

Nazi Propaganda: Creating the 'Myth of the Fuhrer'

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Headnote: On August 2nd 1914, photographer Heinrich Hoffmann allegedly captured Adolf Hitler in one of his pictures, later titled *Feldherrnhalle*, taken at the mass rally in front the Field Marshalls Hall in Munich.¹ The rally was in celebration of Germany's declaration of war and mobilization. Heinrich Hoffmann didn't officially meet Hitler until 1919, and shortly after joined the Nazi party and participated in the Beer Hall *Putsch* as a photographic correspondent. Hitler then named Hoffmann his official photographer. Heinrich Hoffmann used his position in the Nazi party and his relationship to Hitler to acquire considerable wealth during and after World War II. He received royalties from all uses of Hitler's image, which appeared on postage stamps and cigarette packets, among other places. He was a major art 'collector' and after the war was tried for war profiteering from the art collection he amassed as a result of the Nazis art plundering.² Hoffmann's image has since appeared in dozens of 20th-century Hitler biographies as evidence for his early German nationalism. In 2001, Professor Gerd Krumeich published an essay that included scientific discoveries that indicated Hoffmann fabricated the image.³ Krumeich's findings disputed Hitler's claim of patriotism during the first World War and questioned Hitler's persona as an idealized nationalistic leader of Germany.



Heinrich Hoffmann's *Feldherrnhalle*⁴

¹ Hoffmann, Heinrich. *Feldherrnhalle*. August 2, 1914. Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Germany.

² Wikipedia contributors, "Heinrich Hoffmann (photographer)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Heinrich_Hoffmann_\(photographer\)&oldid=877160051](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Heinrich_Hoffmann_(photographer)&oldid=877160051)

³ Krumeich, Gerd. "Hitler in der Menge," in: C. Dipper, A. Gestrich, L. Raphael (eds.), *Krieg, Frieden und Demokratie: Festschrift für Martin Vogt zum 65. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt, 2001), 137-140, p. 140.

⁴ Hoffmann, Heinrich. *Feldherrnhalle*. August 2, 1914. Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Germany.

In 1930, Hoffmann published a photo series in the magazine *Illustrierter Beobachter* (*Illustrated Observer*) which did not include his alleged photo of Hitler. The *Illustrated Observer* was an illustrated Nazi propaganda magazine published from 1926 to 1945 in Munich. It was one of the city's most popular news outlets that often featured beneficial Nazi propaganda.⁵ It wasn't until later that year that Hitler told Hoffmann he had been present at the 1914 rally. Hoffmann reportedly looked through his plate glass negatives and located Hitler in an image he planned to throw away. Two years later, in March of 1932, Hoffmann published images in the same magazine, and for the first time revealed the image of Hitler in Munich for the celebration of the start of World War I.⁶ The 'existence' of this image was incredible news for the Nazi propaganda team. It was a crucial aspect in creating a mythical persona around the Fuhrer. Hitler being a 'man in the crowd' and a 'commoner of the people' allowed him to gain trust because the validity of his leadership came from this background. It allowed Germany to trust its leader because, in the retrospective propaganda-created idea of the August 1914 mindset, Hitler was Germany.⁷ The nature of the support that this image created was critical considering National Socialist ideals at the time: unification, cohesion, and nationalism. Hitler's 'presence' at the 1914 rally was emblematic of these ideals and further supported his claim as Germany's leader and savior.

Heinrich Hoffmann's *Feldherrnhalle* photograph has since appeared in dozens of Hitler biographies. Hitler is credited with being an early patriot and nationalist because he eagerly celebrated the outbreak of World War I.⁸ The image is used to show his commitment to the German people and enthusiasm for German prosperity, and allows him to be recognized as a supporter of the German cause before the embarrassment of the Treaty of Versailles.⁹ Hitler reinforced these beliefs with his narratives in *Mein Kampf*, where he credits this day with supplying meaning and direction to his life.¹⁰

⁵ Wikipedia contributors, "Heinrich Hoffmann (photographer)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Heinrich_Hoffmann_\(photographer\)&oldid=877160051](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Heinrich_Hoffmann_(photographer)&oldid=877160051)

⁶ The Local Contributors, "Famous Hitler Rally Picture Probably Faked," *The Local*, <https://www.thelocal.de/20101014/30503> Oct. 14, 2010.

