, along with fulfilling the duty of bearing arms in the ranks of the glory-crowned German Luftwaffe? In the model flying groups of the German *Jungvolk*⁽⁹⁴⁾ and in the flying units of the Hitler Youth, you will receive your first training if you have the desire and the aptitude. There, you will find meticulous instruction and the best training by proven teachers from the ranks of the *NS-Fliegerkorps*.⁽⁹⁵⁾

As the tiny NSFK had not yet been extracted from its larger sister organisation of the DLV by 1936, Göring’s emphasis on the former over the latter illustrated the Nazi preference for more politicised aeronautical training. Both Göring and Christiansen had often demanded that all German aviators should be ‘*erst Nationalsozialist, dann Flieger!*’ (‘a National Socialist first, then a flier!’).⁽⁹⁶⁾ This was intended as a further source of combat motivation and national unity by fostering stronger socio-political bonds between its personnel. An NSDAP decree from December 1936 stated that the German youth were to be

‘physically, mentally and morally educated in the spirit of National Socialism for the service of the people and the national community.’⁽⁹⁷⁾

In Anders G. Kjøstvedt’s words, ‘all Germans were to learn to feel increasingly committed to the *Volksgemeinschaft* [‘People’s Community’], experiencing a process of transcendence where they strove for the greater good for all.’⁽⁹⁸⁾ Gliding in particular, as Fritzsche has commented on extensively, lent well to this sense of constructing a *Fliegergemeinschaft* (‘fliers’ community’) in the NSFK because ‘teamwork was essential to the sport’⁽⁹⁹⁾ in order for gliders to be constructed, launched, and retrieved. The ranks of the NSFK worked hard to forge a friendly camaraderie which was intended to instil high morale and cooperative spirit among its members and students so that such attributes could be applied to their future Luftwaffe careers. This sentiment was fortified by a variety of recreational and extracurricular activities that were specifically tailored to strengthen the nation’s *Fliegergemeinschaft*. As an edition of *Der Adler* from 22 April 1941 declared, the first task of the NSFK was to teach within the *Flieger-HJ* that learning to fly was not the first priority; rather, a young pilot ‘should learn and experience that his personal achievement finds its higher fulfilment in the performance of the community to which he belongs.’⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

Charity fundraising initiatives were often held in this vein, with the NSFK being heavily involved in the *Tag der nationalen Solidarität* (‘Day of National Solidarity’) alongside the SA, SS, NSKK and the *Flieger-HJ*. This annual event signified the beginning of the *Winterhilfswerk des Deutschen Volkes* (‘Winter Relief of the German People’) campaign, in which donations of money, clothes, coal, and food were collected for impoverished Germans. One issue of *Deutsche Luftwacht* from January 1939 reported how the NSFK had parked an aeroplane outside of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin during the 1938 *Tag der nationalen Solidarität*. Two NSFK pilots stood giving lectures on the aeroplane and public talks on aviation in exchange for donations, with six other NSFK leaders — along with the *Korpsführer* himself — providing speeches on ‘the importance of the Day of National Solidarity’ in order to ‘emphasise the importance of aviation activity.’⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Taking part in sports, enjoying concerts, visiting art galleries with aviation exhibitions, and engaging in singsongs were also used frequently to strengthen these communal bonds.

Unsurprisingly, these songs often revolved around National Socialist rhetoric, as shown by some of the titles in a 1938 NSFK songbook: ‘*Das Hakenkreuz im weißen Feld*’ (‘The Swastika in the White Field’), ‘*Es zog ein Hitlermann hinaus*’ (‘A Hitler Man Went Out’) and ‘*Wir sind das Heer vom Hakenkreuz*’ (‘We are the Swastika Army’)(Figure 7).⁽¹⁰²⁾ In accordance with mainstream Nazi propaganda, antisemitism featured heavily in the NSFK’s adopted singsongs. In the song ‘*Brüder in Zechen und Gruben*’ (‘Brothers in Mines and Pits’), for instance, the verses call for its singers to ‘load the empty rifles, load with powder and lead/shoot at the Fatherland’s traitors — down with the Jewish tyranny!’⁽¹⁰³⁾ This material illustrates that, in line with the Third Reich at large, NSFK members were exposed to intensive antisemitic propaganda in order to prime them for the Nazi ‘racial’ war. To supplement this indoctrination, all leaders of the NSFK were subjected to compulsory training lectures at the *Hohe Schule der NSDAP* (Advanced School of the NSDAP) in Berlin-Dahlem. Such courses included ‘racial science, which means the foundations of the National Socialist *Weltanschauung* [‘worldview’] ... it is taught by which biological laws the

