



The Kissing Sailor: The Mystery Behind the Photo That Ended World War II

Lawrence Verria , George Galdorisi , David Hartman (forward)

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On August 14, 1945, Alfred Eisenstaedt took a picture of a sailor kissing a nurse in Times Square, minutes after they heard of Japan's surrender to the United States. Two weeks later *LIFE* magazine published that image. It became one of the most famous WWII photographs in history (and the most celebrated photograph ever published in the world's dominant photo-journal), a cherished reminder of what it felt like for the war to finally be over. Everyone who saw the picture wanted to know more about the nurse and sailor, but Eisenstaedt had no information and a search for the mysterious couple's identity took on a dimension of its own. In 1979 Eisenstaedt thought he had found the long lost nurse. And as far as almost everyone could determine, he had. For the next thirty years Edith Shain was known as the woman in the photo of V-J Day, 1945, Times Square. In 1980 *LIFE* attempted to determine the sailor's identity. Many aging warriors stepped forward with claims, and experts weighed in to support one candidate over another. Chaos ensued. For almost two decades Lawrence Verria and George Galdorisi were intrigued by the controversy surrounding the identity of the two principals in Eisenstaedt's most famous photograph and collected evidence that began to shed light on this mystery. Unraveling years of misinformation and controversy, their findings propelled one claimant's case far ahead of the others and, at the same time, dethroned the supposed kissed nurse when another candidate's claim proved more credible. With this book, the authors solve the 67-year-old mystery by providing irrefutable proof to identify the couple in Eisenstaedt's photo. It is the first time the whole truth behind the celebrated picture has been revealed.

The authors also bring to light the couple's and the photographer's brushes with death that nearly prevented their famous spontaneous Times Square meeting in the first place. The sailor, part of Bull Halsey's famous task force, survived the deadly typhoon that took the lives of hundreds of other sailors. The nurse, an Austrian Jew who lost her mother and father in the Holocaust, barely managed to escape to the United States. Eisenstaedt, a World War I German soldier, was nearly killed at Flanders.

For more information on the book, go to www.thekissingsailor.com

The Kissing Sailor: The Mystery Behind the Photo That Ended World War II Details

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From Reader Review The Kissing Sailor: The Mystery Behind the Photo That Ended World War II for online ebook

Corgi says

I did not like The Kissing Sailor: The Mystery Behind the Photo That Ended World War II by Lawrence Verria & George Galdorisi.

I finished the book, however I found it very tedious. I think the identities of the sailor and the nurse should have remained a mystery. They represented many people on that day all over the world who were happy the WWII was over.

I would not recommend The Kissing Sailor to readers. Some mysteries do not need to be solved.

Erin says

The Kissing Sailor by Lawrence Verria and George Galdorisi look into the story behind the infamous Kissing Sailor picture that was taken as news of the end of World War II spread throughout New York. The authors look to tell the story that led up to this photo and definitively prove the identity of the sailor and the nurse.

Sounds good, right? I thought this might be a nice piece of trivia to pull out of my sleeve, but unfortunately, the book fell flat for me.

Turns out, the magazine that originally published the photo LIFE attempted to find out the identity of the sailor in 1980, but with many ages veterans coming forward with different stories, there was just not enough evidence in the photo to corroborate any man's story.

The nurse's identity seemed easier, when the photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt declared Edith Shain the nurse after meeting her. During their research, the authors find another woman with a more convincing claim to be the girl in the photo, but because Eisenstaedt gave his stamp of approval to Shain, she was widely accepted as the nurse.

Confused yet? Verria and Galdorisi do nothing to help you out. After laying out a great story, the authors go over the evidence of the top candidates, and this is where they lost me. For some of the men, Verria and Galdorisi dive so far into the evidence that it felt more boring than the part of jury duty where you wait around for hours watching daytime television hoping you will be called to serve or dismissed.

This book is great in theory. In fact, the story of the authors back as the most credible is very compelling. The photographer was nearly killed in World War I; the sailor barely survived a deadly typhoon; and the woman in the photo, an Austrian Jew who lost her family to the Holocaust, almost did not make it to the United States. I understand the need to acknowledge the other candidates' claims to be the man and woman in the photograph, but by spending so much of the book dwelling on all the red herrings, the essence of the book is lost and so is the reader.

