

Article

Walking with *The Murderers Are Among Us*: Henry Ries's Post-WWII Berlin Rubble Photographs

Vivien Green Fryd

Department of History of Art and Architecture, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203, USA;
vivien.g.fryd@vanderbilt.edu

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Abstract: Henry Ries (1917–2004), a celebrated American-German photojournalist, was born into an upper-class Jewish family in Berlin. He immigrated to the U.S. in 1938 to escape Nazi Germany. As a new American citizen, he joined the U.S. Air Force. After the war, Ries became photo editor and chief photographer for the *OMGUS Observer* (1946–1947), the American weekly military newspaper published by the Information and Education Section of the Office of Military Government for Germany (OMGUS). One photograph by Ries that first appeared in this newspaper in 1946, and a second, in a different composition and enlarged format, that he included in his 2001 autobiography, create significant commentaries on postwar Germany. The former image accompanies an article about the first post-WWII German feature film: Wolfgang Staudte's *The Murderers Are Among Us*. The photograph moves from functioning as a documentation of history and collective memory, to an individual remembrance and personal condemnation of WWII horrors. Both reveal Ries's individual trauma over the destruction of Berlin and the death of family members, while also conveying the official policy of OMGUS. Ries's works embody a conflicted, compassionate gaze, conveying ambiguous emotions about judgment of Germans, precisely because of his own identity, background and memories.

Keywords: Henry Ries; photojournalism; the *OMGUS Observer*; Wolfgang Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers Are Among Us*); German Trümmerfilme (rubble film); rubble photographs; visual culture of war damage; Nazis; post-WWII Berlin

Henry Ries (1917–2004) was a celebrated photojournalist, both in Germany, his country of birth and origin, and his adopted homeland of the United States. His iconic photographs of postwar Berlin and the Berlin Blockade and Airlift, especially his *Landing Approach of the Candy Bombers at Tempelhof Airport* (Figure 1, 1948), can be found on postcards in Berlin tourist sites, on a U.S. postage stamp, in many publications, and on internet sites about the historical event.¹ Born into an upper-class Jewish family in Berlin, Ries immigrated to the U. S. in 1938 to escape Germany, and later, as a new American citizen, he joined the U.S. Air Force. After the war, he returned to Berlin where he became photo

¹ "Berlin Blockade," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Blockade, accessed July 11, 2018, and "Berlin Blockade and Airlift," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Berlin-blockade-and-airlift>. In just one day, I found other sites on the internet that include Ries's iconic photograph: "Moments in U.S. Diplomatic History: The Berlin Blockade and Airlift of 1948," *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, <https://adst.org/2015/06/the-berlin-blockade-and-airlift-of-1948/>; "The Cold War: Berlin Airlift," *Ducksters Education Site*, https://www.ducksters.com/history/cold_war/berlin_airlift_blockade.php; Kennedy Hickman, "Berlin Airlift and Blockade in the Cold War," *ThoughtCo.*, <https://www.thoughtco.com/cold-war-berlin-airlift-2360532>; "Berlin Blockade and Airlift," *Salk Cold War*, <https://sites.google.com/site/salkcoldwar/berlin-blockade-and-airlift>; James Darvell, "The Berlin Airlift: Flying over the Berlin Blockade," *Disciples of Flight*, 21 January 2016, <https://disciplesofflight.com/the-berlin-airlift-flying-over-the-berlin-blockade/>; "The Berlin Blockade and Berlin Airlift: A Summary," *History in an Hour*, <https://disciplesofflight.com/the-berlin-airlift-flying-over-the-berlin-blockade/>; and "The Berlin Airlift," *Amerika Haus Berlin*, http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/amerikahausberlin/index.php?en_history_berlin-airlift, all accessed July 11, 2018. For books that include his photograph, see for example, (Huschke 1999, cover).

editor and chief photographer for the *OMGUS Observer* (1946–1947), the American weekly military newspaper published by the Information and Education Section of the Office of Military Government for Germany (OMGUS). While walking around Berlin after WWII, Ries became, as he later admitted, an “observer of [the] human condition” (Frye 1997)—not an impartial observer, but instead a moral judge, whose history affected his photographs. Ries’s images are an indictment not only of the Nazi government, but also of Germans who were complicit.



Figure 1. Henry Ries. *Landeanflug eines “Rosinenbombers im Templehof Airport”* (Landing Arrival of the Candy Bomber in the Templehof Airport). 1948. Photograph. © Henry Ries. Deutsches Historisches Museum. Invoice No. 2007/952, file PH009230.

In postwar Berlin, Ries felt at times split among his identities as a German, a Jewish German, and as a German American. Fluent in both German and English, Ries was able to understand what the Germans around him were saying, although they saw him as an American soldier unable to comprehend the conversations. As a result, Ries, when walking in the ruined city, had an advantage in knowing where he was and what some Germans thought. His experiences thus allowed him to confront the horrors of the Third Reich with a code of ethics, but also with knowledge of German culture and history—both stand out about his work. Ries, in fact, sat on a knife edge, embodying ambiguous emotions about judgment precisely because of his own identity, background and memories.² Ries’s photographs demonstrate how he, like other American and British photojournalists, conveyed what Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann calls a “compassionate gaze” (Hoffmann 2011, p. 345), which for him existed as a conflicted compassionate gaze because with Ries’s iteration, the gaze also comprised condemnation.

My basic claim is that Ries’s works reflect his liminal identity as both a German Jew and an American citizen: he was free of any denial of German responsibility for the horrors of the Nazi regime, but also able to empathize with the suffering of ordinary Germans in the immediate aftermath of the war. The second claim is that Ries’s varied deployment of “rubble photographs” over time demonstrates how they fulfill the functions of both public documentary and personal remembrance, while remaining consistent with the American military government’s project of recrafting German culture for a liberal democratic state. His images, moreover, contribute to the visual culture of the

² For information about Henry Ries’s life and career, see his autobiography, (Ries 2001). See also (Perger 2004; Martin 2004; Pieters-Klaphake 2008; Schneider 2017). For other German-Jewish photojournalists in exile, see (Vowinkel 2013).

Allied bombing war that, as the historian David Crew argues, created “vectors of memory” in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Crew 2017, pp. 6–12). This German-Jewish-American conveyed “the story of the bombing” of Berlin, which was “also a history of irretrievable, irredeemable destruction and loss,” in which Germans were killed, historic buildings destroyed, and the city’s historic identity shattered (Crew 2017, pp. 1–5, 17). Anne Fuchs specifies that Allied photographers dominated the visual matrix at the end of the war, showing Germany’s moral depravity, but also “relaying the traumatic experience of loss, defeat, death and destruction” (Fuchs 2012, p. 32). Ries’s photographs contribute to this visual matrix of war damage, taking on additional impact given his personal history. Having escaped the Nazis and lost family members in the Holocaust, Ries photographed post-WWII Berlin with a uniquely multilayered lens.

This article foregrounds in particular two of Ries’s rubble photographs of similar scenes, which especially capture the impact of his clear-eyed moral perspective: they show a rubble-strewn street in Berlin, right after the end of the war. In the foreground of the original photo are two actors, Hildegard Knef and Wilhelm Borchert, who play the main characters in the first German feature film created after the end of World War II: Wolfgang Staudte’s *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers Are Among Us*).³ This photograph first appeared in the *OMGUS Observer* on 19 July 1946 (Figure 2). In a significantly altered composition and enlarged format, a related image appears in Ries’s 2001 autobiography (Figure 3) as a two-page spread in which the actors are absent.⁴ The first photograph, in the American military newspaper, circulated among U.S. servicemen, as well as those in the OMGUS staff—a variety of military and diplomatic personnel. Ries’s autobiography, which includes the subsequent image, was published in German for a German audience, and more overtly contains his personal assessment of postwar Germany. In both publications, Ries was the agent of his own visual narrative, although the first work probably was produced as a press event to report on the film’s production for the newspaper.⁵

Ries’s two versions of the photo-shoot, as well as other rubble photographs that will be discussed in this article, present a new vision of ruins. Like other postwar photographers, such as Richard Peter (1895–1977), who focused on bombed-out Dresden in *Dresden, eine Kamera klagt an* (*Dresden, A Camera Accuses*, 1949), and Walter Sanders (1897–1985) in his Berlin rubble images, published in *Life* magazine, Ries did not represent a picturesque landscape of a past great empire, such as that of ancient Rome. Also like them, he did not suggest the Romantic aesthetic of ruins as a harmonious union between man and nature that decays over time.⁶ Instead, he documented anti-pastoral rubble-filled cityscapes, making visible the fall of an inglorious Nazi empire.