succession of a people is carried out, and how each type of people must endeavour to keep their genome pure.’⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

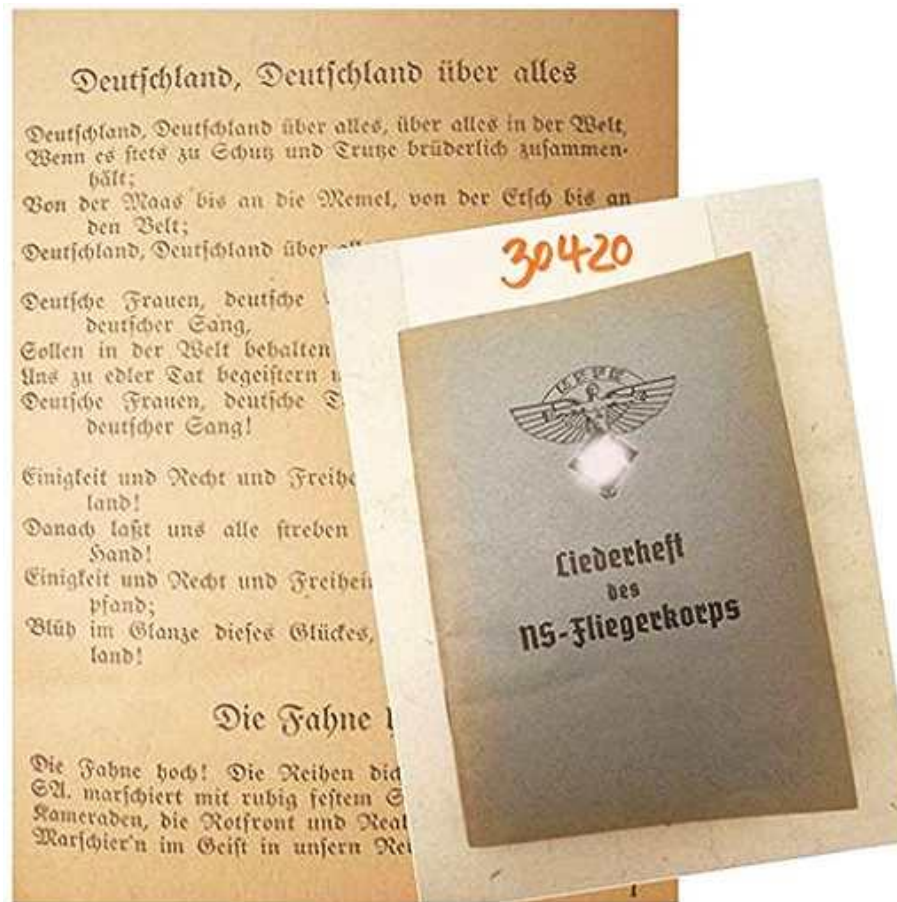


Figure 7. ‘Liederheft des NS-Fliegerkorps’ (‘NSFK Songbook’), 1938 (© Zentrales Verzeichnis Antiquarischer Bücher)