Luna Bookish says

This book covered one of the most iconic photos taken at the end of WWII. Not only did it tell the story of the “nurse” and sailor it also discussed various other theories as to the identities of these two individuals.

I really like how the book started with a wonderful narrative about the childhood and how both came to be in New York on that day. Then it changes gears and becomes almost like a court case. This did not put me off. The author discusses the other theories and claims made by others who claim to be the nurse and sailor. Going through photo evidence, expert opinions, and timelines. It was handled very well. It did not shy away from looking at all possibilities.

I enjoyed this book, it allowed this iconic picture become almost more personal. It gave identities and lives to the nurse and sailor, it added an emotional connection that was lacking for me. I ended up giving it a 4/5 stars. The reason it was not a 5 star book was due to the book was a little slow at some parts since about half or a little more talks about the evidence presented in this book. Currently on GoodReads it has a 3.38 out of 91 ratings.

I find that this book would be best for people who really enjoy history and analyzing of sources. Additionally, those who are really interested in the story behind this photograph.

Pamela says

San Diego is home to a commissioned "Unconditional Surrender" statue that is modeled after Alfred Eisenstaedt's iconic photo featured in *Life* magazine of an unnamed sailor kissing an unnamed presumed nurse in New York's Times Square on V-J Day. Standing in the shadows of this 25 ft behemoth statue off of Harbor Drive, alongside the U.S.S. Midway Museum, is a surreal treat for locals and tourists alike. And it was while doing a photo shoot in 2012 for a Flat Stanley project that my curiosity got the best of me. Who were the real smooching victory revelers????

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fb...>

A google search didn't produce a definitive answer. Go figure..... More than a handful claimed to be the sailor or the nurse in the photo. So I just decided to embrace it as one of those unsolvable mysteries and move on. That is, until my sister came from Tucson for a visit last month and I took her to see this iconic memorial. With my curiosity dying to know more, I researched the San Diego County Library books and found this little gem: *The Kissing Sailor: The Mystery Behind the Photo That Ended World War II*.

It's a good solid read. Not exactly scholarly, but respectably written, enlightening, and rather fascinating. A bit redundant at times, but not too annoying. The authors cover a good bit of interesting related history encompassing *Life* magazine, WWII, Times Square, forensic science as it relates to photography and facial recognition. They of course include mini bios of people and places featured in the book. Additionally, the authors also make a compelling case presenting their findings as to the world famous kissing duo's identities,

and how a renown photographer, a sailor without his chevrons, and a dental hygienist came to be in "Times Square" AND became an unsolved mystery for decades!

THREE *** Americana History and Mystery *** STARS

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fb...>

Andd Becker says

Aha! Now we have documented proof that the previous claimants were impostors! The real V-J Day, 1945, Times Square sailor is George Mendonsa. And the real dental assistant is Greta Friedman. The story behind the story is presented in detail. LIFE magazine printed a full-page visual in its August 27, 1945 issue. For decades, no one knew the identities of the persons in the iconic photo. But thanks to photographic experts and forensic anthropologists, the true identities have been made known. I love the photo, don't you?

Allison says

Even being a photojournalist myself, I've never cared about the Kissers' identities. I've always just seen a photo that feels good to look at, well-composed, -lighted, and -printed. It really just exudes the joy so many experienced that day. After reading this, though, I like knowing the story of the identity debacle. I had no idea it was even contested, or that anyone cared so much as to pursue the matter. I'm glad that the authors are able to bring this matter to a succinct close. I buy all their evidence! Even if George and Greta don't eventually get the popular recognition they deserve, there will at least be this book to chronicle their importance.

Smiller says

Since the couple recently appeared on the Today Show I was happy to find this on the shelf in my local library. The first third of the book is fascinating, exploring how the lives of three people (the sailor, the "nurse", and the photographer) crossed that day. Remarkably Life magazine did not make much of an effort to identify the two people in this iconic photo. Eventually, they held an all-call to find the sailor. The middle third of the book is devoted to photograph technology that helped narrow down the list of claimants. To be honest this part was a little boring, so I skipped to the final third to find the woman. Interestingly, a different woman had been recognized for years as the nurse, and when she died TV news everywhere reported her obituary and claim to fame. It is not surprising that so many people thought they were one of the two in the photo. My mother was a young girl that day and she recalls the dancing in the street and everyone kissing strangers even in Scranton, PA. Just imagine how many people in NYC did the same thing!

