FRANK USBECK

Fighting Like Indians: The "Indian Scout Syndrome" in U.S. and German War Reports during World War II

Whether invoking the noble—or the cruel—savage, the image of Native Americans[1] has always included notions of war and fighting. Non-Natives have attributed character traits to them such as cunning, stealth, endurance, and bravery; and they have used these images to denounce or to idealize Native Americans. In the U.S., a prolonged history of frontier conflict, multiplied by popular frontier myths, has resulted in a collective memory of Indians as fighters. While images of fighting Indians have entered American everyday language, Germans have had no significant collective history of American frontier settlement and conflicts with Native Americans. Nevertheless, they have acquired a number of idioms and figures of speech relating to Indian images due to the romanticized euphoria for Native themes, spurred by popular novels and Wild West shows.

This study will analyze how the warrior image influenced reporting on World War II in Germany and the U.S. Firstly, I will discuss the extent to which everyday language in both cultures is laced with Indian references in a warfare context. As the warrior cliché became independent of Native American realities, warrior terminology would be applied to virtually whomever was seen as an outstanding fighter, thus enabling the mental link between 'Indian' and 'war.' In addition, Native American soldiers have been appointed to dangerous military tasks on the grounds of their Indianness and alleged fighting abilities, which has been termed the "Indian Scout Syndrome" (cf. Holm 88-89). The use of the term 'Indian' to imply 'fighter' in both the U.S. and German discourses on war allows for an extension of the concept of the Indian Scout Syndrome to everyday language in both cultures, since both employed preconceptions and clichés about Native fighting abilities to discuss general soldierly achievements. While such occurrences in American texts are often explicit references to the frontier, German texts reflect a more subtle approach to drawing connections between soldiering and Indians. The second part of this study, therefore, will

[1] Name giving in the context of post-colonial scholarship is still hotly debated and has political implications. In this study, I will follow Robert F. Berkhofer's suggestion and use the term *Indian* when referring to the image and stereotypes, and otherwise speak of Native Americans. Similarly, I will use *Eskimo* and Inuit.

emphasize the German cultural practices which produced Indian warrior images. Comparisons of German and U.S. reporting of World War II reveal the ambivalence of the warrior image as both sides, locked in a deadly struggle, continuously stated that one side or the other 'fought like Indians,' even when none of the participants in these particular battles actually bore any resemblance to Native Americans.

Thus far, only a few studies on the Native American participation in the war effort on the front and at home have discussed Native representation in war reporting. These have mainly focused on Native persons' actions such as volunteering for the front or spectacular war bond drives in American papers.[2] However, no scholar has investigated the degree to which newspapers under the Nazis utilized Indian (warrior) imagery in war reporting. The task of comparing German and American newspapers to find references to the warrior image has proven complicated. In contrast to many American newspapers, German papers and magazines have not yet been digitized.[3]

For the analysis of American papers, I have researched the papers digitized in the database "ProQuest Historical Newspapers" and limited my search for occurrences of "Indians" to the period of 1933-45. This time frame includes coverage of the Indian New Deal as an important preparatory phase for the Native war effort as much as American perspectives of German "Indianthusiasm."[4] Of the American newspapers, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* provided valuable insights on the American perception of Native life in the 1930s, and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* revealed exemplary applications of the Indian Scout Syndrome in actual reporting from the fronts after 1939. In addition to the digitized American daily papers consulted, I have sought out all references to Native Americans in the *Internationale Bibliographie der deutschen Zeitschriftenliteratur*, called *Dietrichs*, the leading German language periodicals index. Furthermore, I have

[2] Jere Franco and Kenneth Townsend have published extensive monographs covering the entire range of Native war efforts from work in war plants, entanglement of Native organizations in Nazi propaganda, collections of scrap metal on the reservations, to Native participation in the military. Barbara Haible has discussed the interrelation of German children's literature, preparation for war, and propaganda through the promotion of Indian novels by the Nazis.

[3] As a result, systematic searches for colloquial usages of "Indian" terminology in German media are still almost impossible and, at least, extremely time-consuming. Research in war reports is reduced to chance finds, while indexes of periodicals mainly list explicit stories or reports about Native American history or societies, but rarely provide clues to warrior imagery in war reporting.

[4] Hartmut Lutz coined the term "Indianthusiasm" to denote nationalist applications of Indian imagery for the formation of a German national identity.

scrutinized all war reports and features in the *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten* after 22 June 1941, a daily paper listed by *Dietrichs* as having the highest frequency of reporting by war correspondents and propaganda officers.

The resulting list of several hundred newspaper and magazine articles provides insight into the German and U.S. usage of Indian terminology and permits a contrastive view of both cultures in the context of the Indian Scout Syndrome.[5] These articles further reveal the wide circulation of references to Indians across national boundaries and their multi-purpose applications. Indian warrior imagery, although widespread in German and American popular culture, did not find many expressions in visual representations of war reports. Both sides' reports were often limited to few columns and rarely featured photographs. The imagery was transported mainly through literary references. Buzzwords like "stalking," "ambush," or "single-handed" triggered memories related to Indian literature and film as well as playing Indian among both American and German readers.

