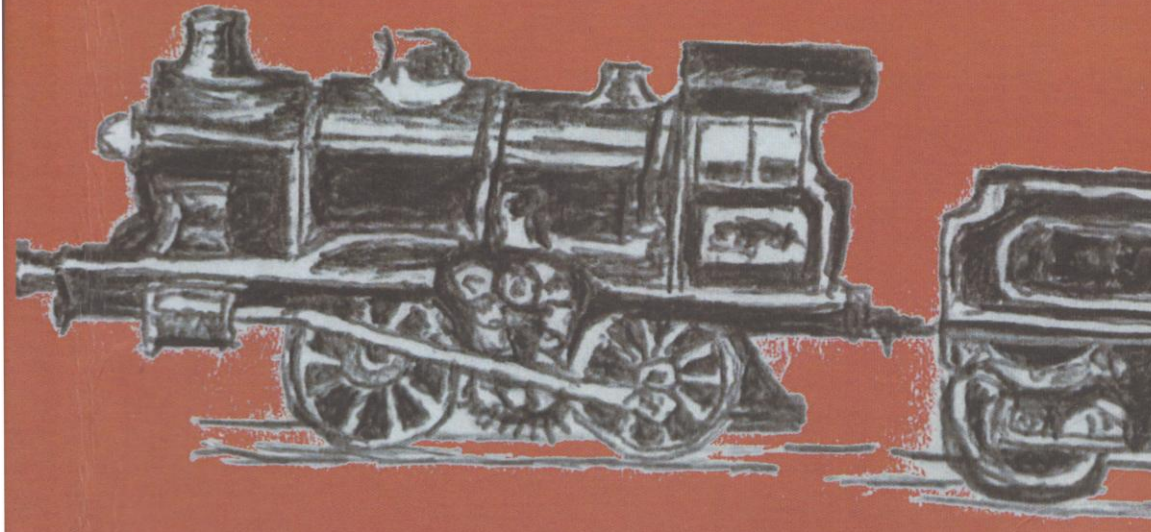
Fritz-Dieter Köpcke

Tausche Stahlhelm gegen Eisenbahn

Glückliche Kindheit im zerbombten Emden



Stahlhelms For Locos

by

Fritz-Dieter Köpfke

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1. A Beginning

Closing the front door, he heard the phone ring. Six speedy steps. Just made it.

It is Frau Schulte, who would like to excuse her little Sebastien from football training. He was very interested to know the reason.

"Oh dear, Herr Kollmann, Sebastien is finding the training too strenuous. Yesterday he was so exhausted that he went up to bed right after supper. A whole hour of running, jumping and playing is too much for him."

Already yesterday another mother had made it known her little Gregor would not be participating in the running and fitness training and would only play a bit of football. Running, hopping and jumping – that was not to his taste. Far too strenuous!

Frank Kollmann is a little frustrated. Out of 10 new registrants to the team, two had already cancelled. Over the past year, he had with some sadness noticed again and again that fifteen to twenty per cent of newly-

registered pocket-sized-footballers had obviously not grown up with the concept of making an effort. Living in retirement, since 2001 Frank had looked after the children's team of a local club, SV Frisia Loga. In order to get youthful legs to link up with a football, he devoted his time to the G-Juniors, despite his other diversions and hobbies. While he was rooting out his training schedule and searching for his notebook in order to remove young Sebastien from the team list, his thoughts turned to the past. Like a video recording running back in time, images of his own childhood emerged without him even having to close his eyes, and it was at first his earliest years that occupied his mind.

Every year he greeted 10 new kids to the team. The World- and European championships each year doubled their membership again. If parents registered with him, he assumed that the boys (and also girls) were keen, at least initially, to play football and that parents only brought to him children eager to try out the sport. It was all the more surprising for Frank, and rather disappointing, that he observed again and again a high percentage of children – a third would not be too high a figure – proved to be clumsy in movement and possessing little co-ordination skills.

From the first, tests right at the start of the training hour indicated that a large number of these kids could barely run backwards, or stand tiptoe on one leg for one second. It is best to draw a veil over the more complex training necessary for any footballer. Additionally, it was often the case that 10 of these little footballers carried two or three kilos too much weight. In spite of that, in his opinion it was important to persevere, to bring about an improvement in endurance and

dexterity. Moreover, it is well known football is a team sport that encourages a feeling of belonging and team spirit, whilst providing children with a good deal of enjoyment.

However, after a year or so, an onset of illnesses and allergies occurred, for the most part colds accompanied or not with fever, and Frank often felt this onset supported his views about the lack of training and physical games.

One Saturday a few Octobers ago, G-Team in Leer was scheduled for a tournament of the leading teams of the Lower Saxony football league, in which 8 groups of 4 teams, including the SV Frisia Loga, would meet one of the other 7. It is hard to believe, but out of fifteen little G-league-juniors, eight parents in just eight brief words cancelled that Saturday. Either the child had caught cold, or a fever, or a bit of drizzle and damp grass made the parents fear for their health if they ventured out of the house. Frank had to turn to a fellow trainer in another league to bring the team to the necessary strength.

Frank laid his league notebook to one side, exchanged writing-desk for seat, stretched his legs out and let his videotape-thoughts run further backwards. These ever-increasing occurrences of shortfalls and Frau Schulte′s phone call just now, these awakened memories of his childhood and his schoolfellows and close friends and then of his playmates and the children in the neighbourhood as he was growing up.

Hunger, poverty and austerity during the war years and

through the post-war years into the 1950′s shaped and hardened his childhood and youth. What a difference to the way today′s boys and girls grow up!

Frank knew only too well that the freedom to play without supervision, finding pleasure in the adventure of wandering from here to there, and of playing in the street: that is all too rare nowadays.

He reflected to himself about other aspects of his childhood as they passed before his eyes, how in comparison the children of today are so much more restricted than children in the 1940s and 1950s. Frank considered his own point of view – as he thought now of his two uncles Theo and Kai – that nowadays there are many more incentives for children to stay indoors. In contrast to the war- and post-war years, children today are overexposed and oversaturated with the TV programmes offered them from 5.30 in the morning until 9 at night. For many, there is the option of playing videos or DVD′s or occupying themselves for hours on end on games consoles or MP3 players.

The adventures he and his friends experienced are delivered to today′s children via television. When innumerable brands hand out packets of crisps and chocolate bars to kids, there is a great danger that sport and games will lose out in the equation. In many cases the consequence is obesity and, in the future, an inevitable decline of health.

All the ‘advantages’ of progress are an unequal balance against the advantages enjoyed by himself and his playmates.

