

# Introduction

The following report is an official AP history of AP operations in Germany in the years 1931–1945. These were years of extreme suffering and crimes against humanity, including the rise of fascism, the horrors of the Holocaust and the carnage of World War II. They tested news organizations that were the world’s link to the front lines and behind them. So many aspects of this period have been subject to multiple waves of historical review, aided by the perspectives of time and the unearthing of archives, and the work of the AP, one of the world’s largest news organizations, is no exception.

The report is the result of an exhaustive review of the work of the AP news bureau and its subsidiary picture service in Germany from 1931–45 and was prompted largely by an article written last year by German historian Harriet Scharnberg (<http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/1-2016/id=5324>). Her paper concluded that the AP, by opting to stay in Germany during the years 1933–1941, ceded influence over the production of its news pictures to Nazi propagandists. A researcher interested in the uses of imagery, Scharnberg studied Nazi-controlled publications of the period and found instances in which AP photos were used and exploited by Nazi propaganda specialists for use in Germany. She also identified AP German photographers, who after World War II began in 1939, joined or were drafted into Nazi military propaganda units, some while still on AP’s payroll in either a staff or freelance capacity.

Scharnberg’s assertions appeared in stark contrast to what today’s AP knew of its own history. AP was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1939 for its comprehensive and aggressive coverage of the Nazi regime and the Nazis’ anti-Semitic policies, and AP’s struggles against the Nazis and efforts on behalf of its Jewish employees have been written about in many past AP accounts. However, to journalists the constant pursuit of truth is paramount. AP’s news values and principles demand that any serious critique of the news cooperative’s activity be thoroughly reviewed. AP believes it is important to know one’s own story — warts and all — and so we have re-examined the period, taking a hard look, and report our findings here.

For this history, AP carried out its research first by going through previously unexamined AP archives. Then we extended the research to other records repositories, U.S. military documents, and in some cases oral histories and the personal papers of deceased employees. The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration declassified all documents relevant to this inquiry in response to AP’s Freedom of Information Act requests. We also interviewed Scharnberg herself, who had reviewed select documentation from the AP Corporate Archives, after corresponding with AP archivists.

We approached this research with the understanding that the AP's chief mission always is to report the truth. In Germany in those years, that meant the AP's primary task and focus was to cover the overwhelming news of the day in Germany: The rise of Hitler, the rearming of the country, and the country's increasingly aggressive territorial demands, as well as the first manifestations of the virulent anti-Semitic policies that culminated in the Holocaust.

The evidence of this report points to a clear conclusion for The Associated Press. Viewed from the perspective of more than 80 years' hindsight, the AP in the totality of its conduct fulfilled its mission to gather the news in Germany forthrightly and as independently as possible for the benefit of its audience and for the benefit of the truth. We recognize that AP should have done some things differently during this period, for example protesting when AP photos were exploited by the Nazis for propaganda within Germany and refusing to employ German photographers with active political affiliations and loyalties, whether to the Nazis or any party. (The law at the time required that all AP German news photographers be German citizens; current AP standards demand that employees refrain from declaring their views on contentious public issues.) However, suggestions that AP at any point sought to help the Nazis or their heinous cause are simply wrong. Due in large part to the AP's aggressive reporting, the dangers of the Nazis' ambitions for domination in Europe and their brutal treatment of its opponents were revealed to the wider world.

When The Associated Press began its expansion into global markets in 1931 by basing subsidiaries in Britain and Germany, it was not evident that Germany was about to be plunged into a dark era of totalitarianism, taken over by Adolf Hitler's National Socialists. Upholding AP's values of a free press and the pursuit of accurate information under one of the most repressive regimes in history became a daily struggle after 1932. American journalists in the AP's news bureau in Berlin were called upon to collect and send out news while being hosted by a government that wanted nothing to do with independent, objective journalism. The Nazi regime revolutionized mass propaganda, brooked no dissent, and held the power to arrest, torture and execute at will. The challenges were even greater for the German staff of the AP's separate new German-registered photo subsidiary, the AP GmbH, which like all German media organizations was wholly subject to Nazi law.

This report reflects on two distinct periods. The first period dates from 1933, when Hitler took power, until Dec. 11, 1941, four days after Pearl Harbor, when AP's legal presence in Germany ended abruptly as Germany and the United States entered into a state of war.

During this time, the AP gathered news, little of it positive to the Nazi government, and collected and sold photos in Germany through its German service for the German market and sent some photos to New York. Photo editors there selected the best ones for distribution to AP's 1,400 American newspaper members. During this time, AP used its network of sources across German society to report on the regime from within, filing reams of dispatches that tracked developments on a daily basis for a concerned world.