Throughout World War II, U.S. war correspondents spiced their reports on the European theater with Indian imagery to provide their readers with a more colorful description of events. Depending on the circumstances, the Germans were sometimes dubbed Indians, sometimes Soviet partisans, or members of other nationalities and diverse branches of service. In some articles, an Indian reference was related to bravery; while, on other occasions, Indian imagery was used to refer to the impotent victims of a mopping-up operation. In this context, one may wonder whether and how Germans, having a reputation as Indianthusiasts, utilized Indian imagery in relation to warfare as well. Did German Indianthusiasm influence the patterns of discussing, or even waging, the war?

It appears that German war correspondents did not use Indian imagery as explicitly and as often as their American counterparts did, for reasons to be analyzed in this study. However, it remains obvious that the imagery of Indian warriors accompanied Germans from childhood playgrounds onto the war's battlefields. Numerous, direct and indirect, subtle and explicit, evocations of such imagery can be gleaned from memoirs of German soldiers and civilians, from soldier jargon, as well as from German newspapers' war reporting. The Indian warrior image was omnipresent in the Germans' minds and actions during the war.

---

[5] A detailed analysis of these sources can be found in my dissertation "Fellow Peoples: The Influence of the German Image of Indians on German National Identity and its Appropriation by National Socialism in German Periodicals, 1925-1945."

The Indian Scout Syndrome and the Concept of the Fighting Indian in Everyday Language on Both Sides of the Atlantic

The history of westward expansion in North America is pockmarked with conflicts between Euro-Americans and Natives. The mystification of these conflicts through popular culture has incorporated Indian warfare terminology into colloquial American English. The remarks of federal officials during the 2005 Katrina crisis that citizens were waiting for the cavalry to come to the rescue are an illustrative example of the persistence of such terminology.[6] In Germany, similar colloquialisms developed because of the euphoria for Native American themes, kindled by romantic novels and touring Wild West shows in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Seeing these performances by "real Indians," argues Karl Markus Kreis, lured many German children and adolescents into re-enacting them in their own games. With little effort, one could make an "Indian" outfit, "become an Indian," thus turning *Indian* into the character in a game plot ("Indians Playing" 201-02).

Considering these phenomena, it is not surprising that the German language gradually adopted a number of terms and idioms related to Indian imagery, although most Germans never had any direct contact with Native Americans. Many of these idioms referred to fighting. Germans were at ease 'burying the hatchet' and 'smoking the peace pipe' after having returned from the 'warpath.' German children learned early on that 'an Indian never cries' because he 'does not know pain.' These idioms and terms constantly reaffirmed the stereotype of the Indian as a warrior figure. At the same time, German children, on all social levels, practiced the role of Indian by spending their pastime out in the woods or urban parks waging 'Indian wars' against each other.

The Indian theme was then carried on from childhood into adult life, namely into the armed forces. Several dictionaries of soldier jargon from World War I to today's *Bundeswehr* document Indian references. It appears that, with the advent of Indianthusiasm, Indian terminology

[6] Cf. Roberts 81-82; "Katrina Files" 2:25-2:48. A Google search for the combination of the terms 'New Orleans,' 'Katrina,' and 'cavalry' reveals a surprisingly high number of entries employing the idiom. The same is true for the concept of 'circling the wagons' in this context. The transnational appeal of this image became evident in a statement by a German minister. In spring 2009, Peer Steinbrück, Secretary of the Treasury, blamed Switzerland for aiding German tax evaders and compared the Swiss with Indians who could only be brought to submission by a raid of the "financial cavalry" (Rohr).

entered the German soldiers' lexicon as well. While one would expect most of the warfare expressions mentioned above to have been incorporated into soldier language, none of them were listed by the editors, though. German-speaking soldiers throughout the twentieth century were known to have called a company commander "Chief" and invented diverse nicknames alluding to the Blackfeet tribe when labeling the infantry. Predictably, surgeons and corpsmen were called "medicine men" (cf. Commenda 59, 73; Küpper 84; Ahnert 58). Some cloaked the boredom of peeling potatoes during kitchen detail by talking about "scalping the ones in Field-Grey" (Ahnert 65). Oak-leaf insignia on uniforms were called "eagle feathers," and a feigned illness was an "Indian disease," referring to the Native Americans' reputation for ruses of war (Küpper 93). While these few examples apparently cover the scope of recorded Indian terms and idioms in the realm of soldiering, the image of the cunning Indian scout and fierce fighter was present in German army life, nevertheless.

The omnipresence of Indian imagery in the context of warfare becomes obvious in field postcards of both world wars. A postcard from World War I shows how German soldiers on the Champagne front (c. 1916) hold a battalion celebration during which a theater play is staged (fig. 1). Its title, translating to "We savages are the better people, after all!," refers to Johann Gottfried Seume's 1810 poem "Der Wilde" ('The Savage').[7] The sign in the back describes the stage décor as the "wigwam of the Jelly Indians," featuring a rough wickiup structure made of branches and a jelly jar from a field kitchen. A postcard from World War II, an American POW postcard, is illustrated with typical imagery from Karl May's novels (fig. 2). It not only features the protagonists Winnetou and Old Shatterhand but also Winnetou's typical Indian lingo, particularly the exclamation 'Uff!'