Frank's boyhood situated itself far outside the norm, a very different world that can never be brought back. He was aware very few children of his age-group grew up with such an exceptionally protecting and prosperous family. Coming of age with the experience of war, in straitened and frequently demanding living conditions, and looking back on those times with terror and horror, it was for Frank still the happiest period of his life. For him and for most of his friends, it was a time of adventure, discovery and freedom.

As if it were an old film, before Frank's eyes there appeared scenes and adventures, and droll not to say amusing experiences brought back from his childhood.

At the beginning of the film, the subtitles would read: '*Forty Years In Emden*'.

2. A Father Who Would Not Join

Frank was born in Emden, a town in north-west Germany, in 1936. Due to his war service and relocations as a civil servant, Frank's father lived only intermittently with his family in Emden, and Frank as the only child, cared for by his mother and aunts, was left to do more or less what he wanted. You would not say it was a strict upbringing.

Frank's father, a very likable man, was head of planning at the Emden hydraulic engineering office — and he hated his job. From a young age he loved everything railway-related and already as a schoolboy was firmly resolved he would follow a career with the German state railway.

After being given the so-called 'emergency baccalaureate', however, he was conscripted in 1914 and following a few weeks on the front he was wounded so severely in his right eye by shrapnel that his eyesight never really returned to normal. Further service for Kaiser and country was spared him, but a job with the railways was out of the question on account of his poor

vision. As a consequence, he took to a joyless study of hydraulic engineering at Hanover, which he finished off after a long period of study, then ended up as a construction *assessor* in the North Sea island of Borkum, attached to the hydraulic engineering office in Emden. He married Frank′s mother in 1935.

Although Frank was unaware of it as a boy of primary school age, he later recognised both from the conduct of his father and from conversations between his mother and her two sisters that he carried out his duties as head of planning with no great passion for his line of work. Always punctual, civil and very well-regarded by his colleagues and subordinates, he constantly felt the loss of enjoying a career with his beloved railways. The female relatives he had in Emden often described him as "easy", which is an Emden expression for having a lack of motivation and for someone who deals with incoming problems by sitting on the fence. However, although Frank′s father was a kindly, quiet and level-headed man, he could knuckle down when it mattered, in the event of a bombing raid for example. That his ideal job of a career in the railways was impossible on account of his injury was in no way a check to his fascination for shipping, docks and buoyage.

During the years he lived in his parent′s house, Frank recalled, his father was interested almost exclusively in railway matters and doubtless that was just as true after he left. Frequent visits to the railway station, a scrupulous examination of every Märklin and Trix catalogue he could buy, as well as involved designs for model railways, all this pretty much filled up his leisure time. A further hobby was the reading of timetables. When asked what the right train connection was, say

from Osnabrück to Strahlsund for the coming Monday, he had been able to provide quite a few people quickly and precisely with that particular day's state railway 'info points'.

His father remained 'only' a buildings assessor for nearly 10 years, waiting for the long-deserved promotion to head of planning that was long kept left hanging up in the air. However, in this there was little wonder.

"When will you finally join the Party, Herr Kollmann?"

Frank's mother frequently brought up that phrase when her sisters came round. Understandably, these words stayed stuck in Frank's memory ever since.

One time his mother was invited for coffee by the boss's wife, who was an ardent supporter of the Führer, and she brought Frank with her. For him it was a wonderful afternoon, as her now grown-up son had left his toys behind back at home. Frank was left to play in a neighbouring room, so that the adults could talk without being disturbed. He occupied himself with metal tanks equipped with rubber caterpillar tracks that were able to climb over even books, and there was also a vast array of Lineol model soldiers together with vehicles of every type, to say nothing of an Anker stone block set.

The talk of the women naturally did not interest him much. When however his father was brought into the conversation, he listened a little to the talk. This was the moment for the pressing desire of the hostess to bring up the issue of how Frank's mother might be able to persuade her man how vital it was for the Fatherland

that he joined up with the Party.

Politics was never spoken about in the house around Frank. His mother and her sisters were not informed enough about political matters to speak with his father about it. And his father succeeded in avoiding the issue of joining with his boss.

At the beginning of 1939, after that long period of waiting, his father was promoted. Frank's mother kept in her photo album an article from the local East Frisian newspaper in which it is very obvious the focus that day was not on his father's promotion, but on recognising the achievements of one of his subordinates who exemplified the spirit of the Party; a true and serviceable Party member!

> **Promotions At Hydraulic Engineering Department**
>
> On the birthday of the Führer a ceremony took place at the Head Office of the Hydraulic Engineering Bureau.
>
> After a speech by the manager, Oberbau councillor De..., in which he particularly stressed the increased performance of his workforce over the last year, an edict of the minister of transport, Dr Dorpmüller, was announced, through which this exceptional performance would be acknowledged.
>
> The manager then spoke a few words in honour of long-serving members of the workforce by presenting decorations for loyal service. Afterwards, the following promotions and appointments were announced, on this the Führer's birthday:
>
> Government-Land Surveyor Le... to Land Surveillance Council Member (holder of a silver party badge); waterways-

> probationer Th... to waterways-assistant (Th...is a well-known holder of a golden party badge); Ordinary Seaman Günther Kr... to clerk-probationer on the grounds of his performance in the competition for state professionals in 1938, from which he emerged as district winner in the dredger industry. The government planning assessor Ko... was promoted to head of government planning.
>
> With sincere greetings to the Führer the commemoration hour was brought to a close.

Frank had retained only a few events in his memory of his earliest childhood until his first day at school: happy days in the house and garden at Emden, situated in Zeppelinstraße, and playing in the sandbox at his neighbour's house with Eva his very first puppy love, who knew how to bake glorious sand cakes with her metal mini-moulds; rail journeys to Aunt Grete in Berlin and to his grandfather in Ludwigslist; and a less pleasant memory of what seemed a very protracted hospital stay in the isolation ward at Aurich-Sandhorst, for scarlet fever.

The outbreak of war in 1939 and the first six months of 1940 passed by without Frank being able to remember anything at all of consequence.

Then his father was conscripted and, as a result, Frank grew up until 1944 with no paternal relationship. It was just his mother and his two aunts and grandmother who looked after and spoiled him (in so far as it was possible to do so in those days).

It was freedom for Frank without end!