7 WARTIME PURPOSE AND PROPAGANDA OF THE NSFK

The NSFK, then, sought to consolidate the Nazi *Weltanschauung* that was being instilled within Germany’s youth — both at school and in the *Flieger-HJ* — as much as it aimed to augment their aeronautical knowledge. The incorporation of prominent Nazis like Christiansen and political accomplices like Loerzer into the NSFK’s ranks further reflected the organisation’s belief that its *Korpsführer* and subordinate leaders ‘must have an unwavering faith in the *Führer*’s idea and unconditionally obey the *Führer*’s orders.’⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Thus, although the NSFK’s early politicisation would come to wobble in its consistency, potency, and longevity, the NSDAP’s efforts to instil the organisation with National Socialism were persistent and pervasive. Operationally, however, Rawson has asserted that ‘the role of the NSFK then diminished rapidly’ following the transfer of some of its personnel to the *Luftwaffe* in 1935.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ Admittedly, the Austrian NSFK-*Obersturmführer*⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ Joseph Kaponig alleged in a post-war interrogation with British personnel that the NSFK ‘lost much

of its importance immediately after the outbreak of the war', although being a prisoner-of-war may have prompted his diminishment of the organisation's importance to the regime.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

Nevertheless, to characterise the NSFK's influence as having nosedived from 1935 onwards denotes a lack of awareness regarding its consolidation of control over Germany's flying associations and schools from 1937. Given that the NSFK potentially went on to train a considerable percentage of the personnel serving in the Luftwaffe since 1937 — having once constituted only a small section of the DLV in 1935 — such a conclusion is questionable.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ Indeed, both the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and the Second World War arguably meant that the NSFK obtained a much clearer focus and greater impetus for providing its students with pre-military aeronautical training *and* political instruction. The NSFK's determination to secure legions of young German boys who wanted to learn to fly could be seen in how its handbook attempted to convert parental fears regarding the safety of their sons to pride in their sacrifices for the good of the National Socialist state.

It will not go unnoticed that the Luftwaffe, even in peacetime, has casualties that might make some parents fret at letting their boys go to the Air Force. Flying is as much of a mission in peace as in war, and it must be flown! Here the enlightenment of the people must begin! Look at the map of Europe and look at the situation in Germany! From hardly any European country can one fly directly to another country without touching Germany.⁽¹¹⁰⁾

To attract such recruits, the Luftwaffe often held *Werbewochen* ('Propaganda Weeks') with both the *Flieger-HJ* and the NSFK. *Der Adler* reported that the *Werbewoche* held between 17 - 24 April 1941 'will be supported by lectures from Knight's Cross holders, the Luftwaffe music corps, and many other events.'⁽¹¹¹⁾ In addition, Nazi newsreels and Luftwaffe training films were shown in the cinema rooms installed within every NSFK-*Sturm*. This meant that the organisation could 'now present the films during promotional evenings [and] the sponsors [could] also learn about [the aircrews'] lives in the Luftwaffe.'⁽¹¹²⁾ Ranging from students to professionals, *Förderer* (patrons) of the NSFK were both male and female and numbered 636,000 by 1943.⁽¹¹³⁾ The *Förderer* offered monthly donations to their local NSFK branches in exchange for pride at supporting the organisation's efforts. In Karlsruhe, for example, the average *Förderer* contribution to the organisation totalled 1 Reichsmark per month (about £5 at present value).⁽¹¹⁴⁾

Wealthier *Förderer* often donated more, with one woman in Karlsruhe donating 50 Reichsmarks each month in 1938.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Nevertheless, the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* (Institute of Contemporary History) — founded in the 1950s — claimed that 'the main reason individuals preferred to become sponsoring members is likely to be due to the time saved that came from supporting membership versus active membership...in general, the political affiliation of the Fellows was not much in demand.'⁽¹¹⁶⁾ However, care must be exercised when accepting this statement at face value. As Theo J. Schulte points out, post-war German historians actively depoliticised the Wehrmacht to avoid entertaining the notion that 'an entire generation had been Nazified'⁽¹¹⁷⁾ — and it is not inconceivable that this phenomenon may have extended to paramilitary organisations like the NSFK that wielded civilian elements as well. When Bopp revealed his previous link to the organisation, for instance, Sommerfeld 'guessed that membership in the NSFK would be regarded as innocuous'⁽¹¹⁸⁾, as Bopp had never joined the Nazi Party. Yet the NSFK's *Förderer* — many of whom were in

the Luftwaffe — were, as was typical for the Third Reich's inhabitants, exposed to intermittent but virulent antisemitism.