In this article, I combine the art-historical techniques of iconography and formal analysis, considering especially space, lighting and composition, along with biography to explore the intersection between Ries’s public and private lives, which is of interest to cultural historians. I also examine articles in the *OMGUS Observer* in conjunction with Ries’s photographs, especially the set design for *The Murderers Are Among Us*, within a cultural, historical and biographical context. It is not by accident that I examine Ries’s work here: he was my uncle, and the correspondence his second wife gave to me, as well as personal knowledge of family history and the photographer himself, sheds more light

³ “The Murderers Are Among Us,” *OMGUS Observer*, vol. 2, n. 29, July 19, 1946, p. 7. Ries had a bound copy of the issues for which he worked, which are located in Henry Ries Archives at the German Historical Museum (hereafter HRAGHM). All of my references to this newspaper derive from this resource in his archives. See HRAGHM, PH009727.

⁴ (Ries 2001, pp. 76–77). He subsequently worked as a photojournalist for the *New York Times* until 1950, covering all of West Europe, which included Germany, where he was based, as well as Spain, France, Austria, and Italy.

⁵ Based on Vowinkel (2016) work on agency in photography, one could argue, as one outside reader suggested, that Ries took this photograph for marketing reasons and that his authorship was thus limited. However, it is my understanding in consulting with Wanda Ries, Henry’s second wife, that while working for the *OMGUS Observer*, he stayed well informed of the happenings at the time and attended some of the places where the film was being made. According to Wanda, Henry took a number of photographs of the film set, which were not saved (Wanda Ries to author, email, 25 May 2020).

⁶ Anne Fuchs discusses this within the context of Richard Peter in his photo-book of *Dresden—eine Kamera klagt an* (Peter 1949, p. 34). See also (Simmel 1998).

on his archival material [which is housed in the Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum) and includes interviews and television documentaries)], as well as his publications and those by others.⁷



Figure 2. Henry Ries. *Angestahlte Ruinen für die Dreharbeiten zum dem DEFA-Film “Die Mörder sind unter uns” mit Hildegard Knef und Wilhelm Borchert (Illuminated Ruins for the Shooting of the DEFA Film “The Murderers Are Among Us” with Hildegard Knef and Wilhelm)*. *OMGUS Observer*, 19 July 1946, p. 7. Photograph. © Henry Ries. Deutsches Historisches Museum. Invoice No. 2007/4176.102, file PH009419.



Figure 3. Henry Ries. *Angestahlte Ruinen für die Dreharbeiten zum dem DEFA-Film “Die Mörder sind unter uns” (Illuminated Ruins for the Shooting of the DEFA Film “The Murderers Are Among Us”)*. 1946. Photograph. © Henry Ries. Deutsches Historisches Museum. Invoice No. 2007/4176.101, file PH009418.

In the decades from the 1980s through the 2010s, the photographer has been honored with several exhibitions in Berlin, all at high-profile venues such as the Deutsches Historisches Museum, the Landesbildstelle, the Berlinische Galerie, and the Deutsches Technikmuseum (Museum for Technology and Transportation). In the U.S., however, his extensive and subtle work on post-Holocaust memory, and his rubble photographs of Germany after the war, remain less known (with the exception

⁷ Besides his autobiography (Ries 2001), Ries also wrote the following: (Stringer and Ries 1950; Ries 1981, 1988, 1992, 1997).

of *Landing Arrival of the Candy Bombers at Tempelhof Airport*). The two images that form the basis of this article, although having been reproduced in various American and German publications, have never been fully analyzed by scholars.⁸ The articles, photographs and ideology of the *OMGUS Observer* also remain relatively unexplored beyond brief references or reproductions of works, especially within the context of Ries's contributions to this newspaper.

This article is organized into five sections. The first addresses Ries's family and life in Berlin, as well as his earliest photographs of renowned Berlin historical landmarks before he immigrated to the United States. The next discusses Ries's initial reaction upon returning to Berlin at the close of WWII, working for the Office of the Director of Intelligence (ODI), a division of the military news service, where, in preparation for the Nuremberg trials, he translated documents, first while in London, and then in Berlin. His visceral responses to the destruction of his birth city, his sympathy for Germans, and his struggle to come to terms with his former countrymen's participation with, or complicit acceptance of, Nazism resulted in a moral dilemma that he worked through in his writings and photographs. The subsequent section considers Ries's post-WWII Berlin photographs created for the *OMGUS Observer*, showing that he continued to focus on how society interacts with the built environment, now in ruins, creating images that intersect with the OMGUS ideology of the "four Ds": denazification, democratization, demilitarization and decentralization (Gienow-Hecht 1999, pp. 12–14; Goldstein 2009, pp. 10–18). In the final part, I examine Ries's two photographs of *The Murderers Are Among Us* and their meanings within the context of the *OMGUS Observer* and his autobiography, showing that the image significantly moves from functioning as a documentation of history and collective memory, to an individual remembrance and personal condemnation of WWII horrors. By removing its illustrative and documentary purpose, the photographs shift to a more personal and affective interpretation that is elaborated upon in the conclusion.

1. Henry Ries in Pre-World War II Berlin

Heinz Ries was born into a wealthy, liberal German-Jewish family in 1917, while the European continent was engaged in the first major war of the 20th century. It consisted of his father, Max Ries (1877–1952), who was a co-owner of a laundry factory, his mother, Martha Ries (1892–1930), his older brother, Kurt (1915–1998), and his younger sister, my mother, Stefanie Ries (1924–1998). After being forced to leave the gymnasium (the equivalent to high school) at the age of 16 in 1933 because of anti-Semitic laws, he worked for three years in radio repair and sales. He apprenticed between the ages of 18 and 20 with a photographer in Berlin, and then worked for one year as a commercial photographer.⁹

In the late 1930s, Ries walked the streets with his new portable, light-weight Leica camera, taking photographs such as the one shown here of middle-class people strolling in the square in front of the Brandenburg Gate (Figure 4, 1937). Ries took this photograph while already intending to escape Nazi Germany. At the time, Ries strolled through the modern city to observe and record, in this case, a renowned national landmark for his own memory. Built by the Prussian King Frederic Wilhelm II on the site of a former city gate between 1788 and 1791, at the intersection between the historic section of Berlin known as Mitte and the Tiergarten, this neoclassical monument marks a key entry point to the city. Johann Gottfried Schadow's *Quadriga*, which consists of a chariot drawn by four horses who lead the triumphal procession of Eirene, the Goddess of Peace, sits on top of the monument. As Ries

⁸ The first image is briefly mentioned by Rentschler (2010, p. 21), noting "The nocturnal view of the rubble with contour and corridors of light in fact derive from Staudte's film set". It is also cited by Spiegel (1998), saying "It shows ... a surreal feeling, the only one that pulls the city into the realm of the unreal and seems to aestheticize the consequences of the destruction ... Ries only documents what happened in Berlin at the time: the shot was taken during the shooting of Staudte's film. The director illuminated the ruins and mountains of rubble, the photographer used the light from the spotlights for his picture."

⁹ Alfred Gottwaldt writes in his foreword in his exhibition catalogue that Ries left school in 1935 to begin a photographer's training. See (Gottwaldt 1990, p. 5).

knew and recalled in publications and interviews, the Brandenburg Gate became a historical landmark for a variety of foreign and German rulers who marched through this Gate into the city, including Napoleon in 1806; Kaiser Wilhelm I with Reich Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in 1871; and Hitler in 1933, when the Nazis held a torchlight procession to celebrate the Führer's election as the German chancellor. Ries witnessed the Nazis' staging of the event, which would become one of the first of many large-scale propaganda events staged by the Nazis as they tightened their control over Germany in the years leading up to the war.¹⁰



Figure 4. Henry Ries. *Brandenburger Tor vom Pariser Platz aus gesehen* (Brandenburg Gate Seen From Pariser Platz). 1937. Photograph. © Henry Ries. Deutsches Historisches Museum. Invoice No. 2007/4176.176, file PH009544.

Ries took this photograph of the Brandenburg Gate four years after the Nazis began parading through it. Rather than showing any indications of the National Socialist German Worker's Party's (NSDAP) grip of the nation, the photograph instead depicts a peaceful, urban, public space, in which leisurely middle-class inhabitants amble around the metropolis to experience the city's historic and modern sites. None of the people wear work uniforms or carry briefcases, indicating that they, like Ries, are casual voyeurs, who find "the world 'picturesque'" (Sontag 2003, p. 55). Through the plaza in the foreground walk a bourgeois man and a woman as urban explorers, who, along with others on the left and right, wander along Pariser Straße, as the street sign placed parallel to the picture plane makes clear. The figures, with their upright postures, black umbrellas and dark clothing, echo the vertical street lamp in the distance and the sign beside them, establishing the foreground. Another man strolls away on the right, toward the Gate, emphasizing the middleground, with its vast empty space. The darker Brandenburg Gate, with its two guardhouses on either side, its crowning *Quadriga* and a gas lamp, dominate the distance and contrast with the lighter, wet plaza.