Elisabeth (Enthralled by the Written Word) says

So I wrote a long review and my computer decided to quit so I am not going to write another one....

Suffice it to say that though I love this photo and the detective story that lasted decades, this book was poorly written AND poorly edited. Oh my gosh. It.was.awful. Too much repetition, bad placement of chapters, etc. Seriously. I am a writer. And I have edited many college papers. The arrangement of this book was pathetic.

William G says

As a detective story about one of the most iconic images in American history, this book is a well-documented page-turner. The authors bring the reader into the hunt -- who is that sailor? and who is he kissing? -- for the truth and the stories behind the truth. There were many pretenders who thought it was their image in this photo, but the meticulous research by this team of writers has drawn a firm and supportable conclusion. Won't spoil the ending here by revealing their findings, but I will say that I fully support what they learned. What's equally fascinating his how they conducted the hunt, and how piece-by-tiny-piece they debunked the assertions of other claimants. The result is a great American story about heroism, hard work, modesty, pride and quiet lives well led.

Hailey Bruce says

So fascinating. The amount of depth in this book, all coming out of one photograph is amazing. I've always loved this picture for it's ability to make me experience something I wasn't actually there to experience, and now I know the true story behind it. I will admit it dragged in a few places, but overall, it was a good read.

Andrew says

On August 14, 1945, the Japanese surrendered, bringing World War II to a close. All across the US, people celebrated the end of the war, and Life photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt was on assignment in New York's Times Square, looking for the perfect photo to capture the celebratory mood of the day. The photo he took has become iconic, perhaps the most famous photo Life ever published.

However, Eisenstaedt didn't take time to make any notes and didn't ask the kissing couple their names, so for decades, their identities were a mystery. Eventually, a number of people claimed to be one of the individuals in the photo. These competing claims created media feeding frenzy, with a variety of experts weighing in on the merits of each candidate.

Now, with the results of careful and thorough photographic forensic analysis, it appears that the true identities of the sailor and the woman in this photo can be definitively established. This book explores the history of the photo and the stories of those who claimed to be portrayed in it, as well as the details to the investigation that should lay the questions about the identities of the kissing couple to rest. This is a surprisingly readable book, that captures the humanity behind an icon, and brings a chapter of history to life for the reader.

Ben Phillip says

Redundant, but still interesting.

John says

Alfred Eisenstaedt's iconic photo of a sailor kissing a woman in a white nurse's uniform in the middle of New York's Times Square is one we've all seen before. The photo was taken on August 14, 1945, just after President Truman had announced Japan's surrender, and people were celebrating. LIFE Magazine photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt grabbed his Leica and went to Times Square to take some candid photos, and spotted a sailor who "grabbed something in white. And I stood there, and they kissed. And I snapped five times."

The photo ended up on the cover of LIFE magazine, and became one of the most famous and enduring photos of the 20th century. But because Eisenstaedt was busy photographing the rapidly changing incidents during the V-J Day revelries, he didn't get the chance to get names and details... and this encouraged a number of conflicting claims to the identity of the subjects over the years.

These are the basic facts behind *The Kissing Sailor: The Mystery Behind the Photo That Ended World War II*, and the authors of this book, Rhode Island history teacher Lawrence Verria and retired Navy Captain George Galdorisi, have done an impressive job of putting this work together. No dull or boring facts here, it reads like a novel, and as it builds we begin to see a clear image of the story behind the photo, which involves quite a cast of characters. The myths that have surrounded the photo are stripped away, and bit-by-bit the real story emerges.

The book works its way through five separate parts to create the structure of the story:

- Part 1: Practically Picture-Perfect
- Part 2: The True Story of the Kiss
- Part 3: The After LIFE
- Part 4: The Case for George and Greta
- Part 5: What Happened to the Truth?

The authors have skillfully structured these to reveal first the part that Times Square played, then the buildup to the photo, the part played by LIFE Magazine, the uncovering of the identities of the real participants, and the part played by photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt and his Leica. The photos and illustrations spread throughout the book add to the unfolding of the mystery behind the real people in the photo, which had eluded so many for years, George Mendonsa and Greta Zimmer.

These may not be the people many have associated with couple locked in that embrace. Alfred Eisenstaedt didn't get their names when he took that photo, and wasn't even aware of what had captured with his Leica that day. The photo was not seen by Eisenstaedt until it was published, as often happens in photojournalism.