This was predominantly delivered via *Deutsche Luftwacht* magazine, which the *Förderer* received as part of their subscription with the NSFK. The way in which antisemitic rhetoric was interwoven with everyday reportage can be observed in an issue of *Deutsche Luftwacht* from 1 February 1942, which begins with the coverage of a school exhibition in Vienna. After this, a full-length article entitled '*Die Kenntnis der Juden*' ('Knowledge of the Jews') laments that 'many hundreds of thousands of German families would not have lost property, land or workshops if they had had a real knowledge of the Jews. It was only due to their ignorance of the Jewish rogue that they could be tricked by the Jew again and again.'⁽¹¹⁹⁾ This weaponised language, then, exhibits how the NSFK trickled antisemitic propaganda into its publications in order to consolidate the ongoing Nazi 'racial war' against Jews. As Göring declared later that year at his Berlin *Sportpalast* speech on 4 October 1942, 'this is a great race war. It's about whether the German and Aryan will survive or if the Jew will rule the world, and that is why we are fighting abroad.'⁽¹²⁰⁾ The NSFK also contributed to Nazi propaganda that was consumed by the Luftwaffe through assisting its reporters with technical information. Daniel Uziel notes how the Luftwaffe's *Propagandakompanien* (PK – Propaganda Companies) made a special effort during the Second World War 'to try and find men with some kind of aviation knowledge, and for this purpose the RPA [*Reichspropagandaamt*, Reich Propaganda Office] cooperated with the local National Socialist Flyers Corps (NSFK) organisation.'⁽¹²¹⁾

8 THE NSFK'S DECLINE, COLLAPSE, AND POST-WAR LEGACY

Like the Luftwaffe, National Socialist rhetoric was ramped up within the NSFK during the war's later years in an attempt to galvanise the fighting spirit of its personnel. Where an average of sixty to seventy pupils had been passing through the NSFK each month earlier in the war, only sixteen to seventeen pupils were graduating each month by the end of 1944.⁽¹²²⁾ Cordts claimed that 'the *Chef des Ausbildungswesens des NSFK* (Head of Training in the NSFK) called on all German stations and the youth with a message for the *Flieger-HJ*: 'the Luftwaffe doesn't need the technical flier alone; rather, it needs the flying National Socialists!'⁽¹²³⁾ Nevertheless, Kaponig testified in his interrogation that he had heard *General der Flieger* Adolf Dickfield inform Göring that 'the G.A.F. [German Air Force] as such was finished and that there was no need to continue training' in the NSFK.⁽¹²⁴⁾ Galland claimed, however, that the nation's young student pilots 'wanted to try, even in the face of total military defeat [...] to prevent the destruction of the homeland.'⁽¹²⁵⁾ Some of the student pilots and NSFK affiliates were even thrown in as *Volkssturmmänner* (infantrymen of the *Volkssturm*) or with the *Fallschirmjäger* (German paratroopers) as a last-ditch attempt to fend off the Allied invaders.⁽¹²⁶⁾ This resulted in some being wounded or even killed in the closing days of the Third Reich, along with the threat of a swift execution if they were found wielding an offensive weapon after the 8 May 1945 surrender — thus illustrating their fervent dedication to fighting for the Third Reich.

The success with which the NSFK had presented itself as a truly National Socialist organisation was arguably reflected in the immense suspicion with which the Allies treated it after the war. A Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force report on the NSFK

noted that ‘the so-called *Fliegerstürme* (aviation companies) of the SA and SS were also incorporated into the DLV, and took a leading role in its administration. This nazification created a centrally administered organisation which served as the first reserve and training agency for the developing Luftwaffe and was soon to become the NSFK.’⁽¹²⁷⁾ Former NSFK members were strictly forbidden from voting in the 1946 Berlin state elections due to *politische Hinderungsgründe* (‘exclusion on political grounds’) in the British, French and American sectors.⁽¹²⁸⁾ The repercussions on voter turnout within these sectors may not have been insignificant, given that there were 1,051 former NSFK members inhabiting the neighbouring Soviet-governed Brandenburg province alone by 1947.⁽¹²⁹⁾

