



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 5. Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War, 1890-1918
Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1925)

In this passage from *Mein Kampf*, Hitler describes his emotions upon learning of the outbreak of war. Like many at the time, Hitler saw the war as a joyful event that would help free Germany from international insecurity and bring about national regeneration.

The fight of the year 1914 was certainly not forced upon the masses, good God! but desired by the entire people itself.

One wanted at last to make an end to the general uncertainty. Only thus is it understandable that for this most serious of all struggles more than two million German men and boys joined the flag voluntarily, ready to protect it with their last drop of blood.

To me personally those hours appeared like the redemption from the annoying moods of my youth. Therefore I am not ashamed today to say that, overwhelmed by impassionate enthusiasm, I had fallen on my knees and thanked Heaven out of my overflowing heart that it had granted me the good fortune of being allowed to live in these times.

A struggle for freedom had broken out, greater than the world had ever seen before; because, once Fate had begun its course, the conviction began to dawn on the great masses that this time the question involved was not Serbia's or Austria's fate, but the existence or non-existence of the German nation.

For the last time in many years, the German nation had become clairvoyant about its own future. Thus, at the very beginning of the enormous struggle the intoxication of the exuberant enthusiasm was mixed with the necessary serious undertone; for this realization alone made the national rising become something greater than a mere bonfire. But this was only too necessary; even then one had no idea of the possible length and duration of the struggle now beginning. One dreamt of being home again in winter to continue work in renewed peace.

What man desires, he hopes and believes. The overwhelming majority of the nation had long been tired of the eternally uncertain state of things; thus one could only too readily understand that one no longer believed in a peaceful adjustment of the Austro-Serbian conflict, but hoped for the final settlement. I, too, belonged to these millions.

Hardly had the news of the assassination spread in Munich, when two ideas immediately entered my head: first, that war would now at last be unavoidable, and further, that the Habsburg State would be forced to keep the alliance; for what I had always feared most was the

possibility that one day Germany herself, perhaps just in consequence of this alliance, would be entangled in a conflict without Austria being the direct cause for this, but that in such a case the Austrian State, for domestic political reasons, would not summon the energy to decide to stand by its ally. The Slav majority would certainly immediately have begun to sabotage such an intention by the State itself, and would certainly have preferred to smash the entire State into bits rather than to give the required help to the ally. This danger, however, was now averted. The old State had to fight whether it wanted to or not.

My own attitude towards the conflict was very clear and simple to me: in my eyes it was not Austria fighting for some Serbian satisfaction, but Germany fighting for her existence, the German nation for its being or non-being, for freedom and future. Bismarck's work now had to fight; what the fathers once had gained by fighting with their heroic blood in the battles from Weissenburg to Sedan and Paris, now young Germany had to earn again. If this fight would be carried through victoriously, then our nation would also have returned to the circle of the nations which are great in external power, and only then could the German Reich prove a powerful shield of peace without being forced to reduce its children's daily bread for the sake of this peace.

As a boy and a young man I had often formed the wish that at least once I might be allowed to prove by deeds that my national enthusiasm was not an empty delusion. Often I considered it a sin to shout 'hurrah' without perhaps having the inner right to do so; for who may use this cry without having proved himself there where all play is at an end and where the inexorable hand of the Goddess of Fate begins to weigh nations and men according to the truth and the durability of their convictions? Thus my heart, like that of a million others, was overflowing with proud happiness that at last I was able to free myself from this paralyzing feeling. So many times had I sung '*Deutschland über alles*' and shouted with full voice 'Heil,' that I considered it almost a belated favor that I was now allowed to appear as a witness before the tribunal of the Eternal Judge in order to proclaim the truth and the sincerity of my convictions. From the first hour I was certain that in the event of war (which appeared unavoidable to me), I would abandon my books in one way or the other. But I knew just the same that my place would be there where my inner voice directed me to go.

I had left Austria primarily for political reasons: but what was more natural that now that the fight had begun that I had to act according to this conviction? I did not want to fight for the Habsburg State, but I was ready to die at any time for my people and the Reich it constituted.

On August 3 I submitted a direct petition to His Majesty King Ludwig III with the request that I be permitted to serve in a Bavarian regiment. The cabinet office was certainly more than busy in those days; my joy was the greater when on the following day I received the reply to my request. My joy and my gratitude knew no end when I had opened the letter with trembling hands and read that my request had been granted and that I was summoned to report to a Bavarian regiment. A few days later I wore the uniform which I was not to take off again for six years.

Source: Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, edited and translated by Alvin Saunders Johnson, John Chamberlain, et. al. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1939, pp. 210-13.