3. Visit To Kiel

In 1943 Frank experienced two interesting weeks in Kiel. His Uncle Karl lived there. Frank's relatives called him 'uncle' though he was really only a cousin of his father. Uncle Karl was four years older than Frank's father, and had been able to quit his war duties due to a serious injury to his leg. Frank had seen him only in photos, which showed him to be a well-dressed and dignified man in possession of a thick head of white hair. He wore rimless spectacles that gave him a rather reserved and severe appearance. He and his wife, Frank's Aunt Maria, had invited Frank and his mother for his 50th birthday, on May 1st 1943. They had no children of their own and wanted to get to know Frank better.

The fear of bombing raids made Frank's mother hesitate to make the journey to Kiel at first, as the initial raids on Emden had just taken place. Uncle Karl attempted to reassure her: "We have a safe anti-aircraft shelter and Bunker; besides, the attacks have been sporadic and the bombs have not caused much damage in the Wik district. If more raids occur, they'd most likely be in the harbour district, where the hangars for storing seed are

located: they wouldn't target residential areas."

Frank's mother was reassured. So, some days later, he and his mother were stood waiting on the platform at the station in west Emden for the train to Bremen, where they needed to change trains: mother with suitcase, Frank with shoulder-bag. Already at Emden they had their first delay, for which no reason was given. Frank however waited eagerly to see what sort of engine would be pulling the train, and he hoped it would be an express one. From his father's assorted catalogues, he knew the popular national railway steam locomotives, as well as the number located on the boiler of every passenger, freight and express train

At last, the train arrived, an express coupled to a class-38 loco. The engine was a decade old, belonging to the class most common to both express and branch lines. It wasn't something to inspire much enthusiasm.

They arrived in Bremen roughly two hours later, and there they had to change from platform 1 to 8 so they could catch the express to Hamburg. As this was almost half an hour late, they had to wait once again.

And then it arrived. There, facing Frank, was his dream engine! At last, an express locomotive, class number 01. The powerful machine majestically and slowly idled past them, sending out white steam from its cylinders and wrapping them both in a cloud emitting the wonderful scent of hot water, fire and smoke. Rooted to the spot, Frank was entranced by the three gigantic drive wheels, two-metres in height, and the connecting rods.

The tender eased past and huge letters inscribed onto its flat surface, that he had not seen in the Märklin catalogue, rose up before him. At that time Frank could count very well, but he had not yet reached the reading stage.

"What does it say on the tender?", he called out to his mother through all the noise.

"Oh, it's some sort of advertisement. It says: *WHEELS WILL ROLL FOR VICTORY*".

As Frank and his mother hurried fast as they could to claim a seat, no further explanation of this peculiar phrase was forthcoming. Frank also sensed that his mother couldn't really offer up much more by way of an explanation. He soon forgot all about it.

In Hamburg-Altona they had to change again and they arrived in Kiel late afternoon.

Uncle and Aunt collected them at the station and a half hour later they stepped into Uncle Karl's comfortable three-room home in Feldstraße. Aunt Maria was a former teacher in a trade school and very much fancied herself in the art of cooking. So there to greet them was a slice of dry gugelhupf cake, which Frank however thought had had much of its sweetness extracted from it. The cocoa too tasted a bit watery.

"Your Uncle Karl works in a bank and he's paid not at all badly," his mother had told him at the start of their journey, "But your aunt Maria is extremely thrifty, and I might even add stingy."

That much, indeed, was clear from the first meal.

Aunt Maria was telling his nervous mother that she had recently taken a journey to town on the route-1 tramline, in order to shop for a few things unavailable in the Wik district. She was in the vicinity of the Holstenstraße when the sirens sounded, and so she made her way to the underground anti-aircraft bunker. At the heavy impact of the bombs, the densely-packed people stood inside the shelter – only a few elderly or sick people were able to sit – quivered fearfully and cried out.

After the all-clear signal, and while she was making her way out of that awful place, Aunt Maria was presented with a macabre sight.

"Imagine it, Selma," she related, "I looked round me, at where the flames were, over to where the bombs had hit, and I saw something in the direction of the Meislahn textile business. The building had been struck by a bomb, and hundreds of women's stockings were hanging on the overhead cable all down the street!"

4. Football in Kiel-Wik

Frank's fears he might be bored at his Uncle and Aunt's in Kiel were luckily not borne out. Shortly after going out into the street four or five boys came up to speak to him and asked him where he came from.

"I'm here visiting my uncle: it's his birthday."

"And, you're from Kiel?", asked the boy who was the obvious leader of the group.

"Nope, from Emden", Frank replied.

"Emden, that's the little dump next to Holland? What's the place? East Frisia, I think. My father went there once to see a friend and he told us what a lousy hole it is. He brought back a saying for my mother from the trip: "*There where the East Fris'ns dwell / you want to get out of there pell mell*".

"You've no idea how great it is in Emden and it's a cracking place where we can play down by the canal and in the swimming baths," retorted Frank, "And anyway

Emden has a huge harbour and your harbour is how big?"

But the gangling leader, probably two years older than Frank, waved this aside and continued: "Kiel is the biggest city in Germany..."

"No, no", ventured a somewhat smaller, sturdy lad. "Berlin is a bigger one. I know this because our Führer governs there. And the Führer always does that in the biggest city. My father said also that Germany will win the war against England, France and Africa and then all the people in these lands will be made slaves here. I once read in a book the white Americans have already done that with the slaves from Africa."

"But the English have permanently flattened Kiel and Emden with their bombs", ventured Frank, as he caught sight of a ruined building nearby. "When the hell is it going to end?", he continued, finding his courage and scrutinising the little lad who was too clever by half.

"Very soon", replied Kerli, well-schooled by his father. "The Führer will soon be building awesome gigantic air defence guns. With these *any* English plane that goes anywhere near a German city will be certain to be shot down. With every shot hitting its target, the tommies will quickly lose the desire to bombard us anymore."

Envisaging guns such as these was a convincing argument and it set everybody's mind at ease, especially seven-year-old Frank.

"Do you know how to play football?", the leader asked

him, to which the young Emder had to answer no, for he and his peers found other things to do when they came to visit him.

"Do you know anything about catching a ball?", one little chap asked with a doubtful expression.

"Of course," Frank answered self-assuredly, which perfectly corresponded to the truth, for the girls in his street often played a game called dodgeball, and he joined in with them in order to pick up basic catching and throwing skills.

"Well then, come with me, you can keep goal for us", decided the leader, whose name, Frank had gathered in the meantime, was Karl-Friedrich.

They set out for a road in a side street, the Düvelsbeker Weg, which branched off from Feldstraße, then came to an empty site that was fairly level and partly overgrown with grass. On the way, the rules of football were explained to Frank who waited eagerly for his first chance to have a go.

