

To the Fire of Normandy and Beyond: Behind Enemy Lines During World War II

Frank Kozol

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To the Fire of Normandy and Beyond sets out to balance the horror of war with morality and wisdom, and succeeds wonderfully.

A successful optometrist reflects on his wartime experiences in *To the Fire of Normandy and Beyond*, a lighthearted and captivating memoir by Frank Kozol.

Writing about himself as “Paul Kramer,” Kozol records his experiences from World War II, from being drafted in Boston to sneaking behind enemy lines, and his eventual return to civilian life. The bulk of the memoir focuses on the day-to-day life of a common soldier.

During the war, Kramer becomes a medic, turns down promotions in order to stay humble, befriends a colorful group of soldiers and noncombatants, and even crosses paths with legendary historical figures. Upon discharge from the military, Paul successfully navigates civilian life and builds a loving family and a prestigious career.

Though he changes his name in the text, *To the Fire of Normandy and Beyond* is Frank Kozol's life story, altered to supplement his messages. As stated in the introduction by his son, “the reader will see that the author reconciles the balancing act of describing his story without resorting to the grim realities of war nor devaluing the sacrifices made by our armed forces.” To that end, the memoir adopts a third-person-driven narrative following Frank Kozol's stand-in Paul Kramer.

The narrative flows beautifully with an optimistic but factual tone. Kramer faces every horror of war, including viewing the concentration camps, a friend's dying next to him, and struggling to fend off German advances. He becomes a double agent, transporting information behind enemy lines, and acts as a medic on the front line. From these experiences flow his message: we should honor the sacrifices made in the war. This is conveyed by capturing events clearly without resorting to writing in over-the-top violence; the text is balanced with humor and morality.

The author's son, Neil Kozol, contributes to the book, polishing it up to have it published and supplementing it with a second introduction, interesting asides, and a heartwarming conclusion. His additions add a sentimental flavor and are helpfully interjected whenever the narrative becomes too dark or disheartening. Through him come stories of Paul after the war, as he thrives and gives back to his community; these threads tie everything