In the U.S., the frontier myth had turned the Indian warrior into a stock character. Fighting traits, such as cunning, stealth, superior vision, or endurance, were attributed to Native Americans (and later adopted by white frontiersmen). As Vietnam veteran Tom Holm relates in his study on the Native experience in Vietnam, the cliché he termed "Indian Scout Syndrome" led to the appointment of Native American soldiers to particularly dangerous tasks on the grounds of their cultural, sometimes even their biological, heritage. Indianness, apparently, predestined an individual to be qualified for soldiering. Holm and others refer to similar experiences of Native veterans in other wars, especially when irregular

[7] This poem details the practice of hospitality between white settlers and Native Americans on the Quebec frontier, in which the Native character is portrayed as the noble, morally superior savage.

warfare was involved (cf. 88-89, 137). Alleged Native American fighter abilities were praised by several dignitaries in World War II, among them Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes who ascribed to the Indian warrior:

> endurance, rhythm, a feeling for timing, coordination, sense perception, an uncanny ability to get over any sort of terrain at night, and better than all else, an enthusiasm for fighting. He takes a rough job and makes a game of it. Rigors of combat hold no terrors for him; severe discipline and hard duties do not deter him. (58)

With the German adoption and reinforcement of the Indian warrior image through romantic literature, Wild West shows, and playacting, it must be assumed that the Indian Scout Syndrome, at least to some extent, has been transferred onto the German popular perception of what Indian entails. Anecdotes told by Native veterans of World War II demonstrate a German apprehensiveness when encountering 'real Indian warriors.' Kenneth W. Townsend relates to a German general who warned his troops in World War I that "the most dangerous of the American soldiers is the Indian" (136-37). Hitler, supposedly, instructed his soldiers on the Eastern Front that the Russians would fight "like Indians."[8] Regardless of whether he actually uttered these remarks in public or not, the German soldiers' upbringing in the Indianthusiast environment and their familiarity with Indians in popular culture made them anticipate something typically *Indian* when pondering the possibility of an encounter with Native American GIs. They applied the Indian Scout Syndrome in much the same way as American officers, for they expected ferocity and savagery—simply because their adversary was Native American.

Reporting War in the U.S. and Germany

If the military on both sides accepted Native Americans' soldierly qualifications as given facts, the media on both sides went as far as using 'Indian' and 'efficient soldier' synonymously in particular settings.

[8] Cf. Hitler 3:1764, 1775, 1917; Small 2. Townsend claims that remarks like these were heard in both American and German barracks and trenches, yet he admits that hardly any of them can be verified (cf. 136). My own research on Hitler's speeches has revealed a few direct comments on Native Americans, but none explicitly on their qualities as fighters. Hitler's descriptions of Soviet combat styles, however, often resemble typical 'Indian prose.'

American news references to Native Americans can be grouped into three principal categories: firstly, reports on the Native American war effort at large, and secondly, casual occurrences of Indian terms in combat action reports, without any correlation to Natives having been involved, nor any other parallels to Native concerns. These articles indicate how references to Indians had become part of everyday language, and that 'Indian' simply depicted a certain type of action or event, such as walking 'Indian file.'[9] Thirdly—being the most promising category for this study—on numerous occasions war correspondents, politicians, or military personnel made a connection between a particular combat event and North American frontier history in U.S. papers, labeling one of the parties involved 'Indians.' This could be done either to underscore the superior fighting skills of the winning side in a particular battle or to depict the 'Indian' side as being mercilessly massacred. Regardless of who was labeled 'Indian' and for what type of situation, the practice of labeling demonstrates the presence of the warrior stereotype both in the American media and among American readers who were supposed to understand and appreciate the allusions.

A common scenario depicted one side as Indians because of the soldiers' ferocity, their irregular approach to warfare, or their ability to use terrain to their advantage. German soldiers who perceived the Russian enemy as Indian were affected by their Karl May memories and harried by the prospects of fighting an enemy they deemed extremely dangerous. American editors reproduced this German image of Russians as Indians, obviously finding it suitable to interpret the situation. An article from 1942 informed its American readers that German general staff officers admired the Russians' fighting spirit, despite official German propaganda declarations to the contrary. The editor explained that "German soldiers spread among themselves legends which are almost superstitions about Russians in forest fighting, attributing to them power supposedly possessed by the American Indian, such as detecting the stir of a blade of grass a mile away" (Small 2). Another editor took the same line and suggested the Russians should not only be as mean as Indians, but also learn to be as tricky as Indians:

> Probably no savage race in the world ever equaled the Apache Indians in the tactics of elusion and ambuscade. Joe Stalin, who already has exhibited most of Geronimo's unattractive social traits, might take a leaf from that chieftain's

[9] The German equivalent is *im Gänsemarsch*. The *OED* lists the term as "the same as *single file*, so called because the North American Indians usually march in this order" ("Indian File"), in itself an example for the stereotyped perception of what Native Americans 'usually' do.