Certain ex-NSFK members even lost their property, jobs, and personal freedom as a partial result of their former membership. The pre-1938 president of the NSFK, Karl Waldstein, was sentenced to a year in prison and forced to relinquish his property due to having given ‘material and moral’ support to the NSDAP in his role with the NSFK.⁽¹³⁰⁾ Though Waldstein strongly denied having ‘propagated Nazism’, he did confess to networking with ‘leading functionaries of the Nazi Party’ via the organisation.⁽¹³¹⁾ In another example, a German telegraph worker was dismissed by the postal service after the war on the grounds of his former membership in the SA, the NSDAP, and the NSFK. During his appeal to the Provisional Commission, when asked to provide evidence of anti-fascist activity, he simply confirmed that he felt ‘completely guiltless concerning the developments in Germany.’⁽¹³²⁾

This case study illustrates that even after the collapse of the Third Reich, some NSFK members had been politicised successfully enough to defend an entirely discredited regime at the risk of losing whatever they had left after the war. Nevertheless, an Allied Expeditionary Force intelligence dossier on the NSFK also recorded that ‘any shortcomings from a Nazi ideological point of view’ were often ‘adequately compensated for’ by the airmen’s ‘experience and usefulness.’⁽¹³³⁾ The report later points out that the appointment of the non-political Keller as the NSFK’s new *Korpsführer* in 1943 ‘may be indicative that the purely military control over the NSFK...has progressively increased.’⁽¹³⁴⁾ Moreover, even supporting the ‘wrong’ form of fascism could spell trouble for NSFK members. Kaponig claimed that he was a former member of the *Vaterländische Front* (Fatherland Front), an ‘Austrofascist’ organisation that was opposed to the Austro-German *Anschluss* (‘annexation’). He recalled in his post-war interrogation that he had previously been put on trial in Vienna by the NSDAP for ‘expressing insubordinate views about the regime.’⁽¹³⁵⁾ Although failing to express solidarity with the National Socialists was hardly an unusual occurrence for Austrian and German aviators after the Second World War, the fact that Kaponig voiced his ‘own’ form of fascism to Allied interrogators arguably demonstrated how strongly he felt about his political difference of opinion to the Nazis.

The fact that certain members held views at odds to the regime thus suggests that the NSFK’s politicisation was not wholly effective. This was even true in the case of individuals who had once been staunchly National Socialist, but who became disillusioned with the organisation. Hanns Stock — whom Edmund S. Meltzer described as having ‘started out with apparently solid Nazi affiliations but whose situation then became more ambiguous’⁽¹³⁶⁾ — had been ‘appointed to the NSFK through no effort of his own, and the Nazi rector of the University of Munich distrusted his political reliability.’⁽¹³⁷⁾ Despite the fact that Stock had attended SA leadership training, ‘when he was named an NSFK squad leader he refused to join the [Nazi]

Party and at length was summoned by the Gestapo.’⁽¹³⁸⁾ That such men were reprimanded for their deviating political views, then, further corroborates this paper’s observation that the NSFK’s politicisation faltered upon occasion. However, it could also be argued that such potent intolerance for being even slightly misaligned with the idealised Nazi *Weltanschauung* demonstrated the extreme degree to which the NSFK was steeped in National Socialism.

