

0. WHO WAS BRIDGET von HAMMERSMARK? - Story
Preface

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One of the most-popular singing actresses in Germany, during World War II, Zarah Leander may have been the inspiration for Bridgett von Hammersmark. This image is from a currently sold [CD of her songs](#).

As the war dragged on, Goebbels tried to lighten the hearts of German citizens with different [types of movies](#). Romances, comedies and music-in-film were extremely popular.

Nazi propaganda did not disappear, as Allied bombings continued. Those films were supplemented by stories which people could enjoy. Movies like *Wunschkonzert* ("Request Concert," 1940), *Die große Liebe* ("The Great Love," 1942) and *Kolberg* (1945) were effective tools in distracting the German public.

Goebbels, a reported womanizer, also tried to develop a "star" system and was frequently seen with popular actresses. Hitler, however, frowned on such activities since Goebbels was married with six young children.

One of the most popular actresses during the time of the Third Reich - [Zarah Leander](#), star of "[The Great Love](#)" - was also a singer. From Sweden, she wanted to be paid in her own currency and was widely rumored (before and after) to be a spy.

Was she an inspiration for Bridget von Hammersmark (who met her fate at the hands of [SS Colonel Hans Landa](#))? One can only speculate, but it seems reasonable.

Was Leander really a spy? The British historian, Antony Beevor, thinks so - see [The Mystery of Olga Chekhova](#), page 152) - although other scholars disagree. Leander, herself, addressed the issue head-on when she said:

I would not be surprised if they claimed I were spying in Iceland on behalf of the Vatican.

Another star of Third-Reich cinema was an actress who became a film maker. [Leni Riefenstahl](#) (who starred in the famous [mountain adventure](#), *Piz Palu*) so impressed Hitler that he selected her to be his personal movie producer. Among others, she made "[Triumph of the Will](#)" (documenting Hitler's rise to power) and "[Olympia](#)" (about the 1936 Olympics).

Riefenstahl, who is still admired for her revolutionary film techniques, was never able to overcome her [association with Hitler](#) and his Nazi regime. Although she lived to be 101, maintaining good health throughout her life, she was unwelcome in the post-war, movie-making world.

Hitler had always been unwelcome in Paris, where he had come to gloat soon after the June 22, 1940 armistice. But French resistance, and Allied advances made during and after the Normandy (D-Day) invasion, worked hard to end Nazi control of the French capital.

Paris was liberated in August of 1944.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/WHO-WAS-BRIDGET-von-HAMMERSMARK-Inglourious-Basterds>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/WHO-WAS-BRIDGET-von-HAMMERSMARK-Inglourious-Basterds>

Questions 2 Ponder

Should We Ever Suspect the Motives of Our Leaders?

Joseph Goebbels tried to divert the attention of Germans from ongoing bad news (about the war) to good news (and distracting films). How successful would world leaders be today if they tried to employ similar tactics?

Does the presence of the Internet, including social media, make it more or less likely that people would believe the words of their leaders or be suspicious of their leaders' motives? Explain your answer.

Do films, created by governments, portray the government's point of view? If so, does that make such films more or less believable? Explain your answer.

Media Stream



Zarah Leander - Inspiration for Bridget von Hammersmark?

1940 photo, of Leander and Staal, from the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda (Reichs Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda), headed by Joseph Goebbels.

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Zarah-Leander-Inspiration-for-Bridget-von-Hammersmark->



Leni Riefenstahl - Nazi-Era Film Maker

Photo by Karl Schenker, 1923, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Leni-Riefenstahl-Nazi-Era-Film-Maker>



Leni Riefenstahl with Adolf Hitler

Photo online, courtesy German Federal Archives.

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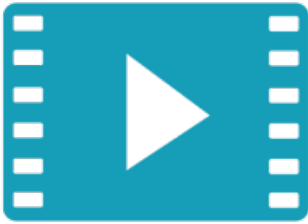
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Movies During the Third-Reich Era

Clip from *Goebbels: Master of Propaganda* - a 1992 BBC production, distributed by [Films for the Humanities and Sciences](#).

Documentary combines interviews (with people who knew Goebbels) and historical footage. Some of the interviewees are:



Fritz Hippler
Wilfred von Oven
Arthur Maria Rabenalt
Hans Feld
Rudolf Klicks

Production Company - BBC

Executive Producer - Jeremy Bennett

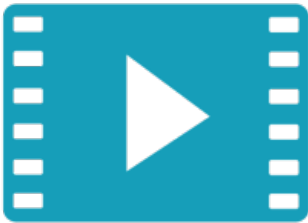
Producer - Laurence Rees

Script - Laurence Rees

Film information from [BFI National Library](#), London

Clip online, courtesy [BBC Worldwide Channel at YouTube](#).

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Movies-During-the-Third-Reich-Era>



Zarah Leander - The Great Love

Clip from *The Great Love*, a 1942 film starring Zarah Leander, in which she sings "*Davon geht die Welt nicht unter*" ('That is not the end of the world'). Online, courtesy Archive.org.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Zarah-Leander-The-Great-Love>



Piz Palu - Famous Silent Film

From "[Cinema Europe: The Other Hollywood](#)," a 1995 documentary by Kevin Brownlow and David Gill, online via YouTube. Copyright, Cinema Guild, Inc., all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

Narrated by Kenneth Branagh

Musical score by Carl Davis

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Piz-Palu-Famous-Silent-Film>

Nazi Propaganda Film - "Triumph of the Will"

Leni Riefenstahl made this documentary in 1935. It is based on the Nazi Party Congress which was held in Nuremberg during 1934.

Recognized for its technical expertise, and revolutionary concepts first used in film, the documentary (and Riefenstahl personally) were forever tainted by the subject matter: Hitler's rise to power.

Roger Ebert—a famous critic writing for the *Chicago Sun Times*—reviewed this propaganda film in 2008. Among the many things he says about it are [these observations](#):

That "Triumph of the Will" is a great propaganda film, there is no doubt, and various surveys have named it so. But I doubt that anyone not already a Nazi could be swayed by it. Being a Nazi, to this film, means being a mindless pawn in thrall to the godlike Hitler.

Yet it must have had a persuasive effect in Germany at the time; although Hitler clearly spells out that the Nazis will be Germany's only party, and its leader Germany's only leader for 1,000 years to come.

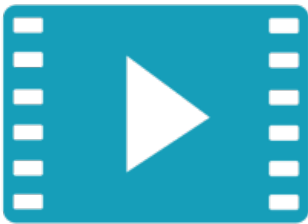
At the end, there is a singing of the party anthem, the Horst Wessel Song; under Nazi law, the right-arm salute had to be given during the first and fourth verses. We see a lot of right-arm saluting in "Triumph of the Will," noticing how Hitler curls his fingers back to his palm before withdrawing the salute each time, with a certain satisfaction.

What a horrible man. What insanity that so many Germans embraced him.

A sobering thought: Most of the people on the screen were dead within a few years.

Such is the power of political propaganda.

Triumph des Willens ("Triumph of the Will"), a German-language film (dubbed in English).



Director - Leni Riefenstahl

Producer - Leni Riefenstahl

Written by - Leni Riefenstahl and Walter Ruttmann

Starring - Adolf Hitler, Hermann Göring and other Nazi Leaders

Music by - Herbert Windt and Richard Wagner

Editing by - Leni Riefenstahl

Studio - Reichsparteitag-Film

Distributed by - Universum Film AG

Release date - Berlin - March 28, 1935

Running time - 114 minutes

Video online, courtesy Archives.org

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Nazi-Propaganda-Film-Triumph-of-the-Will->