But the image had caught an editor's attention, and it was run as a full-page photo in LIFE Magazine's August 27th, 1945, issue.

And LIFE didn't make the effort to pinpoint the couple until 1980, by which time a good number of people seemingly recalled how they had been the actual participants. Those efforts by LIFE actually created more confusion about the identity of the kissing couple than solving the mystery behind the image.

One might logically think that Alfred Eisenstaedt could have made a positive identification of the kissing couple, but his 1969 book *The Eye of Eisenstaedt*, he explained the confusion at Times Square at the time:

"I was walking through the crowds on V-J Day, looking for pictures. I noticed a sailor coming my way. He was grabbing every female he could find and kissing them all -- young girls and old ladies alike. Then I noticed the nurse, standing in that enormous crowd. I focused on her, and just as I'd hoped, the sailor came along, grabbed the nurse, and bent down to kiss her. Now if this girl hadn't been a nurse, if she'd been dressed in dark clothes, I wouldn't have had a picture. The contrast between her white dress and the sailor's dark uniform gives the photograph its extra impact."

This photo, which came to symbolize the hope that the nation felt with the ending of World War II, also appears in *The Great LIFE Photographers*, and there on page 135 we see Alfred Eisenstaedt's iconic photo "V-J Day, Times Square, New York City, 1945."

As a side note, Seward Johnson approached LIFE in an attempt to sculpt a statue of Eisenstaedt's *V-J Day, 1945, Times Square* as noted on page 214 of this book. LIFE rebuffed him, so Johnson based his series "Unconditional Surrender" on a similar, less well known, photograph by Navy Lt. Victor Jorgensen, that was in the public domain. One of these statues can be found in Hamilton, NJ, as seen below.

The final parts of the book sift through the claims by those who came forward as the couple in that embrace using contemporary scientific techniques before determining George Mendonsa and Greta Zimmer as the two almost certainly to have been the ones captured by Eisenstaedt and his Leica. For this reader, this methodical work is probably the final word on this mystery.

Alfred Eisenstaedt's photo was memorable because of its a distinctive connection of history, classic photojournalism and location. In *The Kissing Sailor*, published by the Naval Institute Press, authors Larry Verria and George Galdorisi capture that moment in time almost as perfectly as Eisenstaedt's iconic photo, and make a persuasive case for the identity of the couple in a book that's fascinating from beginning to end.

Note: portions of this review also appeared on Amazon.com.

6/28/2012

Marathon County Public Library says

The photograph of a sailor kissing a nurse on the day Japan surrendered and ended World War II is one of the most iconic images of that time, but who are the people in the photo? Over the years, many people have stepped forward, but do their claims really stand up to the evidence? Lawrence Verria and George Galdorisi take on the challenge in their book, "The Kissing Sailor." Through piles of evidence, photographs, stories and interviews, Verria and Galdorisi make the case for a Portuguese-American fisherman and an Austrian dental assistant. Although the narrative gets bogged down with evidence from forensic studies, the book is a relatively easy read and the cast of characters is engaging. Have Verria and Galdorisi cracked the case? Perhaps. But no matter what, you'll never look at this photo - or the media - the same way again.

Amy R. / Marathon County Public Library
Find this book in our library catalog.

Jenny GB says

I'll admit that I didn't know much of anything about the kissing sailor photograph before reading this book. I think at one time I had been told that it was a planned photo shoot and the people involved were professional models. I couldn't be more pleased to learn that isn't the truth. This book is certainly passionate about its point of view, but I don't know if the case is as close as they might want it to be. The beginning of the book tells the story leading up to the kiss/picture from the point of view of the two people that this book believes are the ones that really were involved. It's a little drawn out and overly dramatic, but it is a good read about that day and the emotions surrounding it. The middle of the book I found very interesting with the competing claims asserted and examined with different degrees of scientific research into the matter. I think there's a strong case for George Mendonsa, but I didn't really end my reading 100% convinced. The last part of the book details some of the events since the 80's when LIFE called forth people to try to find the sailor, but then did nothing with the information it received. This is a rather unpleasant part as LIFE magazine is berated and so are the other claimants to the photo. It ends with a sample article that LIFE could run to settle the issue. I enjoyed the mystery and the search in this book, but I'm not sure it quite hit the goal of an absolutely ironclad case for the man and the woman involved.