> military manual in his current difficulties. ("Debts to the Indian" 14)

As these examples show, German soldiers clearly were influenced by the literary warrior images of Karl May, whose Indian characters could read the tiniest traces of tracks such as bent blades of grass. The reference to Geronimo illustrates that American perceptions of the Indian warrior followed similar imagery.

American papers applied the "Indian scout" label to Germans as well. Especially regarding the new blitzkrieg tactics of infiltration, German soldiers were often said to employ Indian methods of warfare (cf. Murchie H2).[10] The American public was very concerned about the danger that their forces could not be prepared for different combat situations. Newspapers repeatedly demanded that the military leadership draw conclusions from World War I losses and from Allied casualties against new German and Japanese tactics in the current conflict. Authors argued that Americans had adopted the Indian style of fighting from Native Americans during frontier battles and should have enough specialists now (e.g. woodsmen or mountaineers, etc.) to train troops for particular types of terrain (cf. "Fighting Indian Style" 16). Thus, Americans had to remember their own historical 'Indian' lessons to prevail against quasi *Indianized* Axis forces.

A striking example of the use of Indian images in American war reports after the breakout from the Normandy bridgeheads in 1944 does not demonstrate the Indian Scout Syndrome in action, but rather the rampaging settler and militiaman who rounds up the last Indians to pacify his new domain: "The battle for France has become a 20th century version of winning the American West, with roaming bands of Germans marked for extermination," wrote Hal Boyle (1).[11] The author expanded his setting by remarking that, in "Indian Territory," as American officers called territory currently not under Allied control, many cut-off bands of German soldiers were loose, "fighting like roving Indians of old" and, apparently just like Indians, breaking into French farms and stealing eggs and livestock to keep from starving. The U.S. Army was likened to the "federal bluecoats" who "cut up the enemy with shells instead of sabers" and "charge[d] with all the thrill of a horse opera. Everything is there but the bugle" (1). French resistance fighters

[10] An American officer stated that "blitzkrieg" was actually an Indian invention (qtd. in Franco 133).

[11] The motif of the Indian victim was employed by Germans, as well. Nationalist Germans often identified with Indians as victims of Anglo trickery and brutality would often be employed by the Nazis to invoke a spirit of resistance among Germans against the British and Americans after the 1919 Versailles treaty.

performed as "Indian scouts" and, so the correspondent observed, were similarly "careless of dress […] and [...] just as reckless" (1).[12]

Given the parallels in everyday language, in the perception of Native Americans as warlike peoples, and of alleged typical 'Indian' fighting styles in American and German popular culture, one would expect the German media to have appropriated the warrior image in war reports to a similar extent. However, only very few explicit references to the Indian warrior hint at such a practice. In the aftermath of D-Day, for example, an infantry captain quoted foreign sources, saying the Allied forces were having great troubles with German snipers. He praised the sniper as a soldier of superior qualities and training who, "quite Indian-style, stalks the terrain and thus has become some kind of 'Leatherstocking of the Infantry'" (Borsdorff 1; my translation).[13] The author is obviously pleased with the Americans' awe at the Germans' ability to apply fighter traits that both sides would know from Indian novels.

Like their American counterparts, German papers used references to the warrior cliché chiefly in reports on irregular warfare or on especially rough combat conditions. Fighting on mountains and in forests, ambushes, night patrols, and hand-to-hand combat related to the typical image adopted from Indian and Western settings. In Italy, rugged terrain provided for many of these surprising combat situations, and the ethnic diversity of troops deployed there further lent itself to the stereotype of savages. Describing how Allied troops easily infiltrated isolated German positions and suddenly attacked from the rear, one Nazi correspondent concluded: "This kind of Boy-Scout warfare suits the Americans fine, and especially some of the aboriginal peoples whom the Allies are sponging on" (Enz 3; my translation).[14] All these difficulties, though, would be overcome by the superhuman German qualities, since "eventually it is neither the rain nor the malice of the canyons which block the enemies' advance, but only the bravery and endurance of our

[12] In the Battle of the Bulge, many American units were cut off from support and had to fight a 'last stand.' General Patton's troops rushing in to the rescue were portrayed in the role of the cavalry charging over the hill in the last reel (cf. "Isolated Yanks hold Nazis Like Indian Fighters").

[13] The original reads: "Lederstrumpf der Infanterie." This article uses the main character of Cooper's novels as a synonym for the frontiersman who combines European technology and Indian training to become a superior fighter.

[14] The original reads: "Diesen Pfadfinderkrieg lieben vor allem die Amerikaner und erst recht manche Eingeborenenvölker, die die Alliierten für den Kampf eingespannt haben." Among the Allied forces in Italy, there were not only colonial Indian troops of the British Army, but also the 45th U.S. Infantry Division, which consisted of one third Native Americans from the South West (cf. 45th Infantry Division Museum).

soldiers" (3; my translation). After all, as in the Westerns of both American and German making, the 'white race' would 'out-Indian' both Asian and American Indians!