Photos from Germany were in high demand in the United States as fascism and fears of war were on the rise. As noted, AP's photographers were required by law to be German citizens, subject to the pressures of the Gestapo and the Propaganda Ministry, but the main AP office and management in Berlin and London worked to keep the photo service's output free of propaganda. One price for remaining in operation in Germany however was to follow Nazi law, and that forced AP in 1935 — after having resisted for two years — to let go of its Jewish employees. AP helped them resettle safely to other countries, which allowed all of them to survive the Holocaust that soon followed. AP also had to parry interference and intimidation from the Propaganda Ministry, at times exercising self-censorship. Many American and other foreign journalists left Germany in the 1930s under threat or because they were expelled. AP, however, concluded it had to remain to provide coverage for U.S. newspapers and the American public.

The second period begins after Germany declared war on the U.S. and lasts until Germany's defeat by the Allies in May 1945. On Dec. 11, 1941, AP's news office in Berlin was summarily closed and its American staff arrested, to be interned for five months and then deported in a prisoner exchange. The AP German picture service was seized and handed over to the German Foreign Ministry and put under control of a Waffen SS photographer named Helmut Laux. AP's German picture service was AP's no more.

During this period, in order to continue to obtain photographs from Nazi-controlled areas of Europe, AP arranged with Laux, who now reigned over the picture service that had once been AP's, to provide AP with German-censored photos through a third party in neutral Portugal and later Sweden. This was done in exchange for AP photos from abroad. The AP sought and was given a green light for this wartime arrangement by the U.S. government. AP photos from the rest of the world sent to Germany were subjected to U.S. wartime censorship, ensuring that no sensitive U.S. military material was passed on. Photos received by AP from Germany were also reviewed by censors on the Allied side, either British or American, who would block Nazi images they deemed unhelpful to the Allied cause. Although the exchange necessitated dealing with the Nazi regime, it was the AP's belief then and now that the photos gave the U.S. public a much fuller picture of the war than could have been obtained otherwise. That included scenes of fighting on the Russian front, the results of bombings of German cities and Germany's failing war fortunes. In the exchange, the Germans received AP photos that Laux then copied and gave to top Nazi leaders and also offered to German newspapers and magazines for publication. With one known exception, the AP images that appeared in German publications through this arrangement were unaltered by the Germans, but captions were rewritten by the Germans to conform to official Nazi views. It is important to note that the AP photos the Nazis received accurately reflected Allied advances in the war, and over time they therefore became of less interest to German editors because they undermined the official German propaganda narrative of victory.

All these facts and events are discussed in detail in the seven chapters of AP's history that follow. The report includes key events, personalities and findings

from these years, and comprehensive endnotes spelling out the sources for the information. A separate PDF file posted with this report includes scans of 43 documents related to these events found in AP archives and referred to in the endnotes. Every effort has been made to be fully transparent.

Covering Nazi Germany tested the limits of independent journalism, and clearly, the AP made difficult choices. However, the industry's regard for AP's reporting was recognized by granting Berlin Bureau Chief Louis P. Lochner the 1939 Pulitzer Prize for correspondence. Ongoing research by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. has identified the AP as a prime source of information for ordinary Americans to learn of the Nazis' persecution of Jews and events related to the Holocaust, before and during the war. The AP's leadership of this era was outspoken in its pride in the work of its Berlin journalists and also considered it a success to be able to obtain a steady flow of news photos from Germany and Axis-occupied territories for its customers and the public even after the AP was ousted from Germany.

The AP is a not-for-profit cooperative whose members are U.S. media companies. It was formed for the purpose of gathering reliable and accurate news. The evidence in this report shows that overall the AP succeeded in fulfilling its mission to inform the world with truth and integrity to the best of its ability. Certain incidents were handled inadequately, and are identified and outlined in detail in the report. The results of the review as a whole show that during a violent and tragic period, the cooperative was working to obtain reliable information and photos, while protecting its values, in the face of the unprecedented challenges. This was in line with AP's longstanding responsibility to report as much and thoroughly as it can on the actions of tyrannical regimes and to provide a factual and independent record of events.

