

PI
magazine
.com

professional investigator magazine

US \$8.95

May/June 2020



**KEEPING YOUR BUSINESS
ACTIVE DURING COVID-19**

**Business Continuity For The
Professional Investigator**

**To License
Or Not To
License**

**Beginner's
Luck – Don't
Count on It**

SIONYX NIGHTVISION CAMERA REVIEW

Finding the Kissers

A Sixty-Seven Year Detective Odyssey

BY **DANIEL J. DEMERS**

Few pictures in history are as enigmatic as the 1945 photo depicting a sailor kissing a nurse in New York's Times Square. The picture was taken on VJ Day—the official end of World War II. For nearly 70 years, the girl in the picture was always presumed to be a nurse. Taken by Alfred Eisenstaedt, the father of photojournalism, the photo was an impromptu affair. Eisenstaedt never got the couple's names. The photo became his best known and one of the most famous ever taken. It isolated in time the joy and ecstasy experienced when the world's most horrible war ended. It was taken on August 14th. Just seven days earlier, the world's first atomic bomb had devastated Hiroshima, with a second dropped on Nagasaki two days later. They were the one-two punch that preceded Japan's unconditional surrender.

The picture published in August 1945 was one of four frames Eisenstaedt took over the span of a few seconds. The sequence is described in the book, *The Kissing Sailor*. “As he overtook her slender frame...he pulled her inward toward his lean and muscular body.” Her initial attempt to resist “proved futile against the dark-uniformed man’s strong hold.” She instinctively clenched her fist and lifted her arm up in defense. The two embraced, the next frame showed “a mixture of brutish force, caring embrace, and awkward hesitation.” Finally, she lowered her left arm “and gave over to her pursuer—but only for three or four seconds.” And then it was over—the two parted—not realizing their encounter had been photographed—let alone immortalized for all time.

As time evolved, the mystery of who the photo's characters were magnified the importance of the picture. Originally it had been one of scores published in the August edition of LIFE celebrating the war's end. The mystery of who the couple was became as much a part of the picture as the photo itself. Over the decades, LIFE attempted to locate the original characters in the picture. Several candidates came forward. Eisenstaedt, LIFE, various publications and several prominent newsmen all declared they had found the elusive couple, but none had.

With the publication of their exhaustive forensic study, *The Kissing Sailor*, in 2012, authors Lawrence Verria and George Galdorisi irrevocably proved that George Mendonsa and Greta (Zimmer) Friedman were, in fact, the kissing couple.

George Mendonsa, 22, was from Rhode Island—a fisherman in civilian life. He had enlisted in 1942 rising to quartermaster and Petty Officer, First Class on *The Sullivans*, a naval destroyer. He was on a 36-day leave from the ship docked in San Francisco. On this, his last day of shore leave, he had taken his girlfriend Rita (later wife of 66 years) to the movies at Radio City Music Hall before heading back to San Francisco. Shortly after the movie started, an employee announced to the audience that the war



had ended. The theatre emptied, and George and his girlfriend walked towards Times Square, taking liberal advantage of the celebratory liquor being offered by bars along the way. Realizing his combat days were over, an exuberant George began grabbing and kissing various ladies along the way. Verria and Galdorisi observed, “Arguably, more people kissed on that day than on any other in history.”

Several blocks away, Greta Zimmer, a 25-year-old dental technician on her lunch break, walked towards Times Square. She wanted to see the scrolling news ticker on the *New York Times* building in Times Square to confirm that the war was really over.

“The war had rained more than a fair share of misery upon Greta,” wrote Verria and Galdorisi.

In 1939, Greta and a sister had been forcibly moved to New York by her Austrian parents to live with relatives. A third sister was moved to British Palestine. The Zimmers were Jews. Six months later, Greta's par-

ents were taken to Auschwitz by the Nazis. They didn't survive the war. During the war, Greta volunteered as an air raid warden while she studied fashion in school. She wanted to be a fashion designer.

In early 1945 she took a job as a dental assistant in Manhattan. She had worked there for several months and, as was customary of the times, she wore a uniform similar to a nurse—white dress, white stockings, white shoes and white cap. As a dental assistant, she cleaned teeth and prepared patients for fillings and extractions. Her employer's offices—Dr. J. L. Berke—were a short six-block walk to Times Square.

Neither Greta nor George realized their kiss had been photographed that fateful day. Neither saw the picture in LIFE. Greta's first glimpse of the photo was some twenty-odd years later when she flipped through a book of Eisenstaedt's finest photos. She finally made her claim to fame in 1980 when LIFE magazine held a contest to determine the real couple. Several candidates emerged—including Greta and George—and several were declared the real couple. It was left to Verria and Galdorisi in their recent book, *The Kissing Sailor*, to forensically prove the couple was George and Greta.

A "mountain of evidence" supported their conclusion. Scientists us-

ing modern technology such as facial recognition and forensic anthropology, along with detailed photographic analysis, evaluated the picture. In the end, nose and hand size, a unique hairline, an arm tattoo on the right arm, and an unusual bend in the thumb—all led to the conclusion

that George was the "Kissing sailor." Additionally, he had a new uniform tailor-made while on leave and hadn't had his ratings (chevrons) sewn on—just as in the picture. Probably the clinching factor was the observance of a small lump on his arm—barely visible—a subcutaneous growth, known medically as a "wen."

Proving Greta, the dental technician, was the "nurse" in the photo was a simple matter. Experts evaluated her slender figure, long thin legs, slender-bony fingers and a hairstyle, which they compared to the other contenders. At 5'4 3/4", she was the only contender that could possibly fit the embrace with the 6'2" George. Added to this was a small

sliver of her "colorful tapestry purse" in one of Eisenstaedt's frames that served as the coup de gras.

In the book's introduction, the venerable newsman David Hartman sums it well, writing the picture "makes us *feel* like we were there experiencing the exultation of the war's end..." **PI**

“As time evolved, the mystery of who the photo's characters were magnified the importance of the picture. The mystery of who the couple was became as much a part of the picture as the photo itself.”

DATABASES CAN'T FIND IT



- ✓ Licensed
- ✓ Legal
- ✓ Insured

Call Today & Receive
\$50 FREE CREDIT

The Professionals Source Since 1997 for:

- Reverse Cell Number Research
- Prepaid & Non-Pub Listings
- Cell Number by Name
- Active Phones at Address
- Statewide/Nationwide Bank Account
- Nationwide Tags/Vins
- Email Address Research
- Credit Reports
- Plus Much More!!

No Monthly Fees!
No Set-Up Fees!
Accuracy Guaranteed!

“You have NOT Seen Anything Like Us!!”



SCAN TO LEARN MORE

call **1-800-298-1153** or visit **www.PDJservices.com**