This early photograph already shows Ries's aesthetic acuity, by repeating the verticals and horizontals through architecture, lampposts and figures; his manipulation of dark and light; and the

¹⁰ Ries, in fact, summarized the Gate's history more than once in his interviews and publications, noting that "for nearly 200 years, history has marched through its portals—in 1806, Napoleon; in 1871, Bismarck; in 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm II; in 1933, Hitler and Hindenburg under the *Hakenkreuz* [the Nazi swastika symbol]; the conquering Soviet Army in 1945." See (Ries 1981, p. 6). He also provided this information in his interview with White (1982), and, in (Ries 2001, p. 219).

cropping of the composition. He arranged the work carefully—for example, by locating the left signpost so that it corresponds with the inside edge of the left guardhouse. The variations from foreground darkness to middleground lightness, and to the background Gate and the grayer, vaguer landscape in the distant Tiergarten, show his manipulation of light and shadow within the darkroom. The overall haziness that results from the wet atmosphere and streets, which are characteristics of pictorial photography, further indicate Ries's aesthetic awareness, as does his interest in reflections and shadows.

Nothing, however, hints at the threat that Ries must have felt at this time as a German Jew. Hitler had already enacted his anti-Semitic laws, including the ones that restricted Jewish enrollment in high schools, expelled Jewish members of the Greater German Chess Association (Ries was a lifelong lover of chess), and denied Jews access to the public beach at the Wannsee (his family often enjoyed swimming there in the summers). As a child prodigy in playing the piano who attended the Sternsche Conservatorium, National Socialists stymied Ries's goals of becoming a conductor when they passed an employment ban for Jewish musicians (Schneider 2017).¹¹ Despite these restrictions, Ries was able to wander the streets of Berlin because, with his blue eyes, straight nose and blond hair, he passed as an Aryan in the eyes of some Germans.¹²

Despite this, Ries understood the dangers as a Jew living in Berlin. Five months after taking this photograph, he attempted to escape Nazi Germany with a 12-month tourist visa, arriving in New York City, only to be returned by U.S. officials to his home country the following month because he did not have the proper paperwork for immigration. He then booked his second round-trip ticket, leaving on 14 January 1938. Despite visa problems that are too complicated to address here, Ries finally was able to immigrate to the United States on 4 July 1938.¹³

Ries settled in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where he sold vacuum cleaners and worked in two metal factories until 1943. During this time, he also taught classes about photography at the Jewish Community Center. One day, after becoming an American citizen on 14 June 1943, Ries volunteered for active duty in the American military, requesting an assignment in the European theater of operations. He argued "that his knowledge of the history of Germany, his fundamental acquaintance with the ideology and cultural pattern, his familiarity with the country, itself and his understanding of German people could be of value to the Armed Forces."¹⁴

Rather than being stationed in Europe as he had requested, Ries instead served as an aerial photographer for photo-reconnaissance and intelligence with the B-29 Global Air Force in the East Asian theater of operation (1943–1945), perhaps because the military knew he had some experience with photography. Although the letters he wrote while living near Kharagpur, India, indicate his frustration in not fighting on the European front, Ries improved his photographic techniques and worked on a variety of military assignments. He took snapshots of Indian people, important generals, and formations of B-29 bombers flying across the Himalayas. He also kept abreast of world events, expressing his fears in letters written to friends who lived in the U.S. On 19 October 1944, he predicted that "the war in Europe will not end this year," and that more deaths of "friend and foe alike" will likely

¹¹ See also (De Faria 2008, p. 166) and Ries's resume (author's archives).

¹² Ries recalls in his autobiography that early in 1933, a new teacher in his secondary school, the Schiller-Realgymnasium, identified him as an example of Aryan perfection, noting his blond hair, blue eyes, straight nose, and appropriately shaped head and earlobes. Amid his fellow students' laughter, Ries asked for permission to speak, saying, "I am a *Volljude*," Nazi terminology for a person with at least three Jewish grandparents. The teacher required him to stay an extra hour after class and write an essay about "race principles and nationalistic aspects." That was, Ries wrote, "the beginning of the end of my six years" at that school. The writing exercise kept him waiting to be released from school that day, and also waiting to be expelled (Ries 2001, pp. 12–13).

¹³ His brother, Kurt, had escaped Germany two years previously to settle in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and his father would depart for Cuba one year after Henry, leaving his sister, Stefanie, behind in Berlin under the care of their Catholic governess who bribed the Nazis, claiming that she was her daughter. Henry Ries, through the assistance of the Quakers in Berlin and Philadelphia, enabled Stefanie to escape Berlin on 21 February 1941. For Ries's discussion of his work with the Quakers to rescue his sister, see (ibid., pp. 46–48).

¹⁴ Henry Ries, "Appeal to the U.S. Military," 15 June 1943, author's archives.

occur.¹⁵ He also communicated his concerns that even when the Allies “walk into Germany exhausted by war...it will take 2–3 years before Japan is beaten.”¹⁶ Ries expressed his astute awareness of having moved, within two years, from being an enemy alien to an American who fit into and was accepted by his unit. He also Americanized his name from Heinz to Henry. These experiences prepared him for becoming a photojournalist, a new profession that he would soon embrace.

2. Henry Ries in Post-World War II Berlin

At the close of WWII, Ries requested another transfer, now to his birthland, arguing that his knowledge of the German language and culture could assist the Americans in transforming Germany into peacetime and turning it away from National Socialist ideologies. On 18 May 1945, he flew from Kharagpur to London, impatiently awaiting orders and trying to learn about the fate of his family left behind. On behalf of the ODI, he translated documents for the Nuremberg war crimes. Ries then returned to his birth city on 29 August 1945 to continue this work. His return to Berlin coincided with the *Nachkriegszeit* (the postwar period), which was formative in the development of modern Germany and the trajectory of the Cold War. At the end of World War II, Germany’s future was in question. Could it recover from the Nazi regime, the most costly and violent in modern history?

In Berlin, shock and nostalgia confronted Ries. “Despite the revelations about the terrible atrocities of the Nazi regime,” he admitted, “I was not prepared for what I saw, experienced and learned in Berlin” (Ries 2001, p. 75). It appeared to him as “a ruin—it was a devastating sight”: “overwhelming” and “both familiar and unfamiliar” (White 1982). He observed: “Berlin, as I had left it before...was no more. As if buried in an earthquake, the city lay before me” (Ries 1990, p. 9). Ries now felt conflicted between his American and German identities, observation and sympathy, the past and present, guilt and innocence, and survival and death.¹⁷ Later he reminisced that when he landed in Berlin, “the agonizing question went through my head” upon seeing a one-armed and one-eyed German man pulling a three-wheel cart that contained old clothes: “Who is he? Who am I? Had he been a Nazi? Had he only watched, when Jews were threatened, abused, deported and murdered?” “Or,” he pondered, “had he been a human person like our Catholic governess,” who had kept his sister safe from the Nazis? (Ries 2001, p. 75). And he said in his autobiography: “For months as I walked through Berlin, I felt as if I had two pairs of eyes. With my American eyes, I took in the smashed streets and buildings, but with my Berlin eyes, all I perceived were distraught people in front of and behind the backdrop of a Germanic tragedy” (ibid., p. 78). As Katrin Pieters-Klaphake correctly queries in the exhibition catalogue for the German Historical Museum’s retrospective of Ries’s photographs in 2008: “With what eyes did Ries look through the camera? Did he identify as a German American or a Jewish German?” (Pieters-Klaphake 2008, p. 94). Ries himself could not answer this question, although he admitted later in his life, “I often remained silent, but my camera captured the memories that I will never forget” (Ries 1990, p. 9). This resulted in his ability as a photojournalist to combine objectiveness with compassion.

Ries now was no longer a loafing, idle, purposeless voyeur, but instead determined and steadfast, feeling tortured by what had happened. While walking around Berlin after WWII, Ries experienced and documented “the threshold between past and [the ruinous] present” (Yacavone 2014, p. 274). This was the case when he visited the apartment building where his sister and her governess had lived, Schlüterstrasse 33, in the hopes of learning something about his loved ones. What he found

¹⁵ Ries to Aunt Net, 19 October 1944, author’s archives.

¹⁶ Ries to Dorothy Haller, 24 May 1945, author’s archives.

¹⁷ Other American photojournalists in war-torn Germany, such as Margaret Bourke-White for *Life* magazine, documented the shocking images of dead and emaciated bodies in concentration camps. Her images of Nazis reproduced also in *Vogue*, the *British Picture Post* and on posters and brochures, were intended to awaken in Germans a collective sense of guilt and remorse and re-educate them in the hopes of their creating a democratic state. Ries did not to use his camera to record such atrocities, but instead employed his knowledge of German to translate the documents into English, similarly exposing the Nazi horrors, not by way of image, but instead by text.

was a bombed-out building. As he scoured the rubble, he amazingly discovered a slightly damaged photograph of his sister, Stefanie, taken when she was 13 years old (Figure 5, 1937). The visible scratches on her face mark the sole damage to the picture that otherwise was not ripped, bent, or soiled. As Ries recalled: “It had gotten dark when I still walked through this unquiet city. My thoughts were with the many people in my family, now dead.” As he continued, “for a few moments, only the young face of my sister was able to wipe away the shadow-world of the inferno” (Ries 2001, p. 46).