The boys had marked out a goal with chalk or paint on an adjacent partition in the wall of a house. The opposing goal consisted of two iron bars knocked into the ground. The Kielers were as unable as the Emders to obtain a real football. They played with a black rubber ball, relatively large in size but not as big as a real football.

"This ball actually belongs to my sister", explained Karl-Friedrich, in saying which he bounced and then caught the ball.

"At the moment she's lost interest in ball games, so it's natural I take the ball along with me."

"This ball is also a lot better than a leather one!", added Andreas, a friend of Karl-Friedrich. "A real football is scarily heavy and doesn't fly so far. With this one it's a thousand times better."

After a while, Frank got the hang of how the game of football worked and he felt an enthusiasm for the sport. As he got quite good at catching and was quite agile and quickly understood what was expected of a goalkeeper, he became a sought-after man in goal when two teams played against each other.

Unfortunately, the fun in Kiel lasted only a few days. On one day a trip with his uncle was scheduled, then it rained continuously for the final three days of the holiday.

The return journey took Frank and his mother past Altona, Bremen, Oldenburg and Leer then back to Emden. There in the main station of Altona, the train to Bremen was approaching them from behind and there was not much time available until the departure and Frank could not identify the engine by sight. All he saw in the distance was a smoking black "giant". On arriving in Emden, he was able to get his first look at the engine that brought them both back. In Oldenburg they had to take a local train, a *"dawdle-train"* as they say, which halted at each and every stop. Clearly not an express, just a tank engine, but he recognised it from his father's catalogue. A series 78.

5. Bunker School And Splinter Finds

In the autumn of 1943, Frank began life in earnest. It was his first day at school in the Emden-Wolthusen primary school: fifteen boys and fifteen girls made up Class 1. The first lessons could not be called well-ordered. The air-defence sirens sounded repeatedly throughout the day and many lessons were cancelled altogether. In 1944, due to the missed lessons, classes were reduced by about half, so after that school lessons at Wolthusen primary took place in the air-defence bunker.

There was more room available for the pupils in the air-raid shelter, a stander board and school desk for each pupil, as well as a quickly and crudely made wooden bench.

Today in the Emden "Bunker Museum", located at the former air-defence shelter in Holzsägerstraße, you can pay a visit to just such a classroom and a few years ago Frank did go to see the museum. In his opinion though, *his* emergency bunker classroom was more primitive, smaller and less well-lit than the room in the museum,

which he felt was far less oppressive. However, the Bunker Museum is always worth a visit. Its voluntary workers have a commendable and excellent level of commitment, accompanied by a great attention to detail. Day by day, they collect an ever-increasing amount of memorabilia

Frank's teacher, Mrs Thurn, taught reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as local history. She was an already oldish woman with a stiff, upright gait. It was as if, instead of a flexible spinal column, her body was held in place by an iron bar. Her grey hair was tautly back-combed, resolving itself into a thick and sturdy knot. She was strict and, as far as he could recall, utterly humourless. However, she enjoyed a good deal of respect and was not unpopular. In only a short time, she taught the children how to read and write, despite the frequent bombing raids. In addition, she instilled into her class the basic principles of arithmetic, to a greater or lesser degree.

The lack of a break bell in the shelter was of no small concern to Mrs Thurn, conscientious as she was about starting each lesson at the exact right time and ending it punctually. Her small wristwatch lay on her desk right next to a large alarm clock. This latter she set before each period and so, reliably if shrilly, it announced the end of each lesson.

If there was an air raid warning during the night, it was an important talking point among the boys the following morning: whose was the biggest?

Shell fragment was what was meant. If bombing raids

on Emden were successful or allied bombing units had flown over cities in the Hamburg-Berlin direction, the anti-aircraft stations shot their ineffective shells into the heavens, so that fragments of them rained down from the sky.

Immediately after breakfast, or even before, every boy eagerly searched his garden and the street in and around his house, foraging for anti-aircraft fragments collected into in tins and small boxes. The largest fragment was wrapped up in a trouser pocket or hidden in a satchel, whereby it was transported to school, though the teacher in fact had expressly forbidden this.

Until now Frank had only been able to find insignificant fragments. But once upon a time he was king of the day among the collectors, and that happened in the following way:

One morning Frank′s mother, on her way back from a visit to town, noticed that a roof tile of the house had shattered and she had spoken of this to her sister, for although there was only minor damage, she could not explain the cause. As soon as Frank overheard this, he hurried up the steep attic stairs to investigate the damage. And as a matter of fact he could see the sky through the missing tile. As he examined the floor, at first he could only see red chips of stone and tile fragments. And then he saw it: an almost 10cm tall and gloriously janked fragment stuck atop of a cardboard box in which silver and gold Christmas tree baubles had been stored. Clearly, there was no Christmas tree left in one piece inside the box; there was nothing but gold and silver rubble glittering in the morning light. What would happen to next Christmas was of little interest to Frank. To carefully unpack the fragment, pull it out the box,

then make it vanish into a trouser pocket: all that was achieved in a single moment. Unfortunately, there was then an impatient wait of half an hour until it was time to go to school and then, as stated at the beginning of the chapter, Frank was the undisputed King of the Chips, for the second largest fragment, found by one of the boys where it had fallen down in a country road, was at least 2 cm smaller.

6. A Cocked-And-Ready Buoy Tender And A Plane In Flames

"Would you like to pay a visit to the buoy tenders today?", his father asked Frank one day, after a morning of air-raid alarms that had driven the Emders into their shelters. Now though things seemed set for a quiet afternoon. It would, of course, be an interesting "outing" for Frank. The ships belonging to the hydraulic engineering office all had the same colour scheme - the tour steamship 'Randzel' (Frank can still remember the name very well), the survey ships, and the buoy tenders. Black hulls, brown superstructure and yellow funnels.

As he and his father approached the buoy yard, where the buoy tender was docked, Frank caught sight of a vessel that looked like a small warship. Hull, deck and funnels were painted grey, and an anti-aircraft gun stood in front of the fo'c'sle.

There was no longer any work going on in the buoy tenders. In wartime it was not a high priority to look out for the Ems fairway buoys or check their condition. One of the German ships running the Ems-route had been

attacked and sunk by aircraft, his father explained.

Two people were on the deck. Frank could not work out whether they were former members of the crew or belonged to the navy. Whilst the older man was stood on the gangway engaging in some discussion with his father, the younger gave Frank a guided tour of the steamer, providing him with all the relevant information. As they reached the front of the deck, and Frank admired the gun with great interest, the kindly man asked him, while pointing at the flak, "Well, my boy, do you believe you could fire off a salvo with this gun?"