## Key findings: 1931–1941

- The AP German picture service (AP GmbH) was established as a subsidiary of The Associated Press of Great Britain in 1931 and was intended as a first step to setting up a news distribution service outside the United States. It aimed to serve the German press market while gathering photos from Europe for AP's membership in the United States and scattered subscribers elsewhere. Shortly after the Nazi takeover of power in 1933, all German publications lost independence and were brought under the control of the Propaganda Ministry. As a result, German publications began to reflect state-approved propaganda. AP management insisted that its German picture service production stay neutral in keeping with AP world standards, and there is ample evidence of these efforts in AP's internal communications. German staff members faced constant pressure from Propaganda Ministry officials and complained that they felt caught in a perilous bind, with some doing a better job of resisting Nazi demands than others. In addition, AP's captions accompanying the photos were often rewritten by the German media or the photos were run in the German press with misleading or offensive headlines. The AP's internal letters

reflect significant concern about keeping AP's picture service output free of Nazi influence, including mention by Lochner of complaints he directed toward senior Nazi officials about censorship pressure on the AP office and a series of sharply written memos and rebukes to the AP German photo editor from the German service's superior in London. These notes complained about instances of biased captions written or authorized by AP German service editors who were under pressure from the Propaganda Ministry. This review, however, found no record that AP protested directly to the editors of pro-Nazi media about the biased headlines and captions that they often supplied around AP photos that appeared in their publications.

- After resisting for two years, the AP in late 1935 submitted to the anti-Semitic edict that all people working in German media must be of German "Aryan" origin. The German picture service reassigned or discharged six employees considered Jewish by the Nazis. The AP made the difficult decision to comply because it believed it was critical for AP to remain in Germany and gather news and photos during this crucial period.
- With AP's aid, all of these Jewish employees who were forced from their jobs by the Nazi law would emigrate and survive the Holocaust. Five eventually resettled in the United States. A sixth was reassigned to AP's bureau in Vienna, Austria, where he was arrested by the Gestapo when the Nazis arrived in 1938. AP appealed to have him released and transferred to Prague, a city not then occupied by the Nazis. He eventually was released by the Germans and went back to Berlin. Exactly how he survived the war is unclear, but he resurfaced as a photographer in Communist East Germany in the late 1940s. Another of the AP employees who emigrated, Alfred Eisenstaedt, later became a famed photographer for Life magazine in New York, renowned for portrayals that captured the 20th century. Eisenstaedt and two other of his discharged Jewish former German AP colleagues, Leon Daniel and Celia Kutschuk, launched the Pix photo agency in New York at the end of 1935. It lasted for 34 years and provided work to scores of refugees from Europe.
- Lochner reported vividly on the anti-Semitic actions of the Nazis and in his personal letters and memos railed against the Nazis' treatment of Jews. He and other Americans working for AP in Berlin took in Jewish neighbors for their protection during the Kristallnacht pogrom of 1938, which was covered by the AP in a dramatic text account and chilling photos showing broken shop windows and a synagogue set on fire.
- AP's Berlin-based American reporters and German photographers covered the first part of World War II from 1939-41 from the German side of the battle lines. They provided accounts and pictures of the Nazi advances in Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium and France when the German forces were marching through Europe. Although the United States had not yet entered the war, some of this coverage was criticized by someone in the U.S. Embassy in Berlin as channeling German official views and disinformation and as demoralizing to the democracies. AP executives in

New York looked into the accusations and rejected the criticism, stating that the reporting accurately reflected events as witnessed by the reporters.

- AP photo and news managers worked to keep the German picture service objective and free of propaganda, as reflected in AP’s internal correspondence. Still, some of the German employees held pro-Nazi views and covered the German side of the war enthusiastically. One photographer employed by the AP German service, sometimes on staff and sometimes as a freelancer, was Austrian-born Franz Roth, an ardent Nazi. He gained prominence in Germany as a war photographer traveling with the Waffen SS to several fronts before and after the AP’s expulsion from Germany. Roth died in combat in 1943, a year and a half after AP was ousted from the country. A second pre-war German AP photographer, Eric Borchert, died in 1941 accompanying German troops in Tobruk, Libya.
- After 1939, the German government drafted several AP German picture service employees to serve with propaganda units accompanying troops to cover the fighting, requiring that the resulting photos be pooled for use by German media while their salaries still were paid by AP Germany. Some battlefield photos were sent directly to AP’s German picture service by these photographers as “exclusives.” AP management at the time believed their photography had important news value in spite of the restrictions caused by traveling with German forces or their personal views of the war.
- The Berlin office’s coverage of the war in Europe until the end of 1941 dominated front pages in the United States and was vital to readers at a time when little frontline reporting was otherwise available. AP managers praised how the Berlin staff had managed to tell the story in spite of its difficulties. In 1942 after the AP staff was ousted from the country, then Foreign Editor John Evans, who held that position from 1936 to 1943, concluded: “Censorship and the over-emphasized fear of reprisals never had prevented the essential truth of things from coming out.”