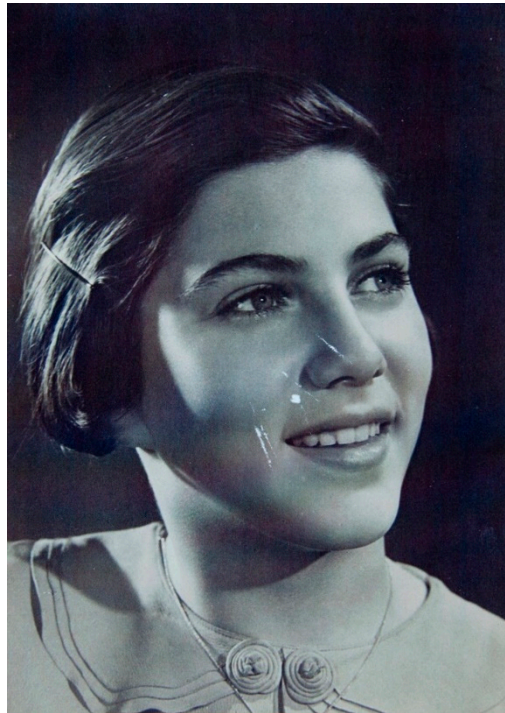


Figure 5. Unknown. *Photograph Stefanie Ries*. 1937. Photograph. Author's Archives.

Other German- and Austrian-Jews also returned to postwar Berlin to record, report, photograph and reflect on the fate of the city in the wake of the Holocaust. They, too, had to negotiate between personal feelings and the perceived intention to be objective. Walter Sanders, also born in Berlin, had emigrated to the U.S. in May 1937, and returned in 1946 as a photojournalist for *Life* magazine. He wrote about his experiences in the ravaged city, accompanied by photographs, some of which also depict the actress Hildegard Knef among the ruins of Berlin (Figure 6). His portraits of the rising star show her either posing in front of a poster with the steel skeleton of a building on the left, in which a group of men become more the focus than the ruined structure, or in front of other buildings that appear more intact. In other pictures, she walks amidst the streets of Berlin with a few people. None of these photographs contain the same sense of drama, destruction and manipulation of deep blacks and extreme highlights that Ries rendered, instead showcasing Knef as a renowned actress who self-consciously poses in a beautiful, expensive mink coat that contrasts with the seemingly drab clothing worn by the Germans who surround her. These photographs, moreover, do not foreground the city's rubble and destruction. In “The Road Back to Berlin” published in *Life* magazine on 11 November 1946, Sanders indeed recorded the devastation wrought by the war. The title-page contains a photograph that fills most of the folio, showing the *Life* magazine photojournalist as a shadow in the foreground and from behind. He stands, as the caption explains, “before the ghostly ruins of the hallway” where he once had lived. The solid shadows of the figure and façade contrast with the highlighted damaged interior that is nicely framed by a rounded arch, creating the type of drama that Ries's photographs also convey. Yet this closely cropped composition, that includes the entrance of the facade and a sliver of a building on the right, does not contain the same sense of vastness conveyed in Ries's two photographs of *The*

Murderers Are Among Us film set. In another photograph published in the same issue, Sanders depicted his former neighbors, a janitor and his wife, casually sitting at a table in the highlighted foreground, posing while eating a meal. A ruined building in the background suggests that life continues despite the devastation. Notably, the text indicates that the man had been “a Nazi who spied on tenants and refused to talk to anyone except ‘full Aryans,’” conveying a simple fact without the moral judgement which Ries continuously voiced.



Figure 6. Walter Sanders. *Actress Hildegard Knef Walking the Streets of Germany*. 1947. The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images.

Another notable example is Billy Wilder (1906–2002). Born in Austria, he made his career as a journalist and screenwriter in Weimar Berlin in the 1920s, returning to that city in 1945 as a colonel in the U.S. Army’s Division of Psychological Warfare to assist in rebuilding the nation’s film industry. He became Film Officer with the Information Control Division (ICD) of the U.S. Forces. He helped direct and edit the 1945 documentary *The Death Mills* (*Die Todesmühlen*), and shot on location the romantic comedy and *Trümmerfilm* (rubble film) *A Foreign Affair* (1948), which stars Marlene Dietrich. The latter movie contains many shots of a devastated Berlin in ruins, first visible from an airplane. From this aerial viewpoint, the city appears as a vast array of bombed-out buildings with no roofs, no windows, no interiors, and no people—a wasteland, which a character later calls “empty shells.” We also view the ruined city as Captain John Pringle (John Lund) rides in a jeep through rubble-strewn streets with bombed-out buildings, and again when Colonel Plummer of the U.S. Army (Millard Mitchell) gives a tour to the visiting congressional committee, showcasing renowned Berlin historical landmarks in ruins: the Brandenburg Gate, the Victory Column in the Tiergarten, and the Reichstag. Because the camera quickly tracks across rubble scenes, it seldom lingers on one particular site. This is manifest in the crane shot that moves vertically down the Brandenburg Gate from its damaged Quadriga, along its bullet-ridden columns, to the street where the black-market exchange takes place. In this film, Wilder, like Ries, condemns the Third Reich and the “question of collective guilt,” although, unlike Ries, the film director and screenwriter satirizes U.S. occupation, denazification and reeducation (Bathrick 2010, pp. 35–36).

Berlin’s fractured topography for Ries, like that for Sanders and Wilder, was devastating, as were the struggling Germans whom he described as “hungry people, crippled people, diseased people, worried people all framed by ruins, all smelling of filth” (Frye 1997). He reminisced that when he landed “in the city where I had been born, the city I had said goodbye to seven years earlier and which at that time I never wanted to return to,” he pondered about the guilt of those Germans he met, concluding that it was not for him to judge (Frye 1997; Ries 2001, p. 75). Yet, he did. As he wrote to his friend, Dorothy Haller, in February, 1946, “of course, they [the Germans] deserve it [judgment],

at least a good part of them....But this doesn't prevent me from feeling pain", seeing all the destruction of buildings and people struggling to survive.¹⁸ Ries wrestled throughout his life between his horror of the Holocaust and those responsible for it, and his empathy for Germans as fellow human beings with whom he spoke the same language and experienced the same history and culture.

At the same time, he learned what his fellow Americans had grasped through their reeducation campaign in 1945: many postwar Germans did not demonstrate feelings of remorse, nor did they "accept their collective guilt" (Fuchs 2012, p. 25). As an article in the *OMGUS Observer* reported, when the American military showed *The Death Mills*, the documentary about the newly liberated German concentration camps upon which Wilder had worked, "the public was nonchalant and complacent ... hardly impressed or convinced." The film's purpose was to expose Germans to the national horrors of skeletal corpses, naked, skinny prisoners, mass graves, piles of clothes, shoes, and gold teeth discovered by the Allies when they first entered the camps (Kempner 1946, p. 1). As the article comments: "No honest person can refuse to believe the evidence the film portrays from a dozen or more different concentration camps, all of them telling the same unbelievable story. Yet the majority interviewed still persisted that though there might have been something bad here and there in Germany, it was not as horrible as the film attempts to portray" (ibid., p. 1). They, in short, refused to accept their "collective culpability" (Rentschler 2010, p. 29), that the narrator at the end of the film asserts they should acknowledge, declaring that the Germans "bear heavy crosses...the crosses of the millions of crucified in the Nazi death mills" (Kempner 1946). As far as I know, Ries never commented about this documentary, but he probably saw it and certainly read this article given his position as photo editor of the newspaper. While the article condemns the Germans as complicit in the Nazi horrors or refusing to accept responsibility, Ries's response was more nuanced because of his liminal identity as a German and an American, reflecting his conflicted compassionate gaze that forms the basis of the photographs he took for the *OMGUS Observer*.

3. Henry Ries: The Military Photographer for the *OMGUS Observer*

At the Potsdam conference in July and August 1945, the Allied forces of France, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union partitioned the German State into four occupation zones, and formally declared Germany's culpability for the war. The OMGUS staff—a variety of military and diplomatic personnel—governed the American sector from 1 October 1945 until 5 December 1949, and facilitated reconstruction efforts as well as programs for reparation and restitution. Under the guidance of General Lucius D. Clay—deputy military governor of Germany in 1946, commander in chief of the U.S. Forces in Europe, military governor of the U.S. Zone in Germany from 1947 to 1949, and a good friend of Ries¹⁹—the Office of Military Government for Germany (OMGUS) established its goal of achieving the "four Ds". It devoted itself to the reeducation of German citizens in modern American democratic values, rules and institutions, in opposition to both Nazi and communist totalitarianism, an example of which was the showing of *The Death Mills* in German cinemas. While the Allies aimed to purge Germany of its Nazi past, the debate over its future governance and economic system intensified until 1949, at which time the western powers enforced and supported the foundation of the Federal Republic in their zones and the Soviet Union established the German Democratic Republic (GDR), dividing East from West and inaugurating the Cold War.