The image of the Wild West was always present among the German soldiers and public; they were told to expect lawlessness, brutality, and insidiousness from American soldiers as part of the American cultural heritage and from Soviet soldiers as part of their racial heritage and nature as communists.[15] Denouncing American preparations for war as criminal, one article quoted a *Baltimore Sun* report on soldier training: "We need to teach our youth not to say 'sorry' when they cut loose, but to creep up to the evil, slimy, […] enemy from behind and kill him" ("Das sind Roosevelts" 1; my back-translation).[16] Germans had been the first to ruthlessly neglect the Geneva and Hague warfare conventions in Poland and Russia, yet Nazi authors likened the combat style of Soviet soldiers and American 'terror bombers' to banditry and gun-slinging on the American frontier. But, as one author said, German-dominated Europe would not "perform as Indians for these [...] scalp bounty-hunting boys" (Ullrich 3; my translation).[17] These examples of German and American usage show how easily the label 'Indian' could be switched from Russians to Germans or to Americans, change meaning from fierce soldier to helpless victim, and thus lose any correlation to the people and situations it originally signified.

Terrain and climatic conditions on the front inspired German soldiers to apply knowledge from Westerns and other stories about Native Americans and even the Inuit. A number of German papers showed soldiers in snowshoes. One article claimed "You can learn even from the Eskimos!" and described how mountain rangers built igloos for shelter (fig. 3). This example of German rangers building an igloo shows the Nazis' pragmatism in applying cultural traits of 'primitive' peoples for the sake of winning the war. By adopting Inuit features such as igloos and snowshoes, the German army followed the parallel tracks of high technology and borrowed traditional methods, often with bizarre results.

Depicting the other as primitive and close to nature expressed both an excuse for one's own soldierly shortcomings and one's admiration for

---

[15] This is also due to the Nazi propaganda effort to portray GIs as gangsters and murderers pressed into the army. In this case, Germans donned the Indian victim cliché (cf., among others, Ullrich).

[16] The German translation from the American article reads: "Unsere Jugend muss darin unterrichtet werden, nicht 'Verzeihung' zu sagen, wenn sie losschlägt, sondern an den bösen, schleimigen, lüsternen und bestialischen Feind von hinten heranzuschleichen und ihn zu töten."

[17] The original mentions "amerikanische Skalpjäger-Boys" [sic].

the primitive, the 'natural born warrior.' Harsh conditions were often invoked to explain to the home front why the series of *blitzkriege* had ended in Russian mud (cf. Hitler 3:1917). They could, on the one hand, be employed to praise how effortlessly Germans met the challenge—the German soldiers' quality would be depicted as superior to Russian barbarism. On the other hand, portraying Russians as Indians could justify the German soldiers' sudden lack of efficiency whenever such adverse conditions needed explanation. The following passage, using almost the same wording as Harold Ickes in his description of Native American GIs, demonstrates how arbitrary the application of the primitive warrior stereotype became:

> The peoples of the East […] are, by nature, warlike, accustomed to hunger and hardship, comparable to no European in their contentedness, and they have the excellent eyesight of people who are more at home in the forests and fields rather than the large offices and high-rises of the asphalt cities. (Kaufmann 2; my translation)[18]



Fig. 3: Illustration in "Selbst von den Eskimos kann man lernen!" (162)

When the German *Landsers*' apparent transformation into 'Indians' in

[18] Similarly, Hitler justified the slowing down of the advance in the Pripjet Swamps by claiming: "Well, [the Russian] is just some kind of swamp man and not a European, we'll have to admit that. It is harder for us to move in these swamps than for this people which originated in the mud" (4:1917). The German original reads: "ja, das ist eben eine Art Sumpfmensch und kein Europäer, das müssen wir zugeben. Es ist für uns eben etwas schwieriger, in diesem Sumpf vorwärts zu kommen, als dieses in Morast geborene Volk!"

Italy and Normandy is compared with German depictions of Soviet and Yugoslav partisans and regulars as Indians, one cannot but wonder about the ease with which the Indian warrior label was slapped onto so many different soldiers in ever-differing settings. It is part of the more general ambivalence in the German appropriation and exploitation of Indian imagery. The Nazis, being very pragmatic in the application of their ideology and their means of warfare, were equally pragmatic in employing a popular image for propaganda purposes. Thus, it is not surprising that the Indian warrior label casually switched meaning from hero to victim as well as villain, and even crossed the officially strict ideological borders of racial purity. Otherwise, heralding non-Aryans as role models would have been impossible.