⁷ Krumeich, Gerd. "Hitler in der Menge," in: C. Dipper, A. Gestrich, L. Raphael (eds.), *Krieg, Frieden und Demokratie: Festschrift für Martin Vogt zum 65. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt, 2001), 137-140, p. 137.

⁸ Hanser, Richard. *Putsch!: How Hitler Made Revolution* (New York: P.H. Wyden INC, 1970), 74-76.

⁹ Toland, John. *Adolf Hitler* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 55.

¹⁰ Bullock, Alan. *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 48-49.

However, in 2001 experts began to take a second look at the image and question its authenticity because Hoffmann's discovery was too timely to be serendipitous. It is no coincidence that Hoffmann did not find the 'find' the image until the 1930s - long after he had been profiting from his service as Hitler's photographer - and shortly before he started amassing an art collection stolen from Jews. Radical totalitarian regimes of the 20s and 30s relied heavily on propaganda to bolster national support, and the image happened to appear at a critical point in the Nazi path of power and would serve as a foundation for building the mythical persona of the Fuhrer.¹¹ Professor Gerd Krumeich explains in his essay, "Hitler in der Menge," that the Munich State Library contains recognizably retouched copies of Hoffmann's image, where Hitler's hair is clearly retouched. Krumeich also comments on the fact that Hoffmann published a book in 1955 that failed to mention the fortuitous discovery of the photo. (Krumeich 2001,5). Even Hitler's prime placement in the image has led experts to believe the image was fabricated.¹²

Krumeich's discovery has offered historians new ways to understand the way Nazis created and used propaganda. There is speculation as to whether Hitler ever told Hoffmann to forge the image, or Hoffmann took it upon himself to please the Fuhrer in order to increase his status in the Reich. If Hoffmann took it upon himself, he would have been 'working towards the Fuhrer' like so many other important Nazi officers for personal benefit. The surplus of these greedy officers catalyzed the radicalization of the Nazi party, which led to the extreme outcomes of World War II. Whichever it may be, Hoffmann's photograph used to be emblematic of Hitler's righteous control over the Third Reich, but is now being viewed as just another ignoble piece of Nazi propaganda.

¹¹ Krumeich, Gerd. "Hitler in der Menge," in: C. Dipper, A. Gestrich, L.Raphael (eds.), *Krieg, Frieden und Demokratie: Festschrift für Martin Vogt zum 65. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt, 2001), 137-140, p. 140.

¹² Weber, Thomas. *Hitler's First War: Adolf Hitler, the Men of the List Regiment, and the First World War* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 88.

Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order

Hoffmann, Heinrich. *Feldherrnhalle*. August 2, 1914. Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Germany.

- The photo is at the mass rally in front of the Field Marshalls Hall in Munich on August 2, 1914. The rally was a celebration of Germany's declaration of war and mobilization.

Hoffmann, Heimrich. *Hitler Was My Friend*. London: Burke, 1955.

- Hoffmann's book includes the questionable image of Hitler but does not talk about taking the photo in 1914 nor meeting with Hitler in 1930 where he 'discovered' the image. Professor Gerd Krumeich later uses Hoffmann's book (focusing on the absence of the discovery story) as evidence for image's fabrication.

Hanser, Richard. *Putsch!: How Hitler Made Revolution*. New York: P.H. Wyden, 1970.

- Hoffmann's image is briefly discussed from pages 74-76 as Hanser recalls the events of August 2, 1914. The image is used as 'proof' that Hitler supported the German cause from a young age. Hitler is credited for having unconditional support for and commitment to World War I at its outbreak.

Toland, John. *Adolf Hitler*. New York: Doubleday, 1976.

- Hoffmann's image is briefly discussed on pages 57-58 and is used as support for Hitler's claims of early patriotism. Toland also recalls segments of *Mein Kampf* where Hitler refers to his attendance as a call to action to commit his life to the German cause.

Bullock, Alan. *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*. New York: Knopf, 1992.

- Bullock briefly mentions Hoffmann's image on pages 48-49 when discussing Hitler's attendance at the Field Marshalls Hall rally to support Hitler's claims of early nationalism and commitment that he makes in *Mein Kampf*.

Kershaw, Ian. *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1999.

- Kershaw discusses Hoffmann's image on pages 88-89 in support of Hitler's attendance at the Field Marshalls Hall rally. He later explains the importance of the image's 'existence' when creating the persona of Hitler the Fuhrer.

Krumeich, Gerd. "Hitler in der Menge," in: C. Dipper, A. Gestrich, L. Raphael (eds.), *Krieg, Frieden und Demokratie: Festschrift für Martin Vogt zum 65. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt, 2001), 137-140.

- Professor Krumeich believes Hoffmann's 1914 photograph of Hitler was fabricated. The existence of this image allowed Hitler to be viewed as a ruler who came from the common people, which supported Nazi ideals. Because Hitler was present in Munich at the start of World War I, it allowed German to be ruled by one of its own. The photo found at the exact time the Nazi party was creating the 'myth of Hitler' and played a crucial role in making that persona possible. Images from that angle appear in the *Illustrated Observer* in 1930, but none of them contain a recognizable Hitler. Krumeich also recognizes the correlation between Hoffmann's closeness with Hitler and his miraculous finding of a crucial image nearly two decades after it was shot. Regimes in the 20s and 30s relied heavily on the use of propaganda to control their populi, and dictators such as Stalin were known to have forged photographs too.

Machtan, Lothar. *The Hidden Hitler*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.

- The image is included in the plates after page 246 as evidence of Hitler's enthusiasm for the Great War.

Weber, Thomas. *Hitler's First War: Adolf Hitler, the Men of the List Regiment, and the First World War*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

- Weber credits the image with being one of the iconic photographs of the 20th century. It demonstrates that Munich was filled with enthusiastic Germans and that Hitler was representative of the average population. However, Weber indicates that Hitler's frontal placement in the photo suggests that it was fabricated for propaganda purposes.

The Local Contributors, "Famous Hitler Rally Picture Probably Faked," *The Local*, <https://www.thelocal.de/20101014/30503> Oct. 14, 2010 (accessed February 1, 2019).

- Hoffmann's image was published in the Nazi newspaper "Illustrated Observer" to counter Hitler's opponents who attacked him for his flight from military service in Austria-Hungary. The image served as 'proof' that Hitler was an adamant German patriot. Hoffman claimed that he only noticed Hitler in the glass plate negative when Hitler visited his studio in 1929 and claimed to be there. Historian Gerd Krumeich studied the picture and concluded that the image had been touched up to include Hitler. Krumeich found a different version of the picture in one of Hoffmann's photo archives and noticed that Hitler's characteristic looks are quite different. The original glass plate negative has never been found.

Crowther, Charles., Nyhan, Julianna., Tarte, Segolene., Dahl, Jacob. "New and Recent Developments in Image Analysis: Theory and Practice." *Digital Humanities*, (2014). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327578754_New_and_recent_developments_in_image_analysis_theory_and_practice

- Crowther et al. reviewed findings of new image evaluation software on a variety of World War I images regarding Belgian refugees. They plan to extrapolate their findings so that they can use images more critically to evaluate the past. They did not specifically explore Hoffmann's image, but mentioned the convenient timing of its discovery.

Wikipedia contributors, "Heinrich Hoffmann (photographer)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Heinrich_Hoffmann_\(photographer\)&oldid=877160051](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Heinrich_Hoffmann_(photographer)&oldid=877160051) (accessed February 1, 2019).

- Heinrich Hoffmann (1885-1957) was a Nazi photographer who met Hitler in 1919 and became Hitler's official photographer 1921. Hoffmann was forbidden to take candid shots, but his images played a major part in Hitler's propaganda campaigns. Hoffmann was a member of Hitler's inner circle and received royalties from his work, making him a millionaire by the time the war had ended. Following the end of the War, he was arrested for war profiteering because his art collection was allegedly stolen from Jews.

Wikipedia contributors, "Gerd Krumeich" *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*,

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Gerd_Kumeich&oldid=877160051 (accessed February 2, 2019).

- Krumeich (1945-) is a professor at the University of Dusseldorf and has a doctorate in history. He played a major part in the construction of the Historial de la Grande Guerre in the French City of Peronne. He specializes in research on World War I. He is known for concluding that Heinrich Hoffmann's photo of Hitler at the rally in front of the Field Marshal's Hall in 1914 is a forgery.