9. CONCLUSION

The official emblem of the NSFK was a statue of Icarus, the Greek mythological figure whose wax wings — sculpted by his father Daedalus — had melted after he flew too close to the sun. Such an emblem was ironically fitting for the organisation whose demise came at the hands of the very creator that had encouraged it to fly. The NSFK had once wielded a significant level of both military and political control over its sizeable membership and students, from reinforcing their antisemitic views and strengthening their support for the *Führer*, to fostering a pre-military brotherhood ready for the Luftwaffe’s air war. Along with its blatant appeal to the *Flugbegeisterung* of its members and *Flieger-HJ* pupils, the NSFK had persuasively interwoven National Socialist propaganda with a diverse pre-military training scheme. The effectiveness with which its pre-military training was delivered could be inconsistent and, in many cases, was insufficient. Despite this, the NSFK’s instructors still provided a well-rounded foundation for its members that enabled many of them to enjoy fruitful careers in the Luftwaffe. In this respect, then, the organisation was relatively successful in fulfilling its overall aims of supplying pre-military aeronautical training to the German youth — both within its own organisation and the *Flieger-HJ*. It remained a voluntary organisation in line with Göring’s desire to have only the most dedicated aviators instructing future pilots for the Luftwaffe, and the fact that it never had to rely on conscription arguably reflected its continued popularity in both peacetime and wartime.

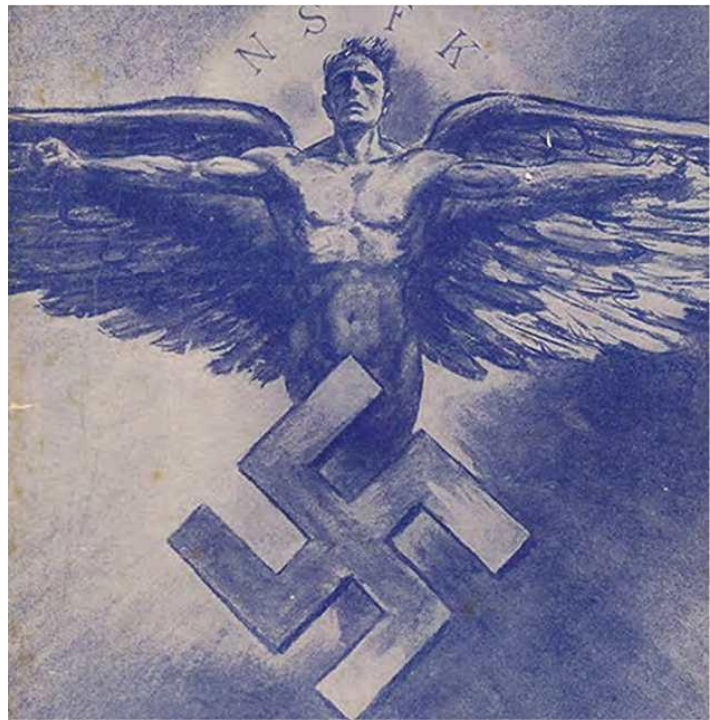


Figure 8. The NSFK’s emblem, which depicted the Greek mythological figure Icarus with wings expanded in front of the swastika, *Deutsche Luftwacht: Modellflug*, Band 9, 1944 (© Deutsche Luftwacht)

On the other hand, the lack of conscription in the NSFK may have also been symptomatic of its growing irrelevance during the last few years of the war. Whilst the organisation was successful in producing some highly skilled future Luftwaffe personnel, it also had to cater to those who either simply flew for pleasure or who did not meet the entry requirements for the Luftwaffe. This meant that the NSFK could not always simply churn out an endless supply of ready-made aviators for war duties — and neither was it equipped nor funded adequately

to do so. Instead, the NSFK attempted to compensate for its wartime shortcomings through bombarding its members and affiliates with National Socialist dogma, from slogans and singsongs to magazines and lectures. An overall generalisation of the organisation's success in politicising its members is arguably more difficult to establish than the achievements of its pre-military training. Yet, as displayed by the fierce dedication of some ex-NSFK members to National Socialism even beyond the Third Reich, such radical political measures had an enduring impact among certain individuals. Despite its operational and political limitations, then, the NSFK served as a crucial supplier of zealous and ambitious young fliers and aeronautical personnel — whether they enthused over Nazism, aviation, or a mixture of the two — for over a decade. The NSFK's contribution to the Luftwaffe's operational composition and political culture, then, should not continue to be overlooked within its English and German historiography.



Figure 9. The ceremonial opening of the NSFK's staff building at Berlin's Meierottostraße 8/9, 18 January 1939 (© Deutsche Luftwacht)

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