

Berlin The Downfall 1945 by Antony Beevor.  
Viking. 2002. £25.00

Stalingrad, Antony Beevor's extraordinary telling of the siege of that city during the Second World War, was an award winning piece of historical writing that portrayed the triumph and disaster of that event in stark terms.

In Berlin, The Downfall 1945, Beevor has created a companion work that in many ways is the equal of its predecessor.

By 1944, much of Berlin was already a ruin, but the attacks on it by the Allies continued, much to the distress, and worse, of the remaining citizenry. In early 1945 the collapse of the Reich was inevitable and the Nazis took increasingly desperate measures to protect their capital from the approaching Soviet Army.

For the Soviets, Berlin was the great prize, capital of a regime responsible for the death of at least 20 million of their people, symbol of everything they had come to hate during the long years of the Great Patriotic War. Beevor describes in stark terms the ferocity of the final battles, and also the almost unimaginable casual savagery of individual Soviet soldiers, as well as the ill treatment meted out to those Jews still alive in Berlin at the end of the War.

In Stalingrad, Beevor evoked the claustrophobia of a city besieged, in Berlin he dramatically describes the disintegration and hopelessness of the Second World War's end, a hopelessness that blighted the lives of many European countries for decades afterwards.

This is a salutary reminder of the widespread horrors of the last war, as well as the clash that underlay that between the Germans and the Allies, the conflict between Fascism and Communism. In the end both proved a disaster to their own citizens and the wider world.

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