Frank gazed wide-eyed at him and immediately nodded vigorously.

"Okay, then let's do it. This is a two-centimetre air-defence gun. I turn it like so in the direction of the Ems, ensuring that it is at the correct altitude so you don't hit someone in the harbour or sink a ship."

Then he showed the already rather excited Frank a few more moves that a gunner has to carry out and all Frank had to do was crook his index finger. The resulting bang did not feel that loud to Frank, but that was because in wartime Emders had to endure many loud noises.

As a souvenir, Frank received the emptied two cm bronze-coloured cartridge case, which meant next day he was able to impress his schoolfellows in a grand way.

In the summer holidays of 1944 Frank spent some time,

or it would be more accurate to say, obliged to spend some time at his Aunt Martha's in Veenhusen, a little village ten kilometres north of Leer, and 25km in distance from Emden. He can no longer recall the reason for this forced stay. No bombs had fallen here; perhaps that was the reason his parents took him to his aunt's.

Without his friends, deprived of adventure, he was terribly bored.

A few days before, Frank's mother had acquired a hefty book from one of her school friends. On the cover there was a picture of a knight who had laid low many an opponent with his sword. On the cover it said *"German Heroic Legends"*. As the first three days in Veenhusen were rained out, Frank got stuck into the book and had his Aunt read the stories one after the other and only mealtimes stopped him gazing at the exciting images.

He was fascinated by Dietrich von Bern, the powerful king of the Goths. With his sword Nagelring, forged by the skilful dwarves, Dietrich defeated in single combat all the brave heroes drawn to Bern, who were then sworn to eternal fealty. Frank found the tale of the battle of Dietrich and his men against Laurin king of the dwarves intoxicatingly exciting.

When the weather cleared up, even Dietrich von Bern or Siegfried could not hold him back in the house. Aunt Martha lived in a small *fehnhaus* (that is to say, a Frisian farmhouse) with an empty barn attached to the rear. There were no animals. The little farmstead would later be brought back to life when her son, Frank's cousin Helmut, came back from the war.

Frank roamed through the empty barn, searching every nook and cranny for something that would provide a good means of distraction; and he struck it lucky. On a dusty shelf lay a sickle that was somewhat rusted but whose edges were still sharp.

Immediately he armed himself with the item, imagining himself to hold in his hands the sword Nagelring. But where were the opponents that he could lay low to come from?

In fact, they were to be found in droves. Behind the barn he discovered a patch early on in season, a strip of earth on which were growing giant stinging nettles, for him the size of a man. This, then, was the enemy, one with which he had previous and often unpleasant encounters. The battle against the stinging nettles lasted over an hour, until finally all the enemies of Dietrich von Bern were laid low.

There were no children in the neighbouring house, none his age anyway. So the boredom returned, at least until the day he was a spectator of a wartime tragedy he was made witness to.

Searching for lapwing nests, Frank had been wandering the deserted pastureland, which in these last months of the war were unmown, and he was about five or six hundred metres away from his Aunt Martha′s house in the direction of the Emden-Ruhr area railway line when two things happened at once. From the direction of Emden a train steamed forth, a locomotive with three tanks. About six to eight hundred metres away from him he was suddenly aware of the noise of engines. A lone

single-engined British warplane roared over his aunt's house, flying low. With luck and lightning-quick wit he threw himself down lengthwise, so that he was facing the railway line.

What happened next greatly affected Frank, and preoccupied him throughout his childhood. The Englishman – that this was an English plane was clearly indicated by the circles on the underside of its wing: blue, white, red – attacked the little train. Frank could clearly hear the machine-like tak tak tak of his aircraft gun. From the first approach of the plane, two of the tankers were shot to flames. The pilot then swung back over the Ems to begin a second attack. This time the third tanker exploded and the locomotive was now on fire. Frank could see only dense smoke and steam coming from the engine.

The driver and boilerman did not survive the attack, he heard later from his Aunt.

7. An Old City In Rubble and Ashes

The city district of Wolthusen, a rural neighbourhood, was spared the increasingly numerous and widespread allied air attacks, so that the children emerging from the shelter after the sound of the all-clear siren were able to resume their playing and roaming as before and in particular after a night raid, they could return home to bed and an undisturbed sleep. Frequent nighttime disruptions, urgent dashes to the shelter, the large chunk of the day that had to be spent there: all that was in the main limited to weekdays.

However, one attack of Emden stands above all the horrors the city had to endure during the war and certainly remains for all the Emders who lived through it the most terrible experience of their lives. Frank was almost eight years old when the biggest nightmare of the Emden population happened. It left no one unaffected and it spared no one.

On September 6 1944, the sirens sounded around six o′clock in the evening. It had been a sunny afternoon and Frank was playing with his friends in the garden. At the sound of the siren all the children rushed home.

They went quickly to the shelter, Frank's mother leading him by the hand, his aunts with pre-packed bags, his grandmother out in front with a cutlery tray full of silver knives and forks. They had almost 400 metres to run. Just after they passed through the entrance to the shelter, the doors were locked behind them. At once they heard the eerie howls of the bombs falling down over in the direction of the city centre. Previous attacks lasted at most half an hour before the frightful explosions could be heard, but today this happened only 15-20 minutes or so after the first impact.

This time everything was much more threatening and more frightening. Attack after attack could be heard; nearby explosions shook up and rocked the shelter as if it were a resort-ship on its way to the isle of Borkum in a heavy gale. Many women and children were crying out. The little ones could not be comforted by their mothers, even if they themselves were keeping reasonably calm.

The horror seemed to have no end. When at last no more explosions could be heard, the all-clear sirens did not sound immediately, so the frightened people had to wait even longer in the shelter and to each of them it seemed like an eternity. When the doors were opened at last, they could see immediately that Emden had been transformed into a terrifying inferno. From their Wolthusen district - from their bunker - a terrible view of the city was presented to them. Not only high-explosive and blockbuster bombs, but also phosphor bombs had carpet bombed all over. Right then the heavens above the city were glowing with a hellish red and pitch-black clouds of smoke hung in the air. The repulsive smell of burning made many pant and cough.

A good number of residential buildings in the Wolthusen district were on fire. Flames climbed out of window cavities and up the blackened outer walls off towards the sky.

Frank's family made their way quickly along the specially-created 'bunker path' that offered a vital, and sometimes life-saving, shortcut for the residents of Zeppelinstraße. In their street the Kollmanns saw that one house had been entirely destroyed by a high-explosive bomb and a house nearby was ablaze. The other houses, having the best of a bad lot, were more or less badly damaged. In the direction of Uferstraße, towards the city wall, the damage was obviously greater, for yesterday a blockbuster bomb had fallen over there on the Kesselschleuse.

