



## *Seeing the War: The Stories behind the Famous Photographs from World War II* by David P. Colley.

Lebanon, NH: ForeEdge, 2015. Pp. xviii, 168. ISBN 978-1-61168-726-2.

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In this handsomely produced volume, historian David Colley offers an engaging sentimental journey recalling various Americans who served their country in the Armed Forces and sometimes died for it before, during, and after the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> A German boy and a Polish girl are also featured.

The book's title, however, is seriously misleading. Some of the included photographs are indeed "famous," like the one of Gen. Douglas MacArthur sloshing thorough waves onto Corregidor<sup>2</sup> in his promised and highly dramatized return to the Philippines on 7 March 1945; we see, too, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower addressing soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division in England before their night drop on 5 June 1944. But other images are generally unknown, for example, a photo of the shell-shocked soldier Charles Kuhl, whom the mercurial Gen. George Patton infamously slapped and called a "gutless coward." Many of the photographed individuals are known only from a single famous picture, such as Graham Jackson, the African American accordionist seen weeping as he plays when FDR's body leaves Warm Springs, Georgia.<sup>3</sup> No picture, however, is without interest. The famous one of low-flying B-24s bombing the Ploesti oil refineries on 1 August 1943 (41) is included, but not the story of the raid; instead, we read the sad tale of Jesse Franks, bombardier on the *Euroclydon*, who parachuted out too late. His was one of the fifty-eight planes shot down early in the daring, expensive attack.

The author's laudable motive is to reveal the later lives of the anonymous or soon forgotten ordinary soldiers and sailors featured in a *Life* or *Time* (or other) magazine photograph.<sup>4</sup> So Colley had to identify the unknown or unheralded individuals in the photographs and then find them. His efforts often went unrewarded. In the case of the many who had died in the war or in the seventy years since, he had to locate relatives and friends to glean details of their later lives as welders, bartenders, insurance salesmen, or dental hygienists. Some of the subjects do not appear in their sub-chapters' opening photographs but served as models for such contemporary artists as Bill Mauldin (once threatened by the same, oft-agitated General Patton) and Tom Lea, who drew for *Life* in the Pacific.<sup>5</sup> Mary Doyle

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1. He has written three other books on the war: *The Road to Victory: The Untold Story of World War II's Red Ball Express* (NY: Warner, 2001), *Blood for Dignity: The Story of the First Integrated Combat Unit in the U.S. Army* (NY: St. Martin's, 2003), and *Decision at Strasbourg: Ike's Strategic Mistake to Halt the Sixth Army Group at the Rhine in 1944* (Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 2008).

2. An unknown photographer shot this image four hours after the troops had gone ashore. Rumors persist that the famous photograph was of a reenactment. MacArthur's landing craft ran aground fifty feet from shore, it is alleged, and he had to wade ashore through the shallows. He came to treasure this photograph, nevertheless.

3. He had met the President as early as 1933. He often played for him alone or accompanied the choir of the Atlanta First Congregational Church (16-17).

4. Or (anonymously) on a US postage stamp (65)!

5. Young Mauldin collected his remarkable European theater cartoons with a simple contemporary commentary in *Up Front: World War II Cartoons and Autobiography* (NY: Henry Holt, 1945). More of Tom Lea's Pacific-theater paintings are in Winston Churchill and the editors of *Life, The Second World War*, vol. 2 (NY: Time, 1959) 334-39, 460, 484-87; the same book gathers many World War II photographs and art from *Life*, including Lea's. On World War II paintings, see, e.g., Monica Bohm-Duchen, *Art and the Second World War* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 2013), with my review at *MiWSR* 2014-071, and, online,

Keefe, a telephone operator who sat as the model (for five dollars) for Norman Rockwell's *Rosie the Riveter*, neither riveted nor resembled Michelangelo's Isaiah the Prophet.

The book's ten (untitled) chapters exhibit no discernible coherence. Sub-chapter titles sometimes name the featured individual or plane, and some wax poetic about the action depicted—"Through Death Valley," "Talking Pike with Ike." A more accurate title for Colley's book might be "The Stories Ahead: What Happened Later to World War II Veterans Whose Stories I Discovered." Absent here are Robert Capa's Normandy beach landing pictures and George Strock's infamous and (for a time) censored *Three Dead American Soldiers at Buna Beach, New Guinea*,<sup>6</sup> perhaps because Colley could not identify the dead.