If German everyday language and even soldiers' jargon to some extent were laced with Indian terms like those of North Americans, why did German war reports not explicitly use Indian terminology equally often when this could have drawn notice and created understanding and support in the populace? There are two—partially overlapping—possible answers.[19] On the one hand, it was simply unnecessary, since the mental link from certain types of warfare to Indian images occurred automatically. In dozens of autobiographies, German veterans commented on their memories of childhood games, brought up by the actual combat experience.[20]

On the other hand, there may have been some reluctance towards adopting Indian references in the context of warfare because many would have regarded comparisons with Indians as childish, and thus as unfit for the serious realm of military issues, propaganda, and politics. While the media formats of features or editorial comments would have allowed for such allusions to virtually everybody's childhood memories, the language of German war reports, although picturesque, more often than not avoided comparisons to Indians. It seems that imagining, performing, and discussing Indian warrior topics were interwoven into the process of maturing.

---

[19] A third answer could lead to the heated debate between Nazi purists and pragmatists on whether Indians, being non-Aryans, were acceptable as role models or not. Since the "pro-Indian faction" seems to have prevailed, and Nazi educators actually promoted the writing of Indian novels for the German youth (cf. Haible 52-78), I will disregard this debate in my analysis.

[20] Thomas Kramer mentions the writers Martin Walser, Dieter Noll, and Erich Loest, all of whom worked Karl May references, adolescent playacting as Indians, and soldier experience into their autobiographies (cf. 126-27).

Playing Indian—Harmless Horseplay or Playful Preparation for War?

In the academic debate about the influence of Indianthusiasm on German politics, and especially on the Nazi effort to radicalize the German youth, many have pointed out similarities between playing Indian and preparing for war. Most notably, histories of the reception of Karl May's novels have been part of that controversy. This study does not aim to enter into the debate on whether or not Karl May cleared the path for National Socialism, or even for the Nazi war of extermination, but it sheds light on the importance which the Indian Scout Syndrome and corresponding customs of playing Indian had for World War II and its preparatory phase.[21]

The widespread popularity of playing Indian worked towards an easy infiltration into and exploitation of these children's activities in approaches to propaganda and militarization after 1933. Since it was not only the children of active Nazis who had shared these experiences, all layers of society could be reached. The continuum ranged from Adolf Hitler, who had enjoyed Indian games as a boy because they fit so neatly into his interest in playing war, through the works of several famous authors, writers, and journalists, to common people such as David and Arnold Weininger, two Jewish boys from Leipzig, whose reverence for Karl May made them don Indian costumes during local carnivals (cf. Hamann 21; Arbeitsgruppe Stolpersteine). Adopting the role of an 'Indian' in these games, one could easily re-enact episodes from the novels; in other words, one could "turn into Old Shatterhand" with little effort (Kreis, "German Wild West" 257). When children spent their free time this way, they did not realize that, after 1933, concerted attempts set in to turn these innocent games into preparations for war.

In a 1930 feature, the *Illustrierte Zeitung* published a telling example of boys acting out Indian games which, in other settings and regalia, could easily be termed gang riots or war games, and which is representative for all social levels (cf. Haase 456). Detailed descriptions of the games' plots in the article "Wildwest am Rande der Großstadt" reveal typical Karl May and Wild West show themes. An accompanying visual complements the text by featuring many of these popular Western themes and images: a stake, a tomahawk, captivity, rescue, Indians wearing war bonnets, and the council fire (fig. 4). It is interesting to note how the author recognized "laws and order" in "the old games" of

[21] For the discussion on Karl May, cf. Kreis, "German Wild West"; also Hamerski; Haible; Kramer. For a brief, contrastive, criticism on the role of the warrior image in Nazi education of the German youth, cf. Allen 247-78.

contemporary youngsters (456). Children, “roaming the area in packs,” revived “times and conditions long forgotten” (456). The poetic language of this feature also notes a “poetic quality” in the children’s games. Typical for Indian novels, this style is apparently used to make the piece somewhat more colorful, but there is also a tone of superior adult haughtiness in the narrator’s voice. The other striking feature in the text is the obvious ease with which the transformation from boy into “bloodthirsty redskin” is commented—the author can take for granted that readers will automatically assume that “becoming an Indian” meant that the impersonator would “feel the insurmountable thirst for blood awaken inside” (456).



Fig. 4: Illustration in G. Haase, “Wildwest am Rande der Großstadt” (456)

The superior adult tone appears again when, in 1941, Franz Schauwecker relates in his article “Triumph der Jugend” the story of a young German soldier in France who is suddenly struck by his childhood memories: one day, while playing Indian, he had happened upon a column of marching soldiers. Enthralled by the splendor and precision of lines of marching men, he lost track of the time and returned home late, fearing an austere father’s punishment. Yet, much to his surprise, the boy was not reprimanded. Instead, his father took him aside and told him stories of his own front experience in the trenches during World War I as well as other ancestors’ war stories. These stories made the boy “forget his games as [...] Indian so that the only thing he could do is listen” (5). After such an initiation into the world of manhood, the boy was determined to become a soldier, go back to France one day, and finish the job his father was denied, namely taking the city of Reims. This

incident clearly demonstrates a process of maturing which might contribute to an explanation for the absence of 'Indian talk' in German war reporting. Although a popular pastime among German children across the social stratum, Indian games were replaced by real soldiering at some stage which belonged to the realm of adults. While there was nothing wrong with playing Indian at a young age, a boy had to move on and become a man through serious soldier training. The image of the Indian scout served as a link between childhood and adulthood, between playful games and the civic duty of military service; it thus constituted a 'present absence' in media elaborations of the German warrior.

