

**Cornelius Ryan**



**THE LAST  
BATTLE**



SIMON & SCHUSTER PAPERBACKS  
New York London Toronto Sydney

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BY CORNELIUS RYAN  
A BRIDGE TOO FAR - 1974  
THE LAST BATTLE - 1966  
THE LONGEST DAY - 1959

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Rockefeller Center

1230 Avenue of the Americas

New York, NY 10020

[www.SimonandSchuster.com](http://www.SimonandSchuster.com)

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Manufactured in the United States of America

11 13 15 17 19 20 18 16 14 12

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 65-18654

ISBN-13: 978-0-684-80329-6

eISBN-13: 978-1-439-12701-8

ISBN-10: 0-684-80329-1

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*“Of the events of war, I have not ventured to speak from any chance information, nor according to any notion of my own; I have described nothing but what I saw myself, or learned from others of whom I made the most careful and particular inquiry. The task was a laborious one because eyewitnesses of the same occurrence gave different accounts of them as they remembered, or were interested in the actions of one side or the other. And very likely the strictly historical character of my narrative may be disappointing to the ear. But if he who desires to have before his eyes a true picture of the events which have happened ... shall pronounce what I have written to be useful, then I shall be satisfied.”*

—THUCYDIDES, *Peloponnesian War*, Volume 1, 400 B.C.

THIS BOOK IS FOR THE MEMORY OF A BOY WHO WAS BORN IN BERLIN DURING THE LAST MONTHS OF THE WAR. HIS NAME WAS PETER FECHTER. IN 1962 HE WAS MACHINE-GUNNED BY HIS OWN PEOPLE AND LEFT TO BLEED TO DEATH BY THE SIDE OF THE MOST TRAGIC MEMORIAL TO THE ALLIED VICTORY—THE BERLIN WALL.

## Foreword

A-Day, Monday, April 16, 1945

*The battle for Berlin, the last offensive against Hitler's Third Reich, began at precisely 4 A.M., Monday, April 16, 1945—or A-Day as it was called by the Western Allies. At that moment, less than thirty-eight miles east of the capital, red flares burst in the night skies above the swollen river Oder, triggering a stupefying artillery barrage and the opening of the Russian assault on the city.*

*At about that same time, elements of the U.S. Ninth Army were turning away from Berlin—heading back to the west to take up new positions along the river Elbe between Tangermünde and Barby. On April 14 General Eisenhower had decided to halt the Anglo-American drive across Germany. “Berlin,” he said, “is no longer a military objective.” When U.S. troops got the word, Berlin, for some of them, was only forty-five miles away.*

*As the attack began, Berliners waited in the bombed rubble of their city, numb and terrified, clinging to the only politics that now counted—the politics of survival. To eat had become more important than to love, to burrow more dignified than to fight, to endure more militarily correct than to win.*

*What follows is the story of the last battle—the assault and capture of Berlin. Although this book includes accounts of the fighting, it is not a military report. Rather, it is the story of ordinary people, both soldiers and civilians, who were caught up in the despair, frustration, terror and rape of the defeat and the victory.*