They hurried to their own house: the walls and roof truss were still intact and the timber work remained standing. The roofing was severely affected; about 50 percent of the roof tiles lay scattered as rubble in the garden and all about the street. Additionally, the upper floor had no walls left and the windows were just black holes with no glass and in part no frames.

"Where is Werner? Hopefully nothing has happened to him." Frank heard these words again and again from his despairing mother.

It was already after 11 o'clock at night that his father finally appeared. Herr Kollmann had been excused duty from military service for a month due to sickness and malnutrition and was carrying on his work at the hydraulic engineering office. When the air raid sirens sounded, he told Frank and his mother, he had rushed

to the Bonnesse shelter. After the attack, he could find no direct route to take back to the house, for there were no navigable streets. Fire, smoke and mountains of rubble made the streets unpassable. Coughing, he resumed his story: "In this chaos, I couldn't see where I was going and, at the corner of one street, I was driven back by such a strong wave of heat from the fires I had to find myself a way back along the water. I'm afraid that there aren't many buildings left standing in the centre of the city."

In spite of the horror they had experienced, everyone was glad to be together again, without injury, and they spent the rest of the night in the undamaged basement rooms.

8. 59 Shelters in Emden

For years Frank's mother had kept a lengthy newspaper article about the Emden bomb shelters, as well as the 'Bunkermuseum' leaflet. Frank had often read through the article and the story of the time of Emden's suffering always remained with him.

Bunkers In Emden

The significance of Emden in World War II as an important harbour and the location of many shipyards explains the great number of air-defence shelters in the seaport city. According to an order of the Reichminister for Aviation, dated 8 November 1935, Emden belonged to the first rank of air-defence shelter locations. By this time, air-raid drills were already taking place regularly, organised by the Party.

By 1 September 1939, when the war began, with the exception of four air-defence shelters and a command post, no further air-defence construction for the population (number of inhabitants, 35,189) had been completed. On the entry of England and France into the war, there were frequent English flights over East Frisia and the German Bight, in the North Sea beyond Emden, closely scrutinised throughout the rest of Germany.

The first heavy attack on the city of Emden took place on 13 July 1940, and left 7 inhabitants dead, 17 injured and 78 homeless. Following this, on 17 July 1940, warning sirens were introduced: the "air defence system". It was now compulsory to use the defence shelters.

During that period, the city councillors also made a timely calculation as to the importance of protecting the citizens from bomb attacks. With no air-defence shelters, thousands of citizens would have lost their lives from the nighttime bombing that followed the attack of July 1940.

Immediately after a 10 October 1940 Führer decree, the construction of bomb-proof bunkers was initiated. Before the first bunker was completed on 26 June 1941, in Lienbahnstraße, English bombers flew twenty-eight attacks over Emden, resulting in 33 dead and 73 wounded. From that time, the bunkers dominated the urban features of Emden. Although almost eighty percent of the city was destroyed, bombing attacks killed "only" 271 of the civilian inhabitants.

Originally the bunkers were to have had pointed roofs to better blend in with the city. But that plan was not stuck to. Due to a lack of time, the bunkers were built with functionality and simplicity in mind. The majority of the six-storey bunkers had concrete walls two metres thick and roofs of two and a half metres.

When the steel doors had been closed, Emders were safe from bomb attacks. The shelters were so well furnished, people could remain there not just a short time but for an entire day.

The bunkers provided Emders with security and were distributed throughout each city district so that they were at most ten minutes from their home. Prisoners-of-war and

those sentenced to hard labour, however, were obliged to remain outside. As to their fate, nothing is available in the published material.

From 1 September 1939 until 20 August 1941 there were 241 air-defence alarms, with an average of around three hours duration, and 31 attacks, predominantly at night.

People very quickly became familiar with "their Bunker", and almost every Emder had their own space in the shelter.

Fifty-nine bunkers were built for the people, each employing twenty-five large concrete blocks in order to accommodate a hundred-plus people. The two biggest shelters were on the Esmauerstraße (space for 1,189) and the Wolthusen (space for 1,020 shelter-seeking souls).

When you consider that, due to bombing raids and shelling, over 600,000 civilians, including 80,000 children, perished in Germany, if you reckon with the large scale of air attacks on Emden, the fact that there were "only" 271 deaths makes it clear how effective a protection the bunkers provided.

The balance sheet for the attack on 6 September 1944, however, was terrible: more or less 80% of the buildings in the city were destroyed. The inner city was a colossal image of destruction. All that remained of the splendid renaissance-style town hall, dating from c. 1574-76, was a small one-metre-high piece of wall. All the buildings in the Delft area lay upended in the water that Emders had nicknamed "little Amsterdam". The historic merchant- and office- buildings: all of them were reduced to a long catena of rubble-towers.

But before the bomb attacks, Emden had been a sea- and trading- city comparable to Holland, with its old buildings, its innumerable canals running through it, and its just short of thirty bridges.

9. Trouble Over A Missing Flag

Frank and Hans-Jürgen got to know each other in 1943, when the Buurma family relocated to Zeppelinstraße.

Born in 1935, Hans-Jürgen was, if we are to be precise, sixteen months older than Frank. His father was a lock-keeper at the *Große Seeschleuse* (that is, the Great Sea-Lock) in the outer port of Emden and had lived there with his wife and children in a pleasant single-family house located near the sea-lock.

On a gloriously warm Sunday in the summer of 1943, the Buurma family visited Zeppelinstraße for the birthday of a relative. The tea-table for the birthday had scarcely been set when the terrible sirens sounded.

Air-defence warning. Down to the shelter. It turned out to be a so-called "moderately heavy" attack that, as they learned later, was aimed at the docks and the southern part of Emden. No bombs had fallen in the Wolthusen district, and after a little while the Buurma family and their guests were able to continue with the birthday celebrations.

However, they could no longer raise much of a festive spirit and Herr Buurma especially was very uneasy, insisting that he and his family return home.

The uneasy feeling turned out to be well-founded, as they could see when they neared the sea-lock district. In fact, things were even worse than they had feared. Their house had been hit by a high-explosive bomb and was now reduced to a rubble-heap of stone fragments and splintered wooden beams. No piece of furniture, no furnishings, were left in one piece. Herr Buurma had the one consolation that, during the attack, he and his family had been away from the harbour, safe in Wolthusen. The cellar of their house had not survived.