Playing Indian in the Nazi era was, therefore, seen and utilized as a necessary, early phase in a future soldier's training, promoted in the official periodical of the Hitler Youth, *Die HJ*. Not coincidentally, the author of a 1938 article on scouting games, in explaining to his adolescent readers the interrelatedness of theory and practice, referred to Karl May when stating that one had to be literate in order to read, and enjoy, May's stories (cf. "Parole" 9). Similarly, he argued, one had to learn how to "read" the terrain in order to succeed in a scouting game and thus learn for life: "After all, we don't do these scouting games to determine the winners and losers. That would be superficial and, in the long run, boring. The emphasis is on 'scouting,' not on 'game'" (9; my translation).[22] This argument involves playing Indian, along with the fun of assuming roles by teaching children how to take advantage of terrain, to camouflage troops and conceal their movements, to lie in ambush, to outflank enemy positions, and the like. Casually mentioning that these skills will be useful for the "serious business ahead" (9), the author instructed his squad-leader readers how military methods and concepts could be strategically pointed out to their units by way of playing.

The gradual transition from horseplay to military instruction would also come to the fore when front officers uttered informal remarks in the presence of young soldiers, as an autobiographical short story by writer Erich Loest suggests. A group of Hitler Youth, recruited into the short-lived Nazi guerrilla organization *Werwolf*, was dismissed from a briefing with the order to "go out there and prove you didn't read Karl May for nothing" (qtd. in Kramer 127). This comment by an officer functions as an example of similar, more anecdotal, references to soldiers reminiscing

[22] The German term *Geländespiel* is a compound of *terrain* and *game*, thus enabling allusions to scout training, even though the whole exercise could justifiably be described as war game. The original reads: "Schliesslich machen wir die Geländespiele nicht, um [...] haargenau festzustellen, wer Sieger und Besiegter ist. Das ist oberflächlich und auf die Dauer auch langweilig. Der Hauptton liegt nicht auf 'Spiel' sondern auf 'Gelände.'"

on Karl May bedtime stories. However, it could also be read as a sign for a professional's late-war resignation about having to work with children instead of seasoned veterans. The interrelation of play and training is further revealed in the German soldier's coinage of "Indian game" for field training, "Indian village" for field training camp, and "Prairie" for the actual training grounds (cf. Küpper 8, 9).

At this point, a proud report by a German army official on German snipers in Normandy who scared American soldiers gains more importance as it comes back full circle to scouting games, and to early childlike horseplay. While one needed some "natural talent" to excel as sniper, the training efforts by both SA storm troopers and the Hitler Youth, claims Captain Borsdorff, ensured the success of the massive deployment of sniper teams on the front most efficiently (cf. 1). This 1944 report reads as if the Hitler Youth scouting game manual was used as a foil; the same skills and concepts practiced back in 1938 were now, six years later, praised as war-winning skills of soldiers who might have been among the children playing back then. Indeed, practicing these skills had proven useful for the former Hitler Youth in the 'serious business ahead.' If one started out assuming the role of 'Indian' as a child, Nazi organizations would gradually help mold an individual into a fully trained, teutonized warrior, feared by the old cowboys' descendants.

The Indian Scout Syndrome, reasserted over centuries, has been an integral part of the German perception of Native Americans. Intensified by popular literature, by live demonstrations of 'real Indians' in Wild West shows, and through the nationwide custom of children at play, particular traits and habits were tied to the image, and accepted as typical 'Indian' features. The Indian scout and warrior was a role model for German children as well as for soldiers, as much as it was a concrete concept among American soldiers and correspondents. It would be employed to denote exceptional soldiering in both American and German war reports, and it served as a foil to denote propaganda images depicting both heroes and helpless victims in the U.S. and Nazi Germany. Yet, it is also an example of how the historical perception of the other can take on an independent existence until the signifier 'Indian' becomes indistinguishable from 'warrior/soldier' and thus no longer requires the signified reality to make observers understand.

Works Cited

45th Infantry Division Museum. 01 Apr. 2011 <http://www.45thdivisionmuseum.

