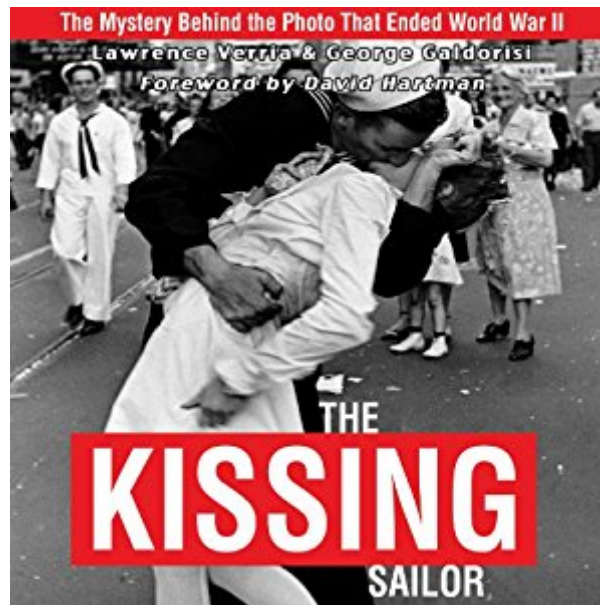


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# Kissing Sailor: The Mystery Behind The Photo That Ended WWII



## Synopsis

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 30 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A book about a photograph? Won't a magazine article do? Apparently not. In this riveting book -- I couldn't put it down -- the authors tell the story of that memorable day and the 60-year hunt to find the two protagonists. The photographer Alfred Eisenstadt never bothered to get their names: he just snapped the picture (four frames, one right after the other, then dashed off into the crowd to take other pictures). The editors of Life Magazine didn't put the picture -- arguably their most famous picture of all time -- on the cover, they buried it somewhere in the back. The sailor and the nurse didn't even strike up a conversation, they each went their separate ways (an interesting tidbit: behind the sailor's right shoulder is a pretty girl some ten yards behind him: that was his girlfriend, now his wife). Finally, neither the sailor nor the nurse saw the picture when it came out, nor in the many subsequent issues of the magazine nor in the thousands of articles and books where it was reproduced. It seems like Fate destined these two celebrities to never re-appear. But of course when money and celebrity is involved, nothing remains anonymous forever. This is America. True to form, once Life Magazine realized it had a goldmine on its hands, it tried to find who the two people were. A horde of potential claimants showed up, like in a Miss America contest, seeking fame and fortune giving interviews and riding in floats in July 4 parades -- and launching lawsuits against Time-Life Inc. for not mentioning their name.

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.

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