There was a silver lining in the cloud for the Buurma family. They found out from a hydraulic engineering office inspector who lived in Zeppelinstraß that a house next door to him had become vacant. Due to his advancing years, the current occupant had relocated to relatives in Hanover and he was now renting a ground-floor flat from them. So Hans-Jürgen became a child of Zeppelinstraße.

Due to their common interests, Frank and Hans-Jürgen quickly became good friends and they played together almost every day, more so than with the other boys and girls of Zeppelinstraße.

A boy who lived near to Hans-Jürgen liked to impose himself on the two friends and wanted to join in with all their adventures, and with him as leader.

Horst-Hermann Hukela, somewhat stocky but muscular

in build, blonde hair combed smoothly back, had reached 10 years of age in 1943 and that was why he had already joined the Hitler-Youth (HY), so he was colloquially a *Pimpf*, as newly-joined members were termed. He belonged to the *Deutschen Jungvolk* – that is, the 'German Youth', the HY section for boys aged between ten and fourteen. When Horst-Hermann stepped out into the street wearing his HY shirt, black scarf and sailor-cap, his gait was so intensely stiff and upright that he seemed to gain an extra ten centimetres in height. His absolute pride and joy was his HY-dagger, a sheath knife: all the children in Zeppelinstraße admired (or felt obliged to admire) it.

1 May 1944 was a holiday, one held every year and which the Nazis had established on taking power. It was called the "National Workers' Day". There were parades, military marches and speeches, and putting up flags was compulsory. Every house had to put a swastika flag out on display.

As Hans-Jürgen called on Frank and the two friends were making their way from the Buurma's home, the "little squirt" – 'squirt' is what the HY nickname *Pimpf* means, and this was what Hans-Jürgen and Frank secretly called him – ran out to them from across the road. The bad weather, stormy gusts of wind accompanied by drizzle, meant they would only be able to play indoors. Horst-Hermann pestered Hans-Jürgen to let him join in, so they could play with Hans-Jürgen's Lineol toy soldiers. Hans-Jürgen looked all up and down Zeppelinstraße, but at that moment there were unfortunately no other playmates to be seen. There was no excuse to leave the "little squirt" standing outside.

Frank had to look on, without much enthusiasm, as the little squirt struggled to win a battle against Hans-Jürgen's soldiers, until after about an hour a quarrel broke out. The game was usually played like so: model soldiers were divided out between the two players and then placed behind a defensive cover of building blocks. Then turns were taken at throwing marbles, or '*knickers*' as they were called in Emden (an old Low-German term found today in the Dutch word *knikker*).

Hans-Jürgen's soldiers were obliged to represent English units, whilst Horst-Hermann naturally commanded German armies.

Now, the Squirt could not throw or aim as well as Hans-Jürgen, so that the Wehrmacht lost three battles one after the other. After the third defeat, the supreme commander rose up foaming with rage. He spoke of betrayal and threatened he would retaliate by other means, after which he proclaimed that his father would intervene in the matter. Hans-Jürgen kept cool, bade the unbidden guest leave, and went with Frank to the kitchen to have a cup of tea with his mother.

It was, as mentioned earlier, 1 May. As per the official order, nearly all the residents of Zeppelinstraße had their swastika flags hanging up outside. Hans-Jürgen's family had bigger worries to concern themselves about than flags. The Buurma's had been bombed out, and were now left with only the most essential furniture for the kitchen and bedrooms, and this was acquired using ration coupons.

Hans-Jürgen's mother had just poured out two cups of

tea when the doorbell rang up a storm. They all hurried to the door, curious as to just who was so desperately demanding to come in.

Before them, right hand raised in a Hitler salute, stood the father of Horst-Hermann. Face drawn up into a deeply serious and quite alarming expression, he demanded an immediate explanation as to why there were no swastikas fluttering in the wind outside the house.

Herr Hukela, Horst-Hermann's father, was the lone Nazi diehard. He made his presence repeatedly felt in Zeppelinstraße. There were certainly other Party members among the residents who kept it to themselves and did not admit it publicly. Things were quite otherwise with Herr Hukela. He worked as carpenter in U-Boat construction at the *Nordseewerke* Emden shipyard. He had joined the party when it took over power, and also the SA (*Sturmabteilung*, or 'Storm Division'). His spiritual horizons were so narrow he had never risen higher than an *SA-Mann*, which was the lowest rank in the organisation.

Nevertheless, he held himself to be the protector of law and order in Zeppelinstraße, concerning himself with blindly following orders and, on all Party commemoration days and festivals, parading about in his brown SA uniform, swastika armband on the left arm.

As Hans-Jürgen's mother tried to explain to him that the order to put out flags was for householders only and that she had started renting here just a short while ago after losing her home to bomb damage, the deputy

sheriff, as he was called by the residents of the street, could no longer think up any more threats. However, he could not hold back angry glances at Hans-Jürgen and Frank and on his way out called back to them: "When you enter the HY in a couple of years, my son will teach you through the appropriate practice exercises that one does not betray a German youth, even when one is playing games!"

After the *SA-Mann* had made his theatrical exit, the threat did not leave an impression on the children for long. School in the shelter, playing in the street and at home and the repeated squall of the warning sirens claimed their full attention – and children quickly forget.

Frank related the incident to his mother and aunts, expressing himself rather disparagingly vis-a-vis Hukela father and son. As his aunts were doing the washing up after lunch, they began to discuss the elder Hukela. Frank interrupted his schoolwork and listened to his aunt Lotti say that she had some good things to tell about him. For one, he constructed three rabbit hutches for her neighbour, Frau Waldheim, a war widow, without charging her, and he repaired the alarm clock of her fellow occupant without taking a single penny.

"Yes, that's true," Frank heard his mother say, "But Hukela's treatment of the elderly teacher Küfer was not so good. Herr Küfer told me recently, as I was at the dyke on the way to the city, Herr Hukela had said to him a short while ago he could repair his two gold wristwatches at a good rate. As both the watchmakers

in Emden had been bombed, Herr Küfer was very glad it might be possible to have the watches repaired and so he handed them over to Herr Hukela.

"Well, what was wrong with that?", his aunt was impatient to learn from her sister.

"Now, Herr Hukela gave one watch back to Herr Küfer repaired. It worked perfectly. The second watch Hukela kept back for himself, supposedly because of the large amount of work that had been required and also the fact it was now worthless because he had to remove certain parts to repair the other watch. What was left of it had no value. Neighbours have however reliably informed Herr Küfer that the *SA-Mann* has proudly shown off to his friends a wristwatch he recently got hold of – with a hinge on the lid just like the one on the second watch that belonged to Herr Küfer."

