

**Liberation - The Bitter Road to Freedom, Europe 1944-1945 by William I. Hitchcock.
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The image that many of us have from archive footage of the liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe is one of smiling troops, atop tanks and other vehicles, driving through the streets of towns where they are cheered and feted by the inhabitants exultant at having had the German yoke removed from their shoulders.

It is an image that is true, but it is not the whole picture. To liberate Europe, starting with France, the Western Allies had to dislodge the Germans, beach by beach, field by field, village and town by village and town; and as the Germans were not prepared to leave quietly the liberation was achieved through the hardest and most bloody of fighting, with enormous damage being visited upon communities, buildings and infrastructure in the attempt.

William I. Hitchcock, Professor of History at Temple University in Philadelphia, has presented a snapshot of the liberation of Europe in his latest book that presents in all its terrible clarity the full extent and horror of the campaign and the damage it inflicted on friend and foe, occupier and occupied alike.

The book is divided into four sections, Liberation in the West, Into Germany, Moving Bodies and To Live Again as a People. The first deals with the impact of the liberation of France, Belgium and the Netherlands, the second the actual encroachment on Germany of the Soviet Army from one side and the Western Allies from the other, the third with the massive relief effort and the impact of millions of displaced people trying to return home and the fourth with the liberation of the camps, concluding with the British liberation of Belsen.

Though much of the ground has been covered in other contexts, Hitchcock's unique focus gives the events he describes a power, horror and poignancy that are hard to forget, and makes Liberation an excellent addition to the huge corpus of books about the Second World War whose production shows no sign of abating.

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