During World War II, the Psychological Warfare Division (PWD) of the United States Armed Forces directed propaganda efforts and assaults on enemy morale. It also functioned as the resource for facts, news, and publication materials for OMGUS, as well as overseeing the implementation of American-style print media. Citing a free press system as a central value of modern democracy, OMGUS and the PWD believed that introducing publications free of propagandistic rhetoric would be

¹⁸ Ries to Dorothy Haller, 12 January 1946, author's archives.

¹⁹ Ries commented that Clay "opened a lot of doors" for his ability to photograph different sites and people. See (White 1982).

an important factor in denazifying and democratizing the country. The OMGUS press promoted civic engagement and social awareness, creating propaganda in advancing American democratic values (Gienow-Hecht 1999, p. 14).

OMGUS employed U.S. soldiers to serve as auxiliary journalists and news photographers for the news publications; their role was to explore the busiest sections of the city and document the “daily moods and motifs” of the people of Berlin (Ranke 1995, p. 2). The photographs they took would then be manipulated in the dark room, cropped, altered in terms of lightness and darkness, and used to supplement stories in the denazified newspapers. Aside from adding to the construction of a new national narrative, the *OMGUS Observer* images and texts directly affected the understanding of reconstruction in Berlin within the American military.

One of the most accomplished *OMGUS Observer* photographers was Ries, whose relationship with his home city featured prominently in the pictures he created during the Occupation period. Ries worked, beginning on 30 March 1946, as a staff photographer for the OMGUS military newspaper, initially called *The Grooper*.²⁰ By 12 April 1946, the newspaper changed its title to *OMGUS Observer*, with Ries also serving as its photo editor.²¹ In this position (Figure 7), he decided which photographs to shoot, and which to place on covers and place inside the paper based on content and composition. He also created the readable typeface. In his two positions, he shot press pictures, printed the negatives, edited the images, created the layout of the newspaper to convey the American military’s life in a war-torn city that they now helped govern, and wrote captions for the images.²² As the newspaper reports, “transportation...was by foot...to collect news in the ruined city with its rubble-heaped streets,” making it feel as if reporters walked “over Berlin [rather] than through it.” Its focus was to create a “graphic record of Military Government history in the U.S. Sector of Berlin,” by joining “raiding parties,” helping “track down elusive Nazis,” and stopping “black-market gangs....It has witnessed—and recorded—the changing scene right in its own front yard; the transplanting of an American community into the heart of a military outpost.” The role of the *OMGUS Observer* staff was to establish a relationship between “the American community and the Germany whose territory we occupy,” to assist in reconstructing “a beaten country” by examining its political, social and cultural events.²³ They thus supported the Allied aims to encourage cooperation and discourage indignation on the part of the Germans (Rentschler 2010, p. 27).

Ries consequently showed genre scenes of American soldiers engaged in normal, everyday peacetime activities, such as playing softball (also featured in Wilder’s *A Foreign Affair*), playing chess, hunting, etc.—in other words, settling into Germany as an occupying force, but also establishing a relationship with the Germans. He also documented Berlin landmarks in ruins, as a means to record, remember and condemn the destruction. The newspaper also contains articles about Hitler’s regime and the persecution of former Nazis; survivors of concentration camps; German artists and art such as Käthe Kollwitz, “Ewald Vetter: Anti-Nazi Painter,” and “Modern German Art”; the adoption of German refugee children (restricted only to Germans); the opening of markets, such as the sale of Bavarian handicraft and decorative objects in Munich; the creation of a Barter Exchange to replace the black market; and current German politics.

Ries’s perspective is both multifaceted and nuanced—his photographs are empathetic with the people of his home city, and imbued with a nostalgia for the Berlin that had existed before the terror of the Third Reich. The filth and the rubble of the capital city embodied, according to OMGUS and Ries, the moral destruction of the NSDAP, but what of the people covered in soot and scrounging through the wreckage? They could have been his former neighbors, but also Nazi perpetrators. In his

²⁰ Ries is listed as Staff Photographer along with Clayton Hemsey in *The Grooper*, vol. 2, n. 13 (30 March 1946), PH009721, HRAGHM.

²¹ *OMGUS Observer* vol. 2, n. 15 (12 April 1946), PH009721, HRAGHM.

²² For information concerning the role of photojournalists, picture editors, and art editors, see (Gervais 2017; Clark 2016, p. 858).

²³ Vivianne W. Adams. “Behind the Front Page,” *OMGUS Observer*, July 26, 1946, issue 53, p. 7, PH009727, HRAGHM.

photographs of the destroyed city, Ries juxtaposed scorched national monuments and landmarks of the German past and the German landscape with sympathetic scenes of the German people, especially children, revealing an empathy with the survivors who were buried, as he noted, “under mountains of debris and ashes” (Ries 1981, p. 6).



Figure 7. Henry Ries in the editorial team (with Clayton Hemsey) of the *OMGUS Observer*, vol. 53 (26 July 1946). Photograph. © Henry Ries. Deutsches Historisches Museum. Invoice No. 2007/4176.251, file PH009620.

Ries documented Berlin’s historic sites in ruins, such as the Reichstag, the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church (Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche), the Berlin Castle (Schloss, Figure 8), the Reichstag, the Tiergarten (Figure 9) and the Brandenburg Gate. This is evident in a two-page spreadsheet in the *OMGUS Observer* on 10 May 1946, which combines images and text to summarize the German-American photojournalist’s assessment of WWII, Hitler’s regime, and postwar Berlin. Ries titled his photo story “Berlin Then... and Now (Figure 10), pairing on the left and the right the same photographs of notable Berlin monuments and buildings before the war and after it, revealing different stages of survival and/or destruction.²⁴

²⁴ “Berlin Then... and Now,” *OMGUS Observer*, 10 May 1946, pp. 4–5, HRAGHM also reproduced in (Ries 2001, p. 94). For “paired photos...,” see (Fehrenbach 2015, p. 190). Crew makes this observation about different photographs in (Crew 2017, p. 94). Allbeson (2015, p. 565) addresses similar pairings of photographs, now of Salisbury Cathedral, to show “an implied progression or continuity from past to future (left to right)”.



Figure 8. Henry Ries. *Karussellfahrt im Lustgarten vor dem zerbombten Berliner Schloss in Mitte* (*Carousel Ride in the Pleasure Garden in Front of the Bombed out Berlin Castle*). 1946. Photograph. © Henry Ries. Deutsches Historisches Museum. Invoice No. 2007/4176.108, file PH009425.



Figure 9. Henry Ries. *Denkmäler zur preußischen Geschichte im abgeholtzten Tiergarten, Statue Friedrich des II, im Hintergrund die Siegessäule* (*Monuments to Prussian History in the Picked-up Zoo, Statue of Frederick II, in the Background the Victory Column*). 1948. Photograph. © Henry Ries. Deutsches Historisches Museum. Invoice No. Ph2007/4176.31, file PH009319.

On the left side, “Berlin Then” shows, as the text written by Ries explains, “the capital of the Reich...a great industrial city as well as an oppressively military one...under the Fuehrer’s [sic] reign which led to mass destruction.” On the top left, Ries printed a prewar photograph of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church beside Nazi soldiers, with the following description: “The Wehrmacht—12 years of goose-stepping to ‘protect’ the father land.” Beneath this is an image that shows blond-haired Aryan children saluting Hitler. The text observes: “Even the kids were imbued with the Fuehrer [sic] illusion.” Next, a crowd of people stand before the Reich Chancellery, paying “their respects with ‘Heils’” through the Nazi salute. The bottom two images depict the grand neoclassical Brandenburg

Gate on the left with the caption, “commemorated past victories,” and the Reichstag on the right, “the German House of Parliament where the fire burned in 1933.”²⁵



Figure 10. Henry Ries. “Before Then ... and Now.” *OMGUS Observer*, 10 May 1946. Photograph. Author’s archives.