10. Boy Buried Alive In Cellar – A Half-truth

One day during the winter of 1944, there appeared a single-column article about Frank's best friend Hans-Jürgen in the *Ostfrischen Tageszeitung* (that is, the 'East Frisian Daily'). The headline of the article was: "Boy buried alive in bombed-out house rescued". This was misleading as it led the reader to believe a boy had been been buried alive in one of the numerous bombing raids, then later rescued by some miracle. Frank knew better about the details of what had happened, for he had himself played a role in the adventure.

The children, during the winter of 1944, had long been waiting in vain for the canals and deeper waters to freeze over so that ice sheets able to take enough weight for skating would form.

Instead of ice, it snowed. Not heavily, but enough to get the toboggans out. In the level city districts of Emden, and the equally-level city environs, there was little chance of finding a usable a toboggan run except over by the Ems-Jade canal dykes and the city wall ramparts.

Frank's sledge had thus far survived the war and was stored in the basement. Several other children in the neighbourhood were similarly lucky. His friend Hans-Jürgen did not number amongst the fortunate sledge-owners because, as related in previous chapters, his family home in the outer harbour area had been bombed out.

As it was the first snowfall and the sun was shining, many children were tempted out into the street with their sledges. Hans-Jürgen was hoping his parents had kept his own sledge in the cellar of the old house. If only he made a thorough search for an entrance to whatever was preserved of the basement, there was a good chance he could retrieve his sledge. Immediately after school, and his lunch was ended, he put his plan into effect. Because he feared his mother would forbid such a search, an operation not without dangers, he had told no one about his intentions. Anyway, now he grabbed his mother's bike and rode off.

Frank, at that moment on his way to the toboggan runs opposite the city's outer wall, was not informed either.

As the doorbell rang about seven o'clock that evening, just as he was finishing off his supper, Frank as yet had little idea how exciting the next few hours would turn out be. It was Frau Buurma at the door, very out of breath, and she asked Frank's mother if her son Hans-Jürgen was here with him. As Frank heard the excited voice of his friend's mother, he sprinted fast as he could to the door, but he couldn't provide any more details. Frau Buurma told them she had already tried

unsuccessfully to find out anything from the houses in Zeppelinstraße where other children lived, but when she said her son had taken her bicycle with him, an idea occurred to Frank: "It's possible Hans-Jürgen has gone to the ruins in the outer harbour house. He was saying yesterday on the way to school, when the first snow fell, that he was gutted that he'd lost his sledge. He reckoned it was possible it might be undamaged in some nook or cranny of the basement. But we couldn't talk about it any more as we had to defend ourselves from the snowballs being lobbed at us by some school friends who ambushed us."

"What shall I do now?", Frau Buurma gasped out fearfully. "You might just be right, as my bike's no longer there and I have no idea where it could have gone. But how can I get to the outer harbour at this time of day? Something has surely happened to him. There's no buses running and I have no bike. Oh dear God, what should I do now?" Her voice was almost cracking.

Worry had very understandably made the poor woman unable to formulate a solution to the problem. After a bit of thought it occurred to Frank that Johann Fischbach, Hans-Jürgen's best friend at school and his own good friend, might know something or be able to help. Frank's mother fetched his coat, cap and shoes and then Frank and Frau Buurma hurried along the Wolthusen streets to the Fischbach's house. Johann confirmed straightaway that Hans-Jürgen had been intending to make his way back to the old house in order to look for his sledge.

As it was already half past eight, something must have

happened to Hans-Jürgen. It was clear to all of them something needed to be done. Johann had an idea and disappeared into the next room where his father, who had a coal business, was exhaustedly doing the accounts.

Almost ten minutes of fear and impatience passed. At last, the door opened and Johann entered with a little smile on his face.

"My father has just rung up Willy, his driver and coal carrier, and has called him over. He's already on his way. The van will be ready to start in just a moment."

"Why take a moment?", asked Frank. "We have no time to lose."

"And it's freezing out, the poor boy", Frau Buurma cried out meanwhile.

In the meantime Herr Fischbach came back into the living room and explained to them that his small coal van, like all vans that hadn't been commandeered or destroyed, ran on wood gas. By a stroke of luck, the van had come back from its rounds just an hour ago and its tank was still warm, but the gas tank needed to heat up. It would be ready to go in a quarter of an hour.

Of course, there were only two seats in the driver's cabin, so only Willy and Johann went, for Johann was to give Willy directions to the outer harbour. Willy threw a lengthy tow-rope, a sledge hammer and a ladder into the back of the van on top of the peat and coal residue, and then the van disappeared into the darkness.

Frau Buurma and Frank were invited back into the house where they warmed themselves up with a cup of tea. Time seemed to stand still for Frau Buurma. The hands of the large antique grandfather clock she constantly peeked at did not appear to move. Almost one and a half hours passed until at last they heard the sound of the van turning into the courtyard. Seconds later Frau Buurma, tears in her eyes, was holding her son tightly.

After Hans-Jürgen had falteringly told of his adventure under a press of questions and his mother had repeatedly thanked the Fischbachs, the three of them made their way home to Zeppelinstraße. Hans-Jürgen looked like he had been working on a building site for a whole week without the opportunity to have a wash. Both trouser-legs were ripped, his jacket had acquired the hue of cement and roof tile and his shoes looked as if even shoe polish could never restore them to their original black. However, a few scratches aside, he was uninjured, just extremely tired.

On the journey back, Frank learned more details about the adventure of his friend, although it was clear that, because he was so exhausted, he was unable to relate anything very coherently. Hans-Jürgen had indeed gone to the bombed-out house, and on his mother′s bike. When he got there, using only his hands and a piece of wood, he had uncovered part of the basement ceiling. With a large bloc of rubble about fifty centimetres in diameter, he bashed a hole in it. Without a thought for his own safety, he leapt down into the basement to look for the sledge. However, he failed to find it in the part of the basement he had entered, partly rubble-filled, and there was no other area he could search, or at least one

reachable though the debris.

His efforts to get back out though the hole in the roof failed. With no shovel or pickaxe, Hans-Jürgen could not heap up enough debris to enable him to reach the edges of the hole. Though this exertion provided him with a welcome amount of body heat, the experience must have been a bitterly cold for him. Nevertheless, he overcame the strain remarkably well, and gave Frank the details next day on the way to school.

Who, at the end of the day, passed on to the newspaper the story about the rescue of the boy buried alive in a bomb attack remained mysterious to all its participants.