



by Volker Heise

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Non-Fiction

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lists of der Welt, der NZZ,  
RBB Kultur und ORF Ö1

**1945**

*1945*

### review

Volker Heise, best known for his award-winning Living History television series, has crafted a multilayered report of the final year of the Second World War and its aftermath. Combining a framework of facts with eyewitness accounts, this tome gives the reader a feel for the experience of the war from a civilian perspective, paraphrasing diaries and letters, as well as including reports and newsreels by soldiers, journalists, political leaders and concentration camp prisoners.

‘This book is based on the conviction that history cannot be told from a single perspective,’ states Volker Heise in his foreword. What follows is an intriguing, gripping and at times harrowing account of what it was like to live from December 1944 to December 1945 in Germany, with a chapter dedicated to each month.

We follow the daily life of a series of people and by the end, have become thoroughly invested in their fates. Brigitte Eicke, for example, a young secretary living in Berlin, writes a diary to practice her stenography. She charts a glib, carefree life spent going to the cinema, kissing boys and participating in events organised by the League of German Girls. By contrast, we encounter a 23-year-old Kurt Vonnegut, back then a volunteer soldier in the US Army, tracking his way alongside similarly inexperienced soldiers through the snow in the Eifel. Short paragraphs intersect with each other – journalist Ruth Andreas-Friedrich’s attempt to drum up support for

condemned resistance fighter Helmuth James Graf von Moltke contrasts with the letters he writes to his wife. A collage of perspectives is gradually built up, ranging from Red Army leaders to Hitler's secretary, Traudl Junge. These accounts add vivid detail to widely-known facts about the events on the Eastern front, in the houses and bunkers of Berlin, and in prison cells. An appendix lets us know what happened to each of the lesser-known people whose reports make up the backbone of the book.

By the finale, we have profound insight into the ruinous effects of armed conflict, especially on the civilian population. Eschewing academic complexity in favour of a slice-of-life approach, this panoramic view of first-hand accounts requires no detailed knowledge of the events in question. A brilliant and original non-fiction title that coincides with the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

Find out more:

<https://www.rowohlt.de/verlag/rights/book/volker-heise-1945-9783737102018>

## press quotes

*"The chronicle of a traumatic year. Volker Heise brings together diary entries, eyewitness accounts and other reports into a play-by-play account of history."*

Sachbuch-Bestenliste von der Welt, der NZZ, RBB Kultur and ORF Ö1 (January 2025)

## about the author

Volker Heise was born in 1961 in Hoya and is a director, producer, and documentary filmmaker. His works have earned him prestigious awards (including the Grimme Prize and the German Television Award). Recent movie projects include Berlin 1945, Berlin 1933, and the Netflix production Gladbeck. The Hostage Crisis. He lives in Berlin.

**Previous works:** Außer Kontrolle, Rowohlt.Berlin Verlag GmbH (2017).

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