## Key findings: 1941–1945

- With the U.S. entry into the war against Germany in December 1941, AP’s American staff members were arrested and interned for five months before being deported in a prisoner exchange. Meanwhile, the German-registered Picture Service was confiscated with all of its files and archival images and handed over to Helmut Laux’ Bureau Laux. Most German former AP personnel were absorbed into the Bureau Laux under the auspices of the Foreign Ministry. Others were drafted into military units. The original bureau and photo office were destroyed in Allied bombings during the course of the war.
- In an arrangement entered into in Portugal in 1942 between Laux and the local AP correspondent — an agreement in which AP’s Berlin chief Lochner played a key role during his deportation — the Bureau Laux gathered and sent regular packets of photos from Germany and German-occupied

Europe to AP New York and London via neutral Portugal, an arrangement that continued until 1945. (A faster channel later opened through Sweden.) AP sent photographs from the U.S. to the neutral countries for ultimate distribution by Bureau Laux inside Germany. The exchange was sanctioned by U.S. wartime officials, subject to censorship. The AP's leadership in New York considered obtaining these photos for U.S. newspapers and the public as one of the cooperative's accomplishments during the war, noting it in annual reports. Although it was known that the photos obtained from Germany had been approved by the Nazi Propaganda Ministry and had been passed by Nazi censors, the photos nevertheless provided important views of the war and occupation at a time when independent access was impossible. AP captions would make clear the German or Nazi origins of the photos selected by AP editors to be sent on to AP's member newspapers.

- Willy Brandt, the German manager of the picture service from 1939 until 1941, was drafted into the German Luftwaffe when the AP picture service was closed but then was transferred by Laux into the Waffen SS to work fulltime for Laux' operation inside the Foreign Ministry. Brandt avoided combat in this way. According to him, he remained committed to AP throughout the conflict and worked to preserve the photo archives while directing the effort to provide a flow of German-censored photos to AP. After the war, he appealed to come back to AP. The request was denied by U.S. military authorities overseeing de-Nazification of the German media because of his wartime enlistment into the SS, which Brandt argued had been forced. Lochner, who considered Brandt to be anti-Nazi, was embittered by AP's decision not to challenge the U.S. military's finding. After the de-Nazification period, Brandt was rehired by AP in 1950 and headed sales for a reconstituted and expanded AP German Service, which produced text news in German for the German market as well as photos from Germany for the German market and the world. His efforts helped expand AP's reach in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. By the time he retired in 1978, the post-war AP GmbH was the largest single AP news and photo operation outside the United States serving more than 200 subscribers. Brandt died in 2001 at the age of 90 following a short illness.
- Laux, the SS officer who took over the AP's assets and then proposed the photo exchange to AP's Lisbon correspondent, cooperated with Allied criminal investigators and intelligence after the war. He argued to interrogators that his wartime arrangement with AP meant he should be spared punishment for Nazi activities. He served time in an Allied detention camp and after his release established his own photo agency in Frankfurt, Germany. He later sold a set of blockbuster images of Hitler on D-Day to *Life* magazine.
- The AP still maintains an all-format news bureau in Berlin to gather news, photos and video from Germany, but the separate German-language news and photo service no longer exists. It was sold in 2010 in view of a tightening news agency market in the country.

## Values and principles

AP covers the world, which includes dictatorships and democracies, countries at war and countries at peace. This means AP journalists need to cover authoritarian governments and undemocratic political movements from within borders that these regimes control. This was the struggle of the Berlin bureau in the years 1933–41. This review of the historical data leads to the conclusion that AP succeeded in its journalistic mission in spite of the turmoil of the period and the enormous pressures the AP staff faced.

This evaluation of the historical record, including many documents surfaced for the first time through declassification, has been an exhaustive process but in so doing the AP has re-emphasized an enduring lesson in the historical experience that was relevant in the past and is relevant today. The AP now and in the future must:

- Uphold key news values and principles; ask: Will any action being taken on behalf of AP’s newsgathering be defensible and understandable years in the future?
- Be transparent with staff and the outside world about what compromises if any have been made for access to a leader, or a government, and be willing to justify them.
- As far as possible work to obtain access, including emphasizing the AP’s own record of fact-based objectivity and accuracy in reporting, its wide reach, and its willingness to tell all sides of a story.
- Report critically. Under no circumstances can the AP be used as a platform for any government’s propaganda. Protect the integrity of AP’s editorial content and its independence.
- Protest vocally if AP content is manipulated or distorted by any customer in any country and terminate our contracts with any customer if such behavior persists.
- AP has a core mission to gather news, even in very difficult political environments, because so much of the world depends on the AP for objective information. However if any country, group or person seeks to force AP to relinquish final editorial control over the news AP produces, the AP is best served by withdrawing from that environment and then seeking to accomplish its reporting by other means.

*The project was overseen and edited by John Daniszewski, vice president for standards and editor at large. The author is Larry Heinzerling, an adjunct assistant professor at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and retired AP deputy international editor, with contributions by investigative researcher Randy Herschaft of the AP News Research Center in New York.*