I will not fault the author for not choosing the same ninety images that I or others might prefer, but his selections do not always belong among "the famous photographs" of the war, the most "dramatic," "best-known," or "most revealing" touted on the book's back cover. Colley's criteria may have wobbled or evolved as he culled publishable material. Sometimes he prints a famous photo (the 112th and 110th regiments of the Twenty-Eighth Infantry Division marching down the Champs Élysées on 29 August 1944), sometimes a photo of a famous (Gerald Ford playing basketball or author Tony Hillerman) or semi-famous person ("future [Brooklyn] Dodger" Wayne Terwilliger landing on Saipan with the Marines), sometimes a famous airplane (*Memphis Belle*, *Wee Willie*, *Chowhound*), more often an unknown grunt like Kenneth Averill of the Army Signal Corps,<sup>7</sup> grabbed and kissed by a lovely Parisienne at liberation. But the most famous kiss of the war, if not of all time, does not appear—Alfred Eisenstaedt's sailor and nurse kissing with gusto in Times Square on V-J Day (their identities have been claimed if not established). Nor does Joe Rosenthal's snapshot of the marines raising the (second) flag on Mt. Suribachi at Iwo Jima make the cut.<sup>8</sup> Absent, too, are the landing ships delivering troops under a dark sky at Omaha Beach, the USS *West Virginia* burning and sinking at Pearl Harbor, Buchenwald liberation day, and the obliterated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Such photos are readily accessible online and in many books, but one would have expected them to make any list of "the Famous Photographs from World War II."

Vagaries of selection aside, what has Colley accomplished here? The titled vignettes are certainly moving tributes to individuals who fought and sometimes died for their country. Some had been dutiful children and good students; others were incorrigibles even in military service. Colley considers, for instance, the irascible Maynard "Snuffy" Smith—faced with the choice of prison or army service after being jailed for nonpayment of alimony (91). Given his small stature, he became a vulnerable ball turret gunner. During a raid (1 May 1943) on the well guarded German submarine pens in Saint Nazaire ("Flak City") on the Loire estuary, Smith put out a fire on his damaged B-17 and tended to several wounded comrades. He fought the flames with extinguishers, a sweater, and his own piss, while throwing ammunition cases out a gaping hole in the airframe and firing the waist-guns at waves of enemy fighters. His plane broke in two on landing, perforated by 3,500 bullet and shrapnel holes. For

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They Drew Fire: Combat Artists of World War II (PBS) – [www.miwsr.com/rd/1603.htm](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1603.htm).

6. *Life* magazine struggled for a year to obtain US Government Censors' approval for this, the first image of American war dead to appear in any American publication. The issue allegedly went up to President Franklin D. Roosevelt himself before the editors gained official permission. These two iconic images are reproduced in Churchill et al. (note 5 above) 446–47 and *Life's Picture History of World War II* (NY: Time, 1950) 207.

7. For a survey of the chief American *military* photographers of the war, Colley cites Peter Maslowski, *Armed with Cameras: The American Military Photographers of World War II* (NY: Free Press, 2008). Maslowski's father was among his European front-line and dark-room informants.

8. For eleven photographs of the event by various photographers, with the AP's Hal Buell's explanation of the confusion over the *unposed* 23 Feb 1945 picture, see The Inside Story of the Famous Iwo Jima Story (CNN)– [www.miwsr.com/rd/1604.htm](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1604.htm).

saving six lives by his heroic efforts, Smith became the first enlisted man to win the Congressional Medal of Honor (90–93). Though promoted to sergeant, he was assigned to KP duty that same week, owing to his poor work ethic. Soon after, he was busted down to the rank of private. After the “little guy” was discharged and greeted with a parade in his home town of Caro, Michigan, his postwar career was less than undistinguished.<sup>9</sup>

David Colley has performed a valuable service in researching and gathering material before it was too late; this includes oral histories of photographers, the men and women they photographed, and their relevant friends and families. He has unearthed obituaries in local papers and a few from the *New York Times*. The resulting book is clearly a labor of love and a welcome homage to unsung individuals like infantryman Farris Tuohy (46, 48), nurse Evangeline Coeyman (79–80), and pilot Robert Hite (74), who risked their lives during World War II.

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9. Maynard Smith's *Wikipedia* entry includes a link to a rousing five-minute War Department film about him and his award – [www.miwsr.com/rd/1605.htm](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1605.htm).