The “Now” page on the right echoes the six photographs as a mirror opposite, which reveals postwar German life, work, and damaged historical landmarks. The text admonishes:

Today, one year after the armistice, Berlin is an object lesson in future fuehrers [sic]. Among the ruins, Berliners live, eat rations, and putter about to make themselves comfortable. Their greatest worry is getting food ... [and] anxiously wonder when industry can be started again. They talk about what they should do with all the rubble. As for thinking about a new government—most of them shrug their shoulders.²⁶

Ries’s press photographs show on the top left “ex-Wehrmacht men”, who morph into civilians with working hats because, according to Ries, they “face the task of rebuilding their city, their government and their philosophy.” The destroyed “fashionable Gedächtnis [sic] Church,” located on the top right, “took a beating too” from an air raid on the night of 23 November 1943, leaving only a remnant of the spire and much of the entrance hall intact. Instead of people in front of the New Reich Chancellery demonstrating their allegiance to the National Socialist state, “Chancellery sight-seers provide butts for former heilers.” Ries’s photograph shows a man stooped over, picking up a cigarette butt in front of the former Reichstag. The text continues beneath a photograph of children: “the kids have found a new hero—GI Joe who has plenty of chewing gum and a big heart.” Here a group of children again hold out their arms, not in the “Heil Hitler” salute, but instead to reach for treats being handed out by an American soldier located on the far right. The Reichstag and Brandenburg Gate, now in reverse, again are located below; the text reads: “the Reichstag is kaput. More than fire finished it in 1945.” Ries alludes not only to the Nazi arson burning of the Reichstag in 1933, but the additional damage

²⁵ “Berlin Then... and Now,” *OMGUS Observer*, pp. 4–5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

from air raids and warfare. The defaced Brandenburg Gate, combined with the destroyed Quadriga, “reflects,” according to the text, “the downfall of an aggressive nation.”²⁷

Like OMGUS, Ries in this two-page spread blamed the Nazis for the city’s devastating destruction, although his feelings were more nuanced given his multiple identities and transnational history. It echoes scenes and themes also seen in Wilder’s *A Foreign Affair*, although the filmmaker’s satirical edge, which Ries exhibited throughout his life, is not manifest in this official U.S. government publication.

There are many articles in the *OMGUS Observer* of 1946 that blame the Nazis and their collaborators for Germany’s destruction and the people’s struggles.²⁸ The reporting of the German citizens’ complacent yet disturbing responses to the showing of *The Death Mills*, for example, illustrates this, as does the 19 April 1946 issue, which commemorates the first postwar celebrations of Easter and Passover. The article observes that, while a few “months ago,” an “ugly, monotonous, brutal war” with “warped science” that “labored hard for evil ends” destroyed the people and buildings of Germany, now peace “in garments of reason and calm” resulted in “a mad world gr[owing] sane.”²⁹ Another article in the same issue entitled “First Free Passover in 13 Years Celebrated Here,” reports that the youngest survivor of Auschwitz asked the four questions during a Passover seder celebrated in Berlin, something that he could not have done while imprisoned in a concentration camp.³⁰ The ability to observe in post-WWII Berlin two important religious holidays—Easter for Christians and Passover for Jews—marked a move toward denazification and democratization that the *OMGUS Observer* celebrated in this issue.

Given that Ries’s first photograph taken in 1937 was of the Brandenburg Gate (Figure 4), it is not surprising that in war-torn Berlin he took a number of pictures of the now damaged structure riddled with bullet holes, which appears in this spreadsheet, as well on two covers of the *OMGUS Observer*.³¹ The one for 5 July 1946 shows the same view of the corner of Unter den Linden and Pariser Straße as in Ries’s earlier 1937 photograph. Here he faced the Gate directly, rather than at a slight angle (Figure 11), emphasizing the resilience of this important Berlin monument in a peacetime scene. An American soldier and his two children stand beside their car in the empty plaza. This family stationed in Berlin replaces the earlier image of a bourgeois Berlin couple strolling in the urban setting. They, too, are explorers, but of a ruined city. Whereas the 1937 photograph shows the trees of the Tiergarten in the distance, behind the Brandenburg Gate in the postwar image is vast emptiness, for the renowned 520-acre inner-city park had been bombed by the Allies and deforested by Berliners for firewood.

On the 18 October 1946 cover of the *OMGUS Observer*, the Brandenburg Gate again appears, now conveying Berlin’s precarious position as the dividing line between the Soviet Union and the West, which made the city a hotbed of political activity and the convergence point for a multitude of ideologies (Figure 12).³² Ries stood closer to the Brandenburg Gate and off to its side, allowing its damage to be more visible. People, dwarfed by the monument, stroll in front of it, but they are not the focus. Instead, the once stately monument, visibly damaged, appears as a wasteland for the urban explorers. In lieu of the marred *Quadriga*, Henry Koerner (1915–1991) added a drawing of a weathervane. Born in Vienna, Koerner, like Ries, had immigrated to the United States in 1938, was drafted into the U.S. Army, and after VE Day on 8 May 1945, reassigned to Germany, first sketching defendants at the Nuremberg trials, and then working for the *OMGUS Observer*. The weathervane contains initials referring to the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and France, clearly marking the city’s division into the four Allied sectors. Flags bearing the abbreviations for East and West German political parties fly beside four clouds that turn into faces, blowing wind toward the weathervane. “SED” refers to the Socialist Unity Party, which swept into victory with the aid of the

²⁷ Ibid, p. 5.

²⁸ This differs from the *Trümmerfilm*, which showed Germans as “victims or rescuers, rarely as perpetrators”, and never name Hitler as the cause of WWII, the nation’s destruction and defeat, and the Holocaust. See (Rentschler 2010, p. 10).

²⁹ Maurice E. Powers. “Peace-Time Easter in Berlin,” *OMGUS Observer*, 16 April 1946, vol. 2, p. 5, PH000722, HRAGHM.

³⁰ “First Free Passover in 13 Years celebrated Here,” *OMGUS Observer*, p. 7.

³¹ Cover, *OMGUS Observer*, July 5, 1946, vol. 2, no. 27, PH 009719, HRAGHM.

³² Cover, *OMGUS Observer*, 18 October 1946, vol. 2, no. 27, PH009737, HRAGHM.

Soviets in the first elections for local and regional assemblies in the Soviet Zone. Leaders of the Social Democratic Party (“SPD”) in the Soviet zone agreed in April 1946 to merge with the Communists, a step denounced by the Social Democrats in the Western zones. “CDU” refers to the Christian Democratic Union, founded in 1945, and “LDPD” to the Liberal-Democratic Party of Germany, formed in June 1946 as an antifascist and anticommunist party. This political cartoon, which Ries as photo editor collaborated on, suggests that fate, signified by the winds, will determine the governing party of Berlin. This cover conveys factional convictions that adhere to OMGUS’ support for Germany to become a liberal democratic state with elections.



Figure 11. Henry Ries. *Brandenburg Tor (Brandenburg Gate)*, OMGUS Observer, vol. 11 no. 27, 5 July 1946. Photograph. © Henry Ries. German Historical Museum. Invoice No. 2008/921.60, file PH009719.



Figure 12. Henry Ries and Joseph Koerner. Fotografie des Titelmotivs des OMGUS Observer vom 20. Oktober 1946 (Photograph of the Titlepage [for the State Elections] on 20 October 1946). OMGUS Observer, 18 October 1946. Photograph. © Henry Ries. German Historical Museum. Invoice No. 2009/369.152, file PH010228.

4. The Murderers Are Among Us and Postwar German Cinema

Fourteen days after printing his 5 July 1946 cover of the *OMGUS Observer*, showing the Brandenburg Gate with the American military family (Figure 11), Ries included the scene of the stars of *The Murderers Are Among Us*, Hildegard Knef and Wilhelm Borchert, posing during the filming of the movie (Figure 2). This image, located at the top of an article inside the newspaper, accompanies other press photographs by Ries of the director and his actors on the set (Figure 13). The *OMGUS Observer* article reports the near completion of “Germany’s first postwar movie”, in which “the untried young German performers emoting [sic] in a psychological plot in a setting of Berlin ruins” took place in the former studios in Babelsberg, that had seen “better days” as “the nation’s equivalent to Hollywood.” It also briefly summarizes the movie’s production, plot and significance.³³



Figure 13. “Murderer Among Us.” *OMGUS Observer* on 19 July 1946. Photograph. © Henry Ries. Deutsches Historisches Museum. ME00018033.

The movie, released on 15 October 1946, coincided with the conclusion of the Nuremberg trials, and the conviction of 10 of the most important Nazi leaders (Brockmann, 201). It tells the story of Dr. Hans Mertens, acted by Wolhelm Borchet, who returns to Berlin traumatized after having served in the Wehrmacht during WWII, and having been a prisoner of war. Upon his return to Berlin, he meets his former commanding officer, Ferdinand Brückner, and feels overwhelming remorse over his failure to stop the brutal killing of 100 civilians in Poland under his CO’s command. Fearing Brückner would never be punished for his war crimes, the film’s hero resolves to kill him, but his girlfriend, Susanne Wallner, played by Hildegarde Knef, talks him out of his revenge plot.³⁴ As the film historian Robert

³³ “The Murderers Are Among Us,” *OMGUS Observer*, vol. 2 n. 29, July 19, 1946, p. 7.

³⁴ The film, according to Baer (2009, p. 42), “is a story about guilt, responsibility, and retribution for Nazi crimes, and about traumas experienced by individual Germans and by postwar German society as a result of Nazism.”

Shandley summarizes, “*The Murderers Are Among Us* pursues the question of what becomes of war criminals in times of peace and how a returning soldier should find his way in the destruction of postwar Germany.” It emphasized both “the misery of current day Germany” and “the horror of the recent past” (Shandley 1999, p. 112). As the first German *Trümmerfilm*, *The Murderers Are Among Us* underscores the impact of the Allied bombing of, and artillery battles fought in, European cities, which resulted in Germany’s destruction.