com>.
Ahnert, Kurt. *Sprühende Heersprache: 2000 witzige Soldatenausdrücke aus der Weltkriegssprache.* Nürnberg: Burgverlag, 1917.
Allen, Deborah Ann. "The Reception and Perception of North America's Indigenous Peoples in Germany 1871-1945: A Study with Specific Reference to the North American Indian Image." Diss. Universität Konstanz, 2004.
Arbeitsgruppe Stolpersteine Leipzig. *Salomo Weininger*. 2006. Bürgerkomitee Leipzig e.V. 01 Apr. 2011 <http://www.stolpersteine-leipzig.de/index.php?id=177%20target=>.
Berkhofer, Robert F. *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present.* New York: Vintage, 1979.
Borsdorff. "Deutsche Scharfschützen: Die Elite des Einzelkämpfers." *Rheinisch-Westphälische Zeitung* [Essen] 16 Jun. 1944: 1.
Boyle, Hal. "Americans Hound Nazi Bands Like Indian Fighters of Old West." *Los Angeles Times* 03 Aug. 1944: 1.
Calloway, Colin G., et al., eds. *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2002.
Commenda, Hans. *Die deutsche Soldatensprache in der K. u. K. Österreichisch-Ungarischen Armee.* Wien: Verband österreichischer Privatmuseen, 1949.
"Das sind Roosevelts Kampfmethoden und Soldaten!" *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten* 22 Nov. 1942: 1.
"Debts to the Indian." *Chicago Daily Tribune* 10 Aug. 1941: 14.
Enz, Walter. "Neue Flammenzeichen über der Süditalienfront." *Stuttgarter Neueste Nachrichten* 15 May 1944: 3.
"Fighting Indian Style." *Chicago Daily Tribune* 8 Nov. 1942: 16.
Franco, Jere' Bishop. *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II*. Denton: U of North Texas P, 1999.
Haase, G. "Wildwest am Rande der Großstadt." *Illustrierte Zeitung* [Leipzig, Köln] 3 Apr. 1930: 456.
Haible, Barbara. *Indianer im Dienste der NS-Ideologie: Untersuchungen zur Funktion von Jugendbüchern über nordamerikanische Indianer im Nationalsozialismus.* Hamburg: Kovac, 1998.
Hamann, Brigitte. *Hitlers Wien.* München: Piper, 2004.
Hamerski, Baruch. "Mißdeutet und missbraucht: Karl May im Nationalsozialismus." *Exemplarisches zu Karl May*. Ed. Walther Ilmer and Christoph F. Lorenz. Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1993. 205-28.
Hitler, Adolf. *Hitler, Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945.* Ed. Max Domarus. 4 vols. Leonberg: Pamminger, 1988.
Holm, Tom. *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1996.
Ickes, Harold L. "Indians Have a Name for Hitler." *Colliers* Jan. 1944: 41-65.
"Indian File." *OED Online*. 2008. 12 Oct. 2008 <http://www.oed.com>.
"Isolated Yanks Hold Nazis Like Indian Fighters." *Chicago Daily Tribune* 31 Dec. 1944: 2.
"Katrina Files-Sept 04 Aaron Broussard." *Youtube* 14 Aug. 2006. 01 Apr. 2011. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9dJjAEVZ4g>.
Kaufmann, Günter. "'Saprali!' Der Sowjetsoldat und der politische Kommissar."

Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten 6 Jul. 1941: 2.
Kramer, Thomas. *Micky, Marx, und Manitu: Zeit- und Kulturgeschichte im Spiegel eines DDR-Comics 1955-1990—"Mosaik" als Fokus von Medienerlebnissen im NS und in der DDR.* Berlin: Weidler, 2002.
Kreis, Karl Markus. "German Wild West: Karl May's Invention of the Definitive Indian." *I like America: Fictions of the Wild West.* Ed. Pamela Kort and Max Hollein. New York: Prestel, 2006. 249-71.
---. "Indians Playing, Indians Praying: Native Americans in Wild West Shows and Catholic Missions." Calloway et al. 195-212.
Küpper, Heinz. *Von Anschiss bis Zwitschergemüse: Das Bundessoldatendeutsch von A-Z.* München: Heyne, 1986.
Lutz, Hartmut. "German Indianthusiasm: A Socially Constructed German National(ist) Myth." Calloway et al. 167-84.
Murchie, Guy. "Guerilla Warfare: How it Works." *Chicago Daily Tribune* 28 Jun. 1942: H2.
"Parole: Hadschi Halef Omar!" *Die HJ* [München] 2 Dec. 1938: 9.
Roberts, Alasdair. *The Collapse of Fortress Bush: The Crisis of Authority in American Government*. New York: New York UP, 2008.
Rohr, Mathieu von. "Indianer-Vergleich: Steinbrücks Wildwest-Rhetorik erzürnt die Schweizer." *Spiegel Online* 17 Mar. 2009. 01 Apr. 2011 <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,613853,00.html>.
Schauwecker, Franz. "Triumph der Jugend." *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten* 13 Apr. 1941: 5 (Supplement "Sieg des jungen Lebens").
"Selbst von den Eskimos kann man lernen!" *Illustrierte Zeitung* [Leipzig, Köln] 20 Feb. 1941: 162.
Small, Alex. "Finds Nazi Staff Admires Russian as Fighting Man." *Chicago Daily Tribune* 4 Jul. 1942: 2.
Townsend, Kenneth W. *World War II and the American Indian*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2000.
Ullrich, Oskar. "Wild-West und Wild-Ost." *Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten* 28 May 1944: 3.
Usbeck, Frank. "Fellow Peoples: The Influence of the German Image of Indians on German National Identity and its Appropriation by National Socialism in German Periodicals, 1925-1945." Diss. U of Leipzig, 2010.