

## Cold Peace: A Novel of the Berlin Airlift, Part I

**Helena P. Schrader**

Cross Seas Press (Jun 15, 2023)

(516pp)

979-898717700-6

*Character studies dominate in Cold Peace, a lengthy novel that sets up the story of the Berlin airlift.*

Helena P. Schrader's historical novel *Cold Peace* covers the events surrounding the Berlin Blockade in the wake of World War II.

When Wing Commander Priestman is called to his new post at RAF Gatow, he is unsure of what to expect. He is asked to “fly the flag” and “be the face of Britain” in a war-torn Berlin. As he flies over crumbled buildings and he see scavengers looking for items to barter, he is asked to put on an air show. His wife, Emily, who is also a skilled pilot, is expected to show her pretty face, attend the ladies' club, and volunteer her time selling raffle tickets. It all seems superficial and frivolous—until their friend David brings his air ambulance to Berlin, giving them a sense of purpose.

This novel is a prequel to a coming novel regarding the Berlin airlift, and it works to introduce its characters in depth. Their ranks and military acronyms are explained; their places in history are covered in the supplementary material. As the novel progresses, though, there are some abrupt segues between characters. Still, the book's portrayals of people finding their way in the confusing postwar era are empathetic on an individual basis. For example, David, a recent heir, assumes the task of unearthing properties owned by his late aunt and uncle, one of which holds a squatting Nazi. He also helps the “true Germans” of Berlin when Soviet forces try to starve out British and American people.

Throughout the book, though, it's the strong women who stand out most. Emily clashes with some of the officers' wives whom she encounters, whose concerns are more everyday than hers: they gossip in fancy dresses and talk about fashion and their children. Emily is more comfortable in her flight jacket; she does not have children. During a tense phone conversation with an American wife who wants to leave Berlin to protect her children, Emily's tough characterization is solidified: she would rather stay and aid her husband, whom she regards as a teammate. She also interacts with Charlotte, a German countess who teaches her conversational German; Charlotte's parents were killed during the war, and she wears her late brother's coat and boots and cuts her hair short. She and Emily are hired by David and are a source of strength to the men they work with.

In tidy form, the members of the cast make their way to Berlin; much of what occurs herein is a setup for events to come. There's a sense that each person will come to find their true purpose later on; their stories are not completed in this volume.

In the historical novel *Cold Peace*, war heroes and strong women find their collective purpose in a war-torn Berlin.

ERIN NESBIT (July 20, 2023)

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