The fact that *The Murderers Are Among Us* was the first film created in Germany by the Soviets after the war is significant. Upon taking control of the nation, the Allies had ceased all German production of newspapers, radio stations and film studios, the latter because Joseph Goebbels had created the Nazi cinema for its anti-Semitic propaganda. Each occupied zone controlled the cultural activities under command of their respective military governments. By late summer of 1945, the Allies agreed to allow the renewal of cultural organizations, including the film industry, under strict censorship rules. Because the Soviet leaders employed Germans in their productions, they moved faster than the other Allies in reconstructing destroyed studios and establishing the Soviet-licensed Deutsche Film AG (DEFA) on 17 May 1946 (Brockman 2010, pp. 187–91).

While the Soviets created a centralized film industry in the old studio in Babelsberg, Potsdam, the other Allies had a decentralized approach: the Americans filmed in Munich, while the British had their studios in Hamburg. As the article in the *OMGUS Observer* about the filming of *The Murderers Are Among Us* reports, the U.S. military government initially intended only to show Hollywood films in their sector for reeducation purposes, and as “a democratizing force” that would promulgate “American values of equality [and] justice,” but they soon realized that they, too, had to reconstruct the German film industry.³⁵ The article further explains that U.S. officials had decided “to grant licenses to six film producers in the U.S. Zone as soon as operational machinery is set up.”³⁶ They did so with free market competition, limiting monopoly control by cartels, and a lack of state controls, considering DEFA’s state control as a continuation of the Nazi model (Fehrenbach 1995, pp. 51–54).³⁷ Although each nation had slightly different ideological intentions, these films, called *Trümmerfilm* (rubble films), “bespoke the Allies’ stated wishes that German films should address the gravity of their mistakes over the twelve years of Nazism and should reject all forms of militarism and national pride” (Shandley 1999, p. 115).

In Ries’s night shoot that accompanies the *OMGUS Observer* article, he highlighted the actor and actress, who stand in front of a dramatic backdrop, a Berlin suburb street in ruins (Figure 2). He took advantage of the in-place film lighting, using the artificial highlights on the backless facades, which he emphasized further in the dark room, to augment the drama.³⁸ The mounds of debris on the right and left, mostly in shadow, frame the figures. As in the movie, Ries in his photograph also creates a *mise-en-scène* of destroyed Germany—with ruined buildings, rubble, and a threatening dark background—as well as a metaphor for the destruction of the Germans’ own sense of themselves. His viewpoint, from a lower ground plane, results in the theatrically highlighted buildings rising as monumental ruins amid a landscape of destruction, which echoes the urban vistas found in the postwar *Trümmerfilm* (Rentschler 2010, p. 9). The darkened foreground, which appears as an open space that seemingly invites the viewer to enter, nevertheless seems unstable, not only because of the rubble, but also because of its sharp diagonal movement upward and to the right. As in the film, the man and woman appear dwarfed by the surrounding rubble-strewn cityscape.

Ries’s postwar rubble picture takes the form of straight photography, which differs from his pre-war soft-focus photography manifest in his earlier 1937 photograph of the Brandenburg Gate

³⁵ For the U.S. military’s intention to export Hollywood films, see (Shandley 1999, p. 107).

³⁶ “The Murderers Are Among Us,” *OMGUS Observer*, vol. 2 n. 29, July 19, 1946, p. 7.

³⁷ Fehrenbach explains that the aims of the U.S. Military and Hollywood failed to coalesce into a clear vision (pp. 52–68).

³⁸ Tom Allbeson uses the term “backless façade” within the context of Herbert Mason’s Photograph of St. Paul’s Cathedral (1940) in (Allbeson 2015, p. 548).

(Figure 4). The style consists of sharp focus, distinct details, rich tonal contrasts, and saturated, dark shadows, removing the softening, pictorial and nostalgic effects. This results in a starker, more dramatic, forbidding and menacing image, that realizes what Werner Fiedler wrote about the film:

The camera bores into the ruins, it creates frighteningly beautiful landscapes of ruin ... The elements in the film are not light and shadow, but rather shadow, whose oppressive blackness is only deepened by the few hesitant, weak lights. Huge shadows again and again destroy any possible glimmer of hope. (Brockman 2010, p. 205)

In other words, Ries conformed with the aesthetic visions of the camera man, Friedle Behn-Grund, and of the director, Wolfgang Staudte, to emphasize like them the overwhelming amount of destruction, in which deep shadows symbolize a sense of pessimism.

Ries clearly recognized the photograph's dramatic impact later in life, when he printed in his autobiography what at first looks like the same photograph (Figure 3). But this is a *different* image, which may have been a test shot before the actors were in place, or one of the many photographs he took of the set and filming of the movie.³⁹ This related work transforms the earlier journalistic report of the movie's completion into something even more sinister and meaningful with regard to his condemnation of the Nazis. By enlarging the image in this book (19" × 11") and having it as the only two-page spread, he heightened its arresting affect. Its horizontal expanse, without any framing devices, further suggests that this scene extends beyond the frame, resulting in ruins throughout the city, which was the case. Eliminating the actor and actress makes the landscape appear even more ominous, conveying a greater sense of Berlin as an inferno of emptiness and destruction. The dramatic rubble photograph contains sharp contrasts between dark and light (the buildings are more brightly highlighted in the photograph without figures), as well as movement from the shadowed foreground to the highlighted skeletal buildings without windows, doors, and roofs, to two-dimensional black sky. The dark, flattened foreground appears as a barrier to entry. The result is an even more ominous setting, in which no one can exist except for one sole figure, that is visible, yet barely so. Located as a shadow in the midst of rubble on the left, this person appears like an apparition, a ghostlike presence in this haunted space of ruins that seems to extend into infinity. Unlike the film (in which Hans Mertens emerges from the rubble as a defeated man) (Baer 2009, p. 32), the anonymous shadowy figure has no sense of weight—as if floating. He/she walks away from the viewer and becomes consumed by the debris. Two blackened doorways might provide an entry into the building on the left, but it seems abandoned; why would anyone want to enter what looks like a haunted apartment building? The darkened windows and doorways without glass suggest the breakdown of the boundary between public and private spaces as a result of Nazism and the war.⁴⁰ The specter-like figure, even if he/she could enter the empty building, would consequently not find a safe domestic space. The person is instead forever stuck in this wrecked outdoor cityscape.

The exact location of this photograph in Ries's autobiography is also significant. As in his role as the photo editor for the *OMGUS Observer*, he not only wrote the text of his autobiography, but also selected the images to reproduce and determined the book's layout, sometimes resulting in disagreements with the press editor. As both photo editor for the newspaper, and photographer and writer for his autobiography, Ries controlled the stories he wanted his images to tell. In this case, Ries strategically located this two-page spread after the chapter entitled "Himmlers Geheimarchiv" (Himmler's Secret Archive). In this chapter, Ries reproduced some of the documents that detailed the SS chief's medical experiments, which he had translated for the Nuremberg trials (Ries 2001, pp. 66–71). "This was a difficult task," Ries recalled: "my work was in the district of the human trials in Dachau, the Germans are so meticulous, everything is written down, the finest details, terrible, terrible things,

³⁹ Unfortunately, many of the negative of the myriad of photographs that Ries took of post WWII-Berlin were destroyed.

⁴⁰ Baer (2009, p. 38) discusses how "the broken windows constitute a threshold between public and private spaces that highlight the erosion of any distinction between the two," as a result of "Nazism and the war".

that I had to evaluate and translate in preparation for the Nuremberg tribunals” (Schneider 2017). As he reminisced, “the taste in my mouth was pretty severe having worked on this material where the more detailed” so-called experiments on human beings appeared “pretty gruesome” (Ries 2001, pp. 62–70). As he had written earlier in 1946: “Himmeler is really haunting me in my dreams.”⁴¹ About three years before his death, he felt the same, telling his wife, “I think, I never completely digested the horrors I had to translate.”⁴² This chapter also includes Hitler’s will and testament, which he also had translated. In his autobiography, Ries concluded that the Führer was “unapologetic and remorseless...to the last breath” and “rant[ed] along familiar hate tirades against international Judaism in a self-congratulatory manner” (ibid., pp. 62–71). As a German-American-atheist Jew, whose sister had barely escaped Nazi extermination and whose grandmother and aunts had not, Ries felt traumatized reading about these “pretty gruesome” medical experiments and Hitler’s anti-Semitic invectives. By eliminating the press photograph’s function as an illustration of an historical event and strategically placing it in this location in his autobiography, Ries turned it into a meta-narrative of Berlin’s destruction caused by Hitler’s egregious regime, and of his own traumatic experiences as a Jew who had lived in Berlin during the Führer’s early reign, immigrated to the U.S., and had family members executed in concentration camps.⁴³

Although some differences exist between Ries’s two versions of the photograph of the filming of the movie, both demonstrate significant changes he made in the dark room; when compared to another photo shoot (taken by an unknown photographer and housed in the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek archives, see Figure 14), it is clear that the lighting had, in fact, highlighted the foreground and middleground, with the road upon which the actors stood, the rubble, and the right mound more visible. The foreground appears stable. This other image, furthermore, includes in the upper right corner the equipment used for the lighting. Ries in his two photographs had placed all of this in shadow, creating a more dramatic, inferno-like image that matches the actual scene in the movie, in which the setting is the same. In the film, the actor and actress walk from the background into the foreground and then outside the frame.⁴⁴ In comparing the movie image to Ries’s photograph, the photojournalist highlighted the building in the distance on the right (cut off by the rubble), the area to the right behind the figures in the larger burnt-out structure, and a portion of the rubble in the right corner. He also deepened the shadows in the left foreground and other areas of the larger structure that fills up most of the photograph. As a result, Ries created a zig-zag movement from light to shadow, from the foreground to the middleground and then to background.

Ries’s two photographs as they exist in two different publications produced in vastly different timeframes—immediately after the war and later in life—illustrate the potential of his documentary images to intersect with OMGUS’s official ideology of the “four Ds”. Both images convey the propagandist messages found in other American postwar journalistic images and texts, establishing Hitler as the cause of such devastation, which resulted, according to Ries, in “the shadow-world of the inferno” (Ries 2001, p. 46). And both photographs reflect Ries’s grappling with public and personal remembrance within the context of his liminal German/American identities.

These two related yet different photographs are not solely found in the *OMGUS Observer* and Ries’s autobiography. Each appears in exhibition catalogues with captions. In most, the information provides the simple fact that Ries took the photograph during the filming of the DEFA film, *The Murderers Are Among Us*. This is evident in a 1988 Berlinische Galerie catalogue, which contains the later

⁴¹ Ries to Dorothy Haller, 12 January 1946, author’s archives. A few years before his death, my uncle had shown me his reproduction of Hitler’s Will and Testament, but at that time I was not interested, and hence, to my current dismay, did not probe more.

⁴² Wanda Ries to author, email, 25 May 2020.

⁴³ His grandmother, Hilda Wiener, was exterminated in Theresienstadt in 1944; his Aunt Heidi, was exterminated in Auschwitz in 1944; and his Aunt Ellie, also died in 1944 but it is unknown where.

⁴⁴ This scene appears also in *The Murderers Are Among Us* (35.58 min) Chl.

rendition without the actors (Figure 3).⁴⁵ This same image appears in a 1998 Landesbildstelle Berlin catalogue, with the following caption: “Juli 1946 Keine Filmkulisse, sondern Realität: Angestrahlte Trümmer während der Dreharbeiten zu *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, der erste Film, den die DEFA drehte.” (“July 1946 No movie backdrop, but reality: Scrap debris during the filming of ‘The Murderers Are Among Us,’ the first DEFA film shot.”) (Frecot 1998, p. 21). In this text, Ries repeats some of the facts found in other captions, but notably declares that this image does not just document the film shoot, but, in fact, represents a new reality of a destitute Berlin in which one tiny, obscure human figure survives, barely visible and overwhelmed by the extensive destruction that almost engulfs it. Notably, after Ries’s death, the Deutsches Historisches Museum mounted a retrospective of his works; its extensive catalogue again reproduces a full-page reproduction of the initial image that includes the actors. Here, the caption returns to the factual information, except for emphasizing that this is a nighttime scene shot on location.⁴⁶ In other words, Ries could no longer tell the curators which caption he preferred for this reproduction. Notably, only the exhibition that took place after his death included this image with the actors. In other words, Ries included in exhibitions during his lifetime the photograph without the actors in exhibitions, indicating his preference for this work because of its more dramatic impact.



Figure 14. Unknown. Illuminated Ruins for the Shooting of the DEFA Film *The Murderers Are Among Us* with Hildegard Knef and Wilhelm. DEFA-Stiftung.

The migration of the image, resulting in a “repeated circulation” of its two renditions, depends upon its written descriptions to provide slightly shifting meanings that, nevertheless, focus on “the visual culture of war damage” to condemn Hitler’s agency in causing such devastation. Both photographs reveal Ries’s individual trauma, over the destruction of his birth city and the death of family members and friends, as well as conveying the official policy of OMGUS.⁴⁷ And both document the revival

⁴⁵ The caption here is: “Berlin. Während der Dreharbeiten zu dem DEFA-Film ‘Die Mörder sind unter uns.’ Juli 1946.” (“Berlin. During the filming of the DEFA film ‘The Murderers Are Among Us.’ July 1946.”) (Frecot 1988, p. 53).

⁴⁶ The caption reads: “Nächtliche Dreharbeiten zu dem Film *Die Mörder sind unter uns*. Für den DEFA-Film mit Hildegard Knef und Wilhelm Borchert werden die Ruinen am Drehort angestrahlt. Für Buch und Regie dieses ersten Spielfilms der Nachkriegszeit zeichnete Wolfgang Staudte verantwortlich. Berlin, Juli 1946.” (Nocturnal shooting of the movie *The Murderers Are Among Us*. For DEFA film with Hildegard Knef and Wilhelm Borchert, the ruins are illuminated at the filming location. For the book and direction of this first feature film of the post-war period, Wolfgang Staudte was responsible.) See (Peters-Klaphake and Vorsteher 2008, fig. 114).

⁴⁷ I derive from Allbeson the concept of reading the meaning of an image as it “migrate[s] from one sort of publications to another, while different registers of language were deployed for discussion ruin imagery,” resulting in “a visual culture of war damage.” See (Allbeson 2015, p. 557). For “repeated circulation,” see (ibid., p. 560).

of postwar German film no longer under Nazi control, and join the *Trümmerfilm* in creating rubble photographs that similarly convey the physical, political and moral chaos in post-WWII Germany—the latter resulting from those who were complicit with the Nazis but who claimed their innocence, German guilt over the horrors of the Holocaust, and survivors attempting to rebuild their lives and the cities, reflecting Ries's attempt to grapple with his liminal identities and conflicted compassion for these survivors.

5. Conclusion

Ries gave me a copy of the 1988 Berlinische Galerie catalogue, and inscribed it: “Remembrance and Remember” (Figure 15). As a native German speaker, he selected his English words carefully. *To remember* involves becoming aware of someone or something that one has seen, known, or experienced in the past, while *remembrance* connotes “something that is done or made to honor the memory of a person, thing, or event.” Ries created his photographs in remembrance of what he had witnessed and had experienced as a bilingual photojournalist, and to honor and remember those in his family and others killed as a result of Hitler's Final Solution. The photo shoot for the movie in its two variants and in two different publications embodies Berlin's new reality of “the shadow-world of the inferno.” Both photographs memorialize the war and serve as visual commentaries on the trauma and destruction, and on people attempting to return to normal life after Hitler's military rampage—a rampage that resulted in chaos, and in Ries's individual trauma in experiencing Hitler's Germany and witnessing Germany's moral and physical destruction. Unlike other German and Allied photographers, who Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann claims appropriated the suffering of others, “turning it into something consumable” as a “distant suffering,” which he calls the “politics of pity” (Hoffmann 2011, pp. 335, 349), Ries instead struggled with his principled judgment of the German people with whom he shared a language, history, and cultural identity. This makes his rubble photographs even more meaningful, resulting in his conflicted compassionate gaze.

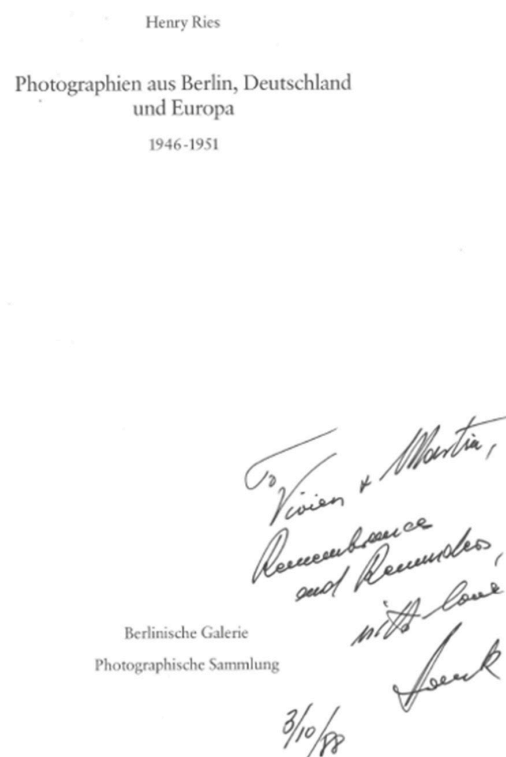


Figure 15. Henry Ries. Inscription to Vivien and Martin. Title page. 10 March 1988. *Henry Ries: Photographien aus Berlin, Deutschland und Europa, 1946–1951*, exh. cat. Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, 1988. Author Archives.

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