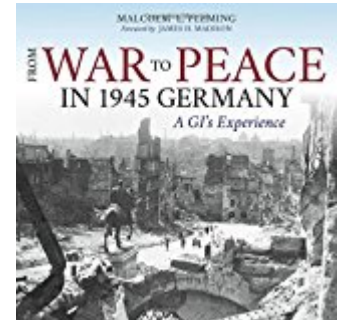


Malcolm L. Fleming. *From War to Peace in 1945 Germany: A GI's Experience.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. 200 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-01956-1.



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Many published works of military history make use of photographs—usually as inserts that readers use to gauge how much progress they have made, especially if the book happens to be particularly weighty. Normally these serve as contextual references and are not particularly noteworthy otherwise. Malcolm Fleming's recently published book of World War II-related photographs represents a refreshing change to their normal relegation as book inserts. Indeed, his photo collection is elegant in its simplicity and conciseness; Fleming lets his pictures do the talking in this handsome new volume.

If you are looking for a book of iconic wartime photos similar to those taken by Joe Rosenthal or Robert Capa, this is not the book for you. However, if you are interested in wartime journeys, including the exciting as well as the mundane, all recorded by one person, it is definitely worth closer examination. Before he became a fixture on the faculty of the University of Indiana, Malcolm Fleming was a US Army Signal Corps combat cameraman assigned to the Euro-

pean theater during the Second World War. Apart from filming the US Army in action, Fleming took a number of photographic stills with a portable, field-issue Vollenda camera and developed his negatives in the field. This is evident in the authentic feel of the photographs presented in *From War to Peace in 1945 Germany: A GI's Experience*—many are blurry or grainy—reminiscent of Robert Capa's photos of the Normandy invasion. Fleming captions his work sparingly, only with the time, date, and his own field notes written at the time of the photograph's taking. As a result, the book is aesthetically pleasing, makes good use of space, and is without excessive clutter. The photographs, in essence, speak for themselves.

All of Fleming's pictures are reproduced in black and white, untitled, and either taken with a still camera or extracted from a motion picture reel. Collectively they span two years in the life of the author and document both Fleming's wartime and postwar experiences. A short prelude highlights the author's practice photos taken while on "apprenticeship" in New York City in 1944; they

stand in stark contrast to the devastation he was to capture months later on the European continent. Fleming divides the book into two separate sections. Part 1 includes photos taken during the war, and covers a lot of ground (literally and figuratively) although the time span is relatively brief—March 14, 1945 through May 20, 1945. For continuity's sake, he does include some shots of Russian occupation in East Germany that post-date the end of the war; this is to better connect this sequence thematically with his US-Russian linkup photos taken on the Elbe River in April 1945. Part 2 consists of photographs taken after VE Day in US occupation zones as well as in other parts of Europe, spanning May 27, 1945 until the end of Fleming's tour as a combat cameraman in November 1945. The author arranges his work thematically in both sections. For example, there is a chapter entitled "Civilians during the War" in part 1 and another entitled "Wartime Destruction" in part 2. Chapters generally contain anywhere from five to twelve images apiece.

Any review of a photographic compendium would be incomplete without some description of the photos themselves, especially those that capture the reviewer's imagination. Perhaps the most impactful is Fleming's portrait of the ruins of Nurnberg, Germany (p. 110), taken on July 9, 1945 and showing the mounted statue of Kaiser Wilhelm, relatively unscathed amidst the complete devastation of the renowned city. (Not coincidentally, this photograph also serves as the book's cover). Perhaps the closest thing to an iconic photo in the book, it is an effective statement on the impact of war on civilized society. Another memorable shot is Paris's Eiffel Tower (p. 48), taken while the author was on leave. It is a clever juxtaposition of the landmark and aircraft in the background, effectively capturing the essence of Allied air power. Overall, Fleming's Paris photos are indicative of a relatively pristine city that, for the most part, escaped the devastation wreaked upon other European capitals. Another memorable image is the US-Russian linkup at the Elbe River (pp.

78-79). Fleming's field notes indicate that soldiers from both sides posed with "favorite props" that included a painted sign heralding "East Meets West," as well as a female Russian sniper who "is said to have liquidated 120 Germans" (p. 79). In the photo, the unnamed sniper appears to exude pride and confidence, as well as boredom. Obviously, she has been asked to pose multiple times before and is weary of the process. Finally, a personal favorite is a portrait of Nurnberg homemakers (pp. 112-113). This photo shows two relatively well-dressed young women waiting on a sidewalk for some unknown conveyance, while casually surveying an utterly gutted landscape sprawling before them. Fleming's caption reads, "Wonder what's going through the minds of these housewives. Somehow people are living in that jungle of wrecked buildings" (p. 113). Fleming's take is wonderfully understated; the photo would be a great candidate for a "fill in your own caption" creative writing exercise.

Aside from the specific photographs highlighted above, some general comments on the remainder are also appropriate. First, there are no actual scenes of live combat in the collection. Nonetheless, what is most evident in Fleming's compendium is the utter devastation of war, from the physical damage of cities and detritus of wrecked war machines to the sheer number of displaced persons captured on film. Next is the utter absence of a generation of German men, and in many cases, the dearth of human inhabitants in cities and towns. What appears predominantly are the elderly and an abundance of children. Many of the latter appear stoic and prematurely aged. In a particularly poignant photo (p. 135), a very young boy walks with a cane and accompanies an elderly woman (perhaps his grandmother). Displaying a hardened visage, the boy is almost grandfather-like, hobbling and appearing well beyond his years. Most of the German males in Fleming's book are POWs, depicted in their pitifully inadequate prison camps; there are almost none in this cohort portrayed other than in cap-

tivity. Another representative topic is the large number of people on the move; perhaps the starkest difference between Fleming's photos of this population during the war and after VE day is that in the latter, subjects are almost always smiling. Their faces seem to reflect a combination of joy, relief, and uncertainty as they face the arduous task of rebuilding.

The book is not without potential criticism. While brevity is an attribute, it does have some drawbacks. Most readers will want to know more about the context and subjects of the photographs, rather than simply the time, date, and location of their taking. In the previously mentioned photos, for example, one's curiosity may be peaked by the young female Russian sniper or the two German women in the devastation photo—who were they, what were their names, what were they waiting for, and what were they thinking about? Fleming generally leaves the answers entirely up to the viewer's imagination. Others may be put off by the lack of live action or combat photos, expecting to see more in a collection of this sort. Indeed, much of Fleming's documentation was accomplished post-VE Day and captured the tough, day-to-day work of occupation forces rather than troops in contact with the enemy.

Despite these shortcomings, there is no doubt that the book presents a valuable record of a combat photographer's tour of duty that spanned some of the key events of the last year of the war and beyond. It is literally a "snapshot in time" and provides a visual record of what some may find incomprehensible by simply reading textual descriptions. In its entirety, *From War to Peace in 1945 Germany: A GI's Experience* makes a very good visual accompaniment to other works that verbally describe the devastation of World War II Europe: Keith Lowe's *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (2012) and Nicholas Stargardt's *The German War: A Nation under Arms, 1939-1945* (2015). Fleming's work is valuable, aesthetic, and comes highly recom-

mended to students of World War II, military professionals, and the general reader. He makes a clear and invaluable contribution to our understanding of the Second World War and its devastating aftermath in Europe.

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