



Hoffmann Portrait Postcards

Heinrich Hoffmann (pictured at left) was Hitler's personal photographer. Josef Goebbles, Hitler's propaganda minister, encouraged Hitler Youth to collect photos of Germany's military heroes. It became a hobby much like today's youngsters collecting popstar autographs or baseball cards. The idea was to collect as many of the autographs as possible. Trading for the more rare ones was fierce.

This was an excellent propaganda tool. Each Hitler Youth group had adults whose responsibility was to help the youth collect hero autographs.

Hoffmann was born in Germany September 12, 1885. After leaving school, he worked in his father's photography shop. During World War I he joined the army where he worked as an official photographer. In 1920 he joined the National Socialist German Workers' Party and soon became a close friend of Adolf Hitler.

Goebbles made considerable use of photographs. Many were portraits, but Hitler also viewed architecture as the most artistic form of propaganda. When World War II broke out, Goebbles continued a tradition that started in WWI of having portrait postcards produced of German Heroes. These cards, known as "Hoffman Cards," are among the most popular WWII German collectibles. Hitler would have the "hero" photographed, then a small quantity of the post card portraits was given to the hero and larger quantities could be purchased at a discounted price. Coupons were included in cigarette packages and those coupons could be traded for the portrait post cards.

As the hobby of collecting these cards grew, some youngsters could not afford to purchase the cards (which sold at about 20 pfennig at that time). They would send the heroes either the Hoffman post cards or would make their own card by pasting a picture out of one of the military magazines for the hero to sign. These home made cards are known as "Hitler Youth Cards."

It often took some time before a soldier was recognized as a hero and the time Hoffmann was able to take his portrait and produce his cards. It was not uncommon for the hero to get killed in action before he was photographed by Hoffmann. In those cases, about the only signed cards available are the home made Hitler Youth ones sent for them to sign. In some cases the Hoffmann portrait cards were printed after the hero was killed in action, as was the case of the Helmut Wick portrait. It is not uncommon to see dealers offering Hoffmann portrait postcards "signed" by Wick. Obviously these are counterfeit.

Hoffmann also produced these cards for members of the high command. Some, like Erwin Rommel and Hermann Goring, had numerous different Hoffman cards with their portraits. Others, like Generalfieldmarshall Schorner for some reason never had one made. While the signed portrait cards were primarily collected by the youth, many of the heroes themselves were very aggressive in collecting the signed cards. Adolf Galland, Dieter Hrabak, and Erich Hartmann were among those who had quite extensive collections. Some little known facts about Heinrich Hoffmann:

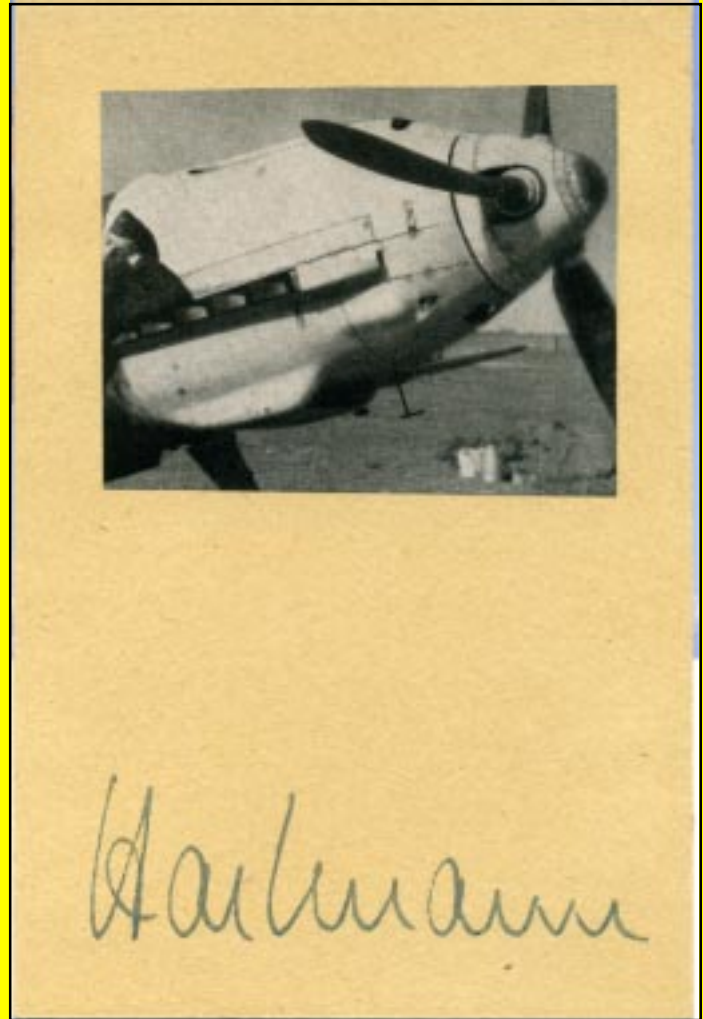
- *He first met Hitler to confront him after hearing Hitler tried to kiss his beautiful daughter.
- *He took over 2.5 million photographs of Hitler.
- *His assistant, Eva Braun, became Hitler's lover.
- *He introduced Erik Jan Hanussen to Hitler. Hanussen coached Hitler in public speaking and it was he that suggested the adoption of the swastika as an "Indian luck symbol" which would bless its wearers with good fortune.
- *He became extremely wealthy by receiving a royalty on every photo of his that was reproduced.
- *His portraits of Hitler were used on Germany's postage stamps and Hitler received tens of millions of dollars in royalties after Hoffmann suggested he should receive a royalty on every stamp sold.

After WWII, Hoffmann was found guilty as a Nazi profiteer and was sentenced to 10 years. Hoffmann's first book of photographs was published in 1919. Over the next 20 years he published numerous books of photos. He was elected to the Reichstag in 1940 and died in Munich on December 11, 1957.

Pictured below is a typical Hoffman portrait postcard, a typical private photo, and a typical Hitler Youth card.



Marseille (Hoffmann)



Hartmann (Hitler Youth)



Molders (Private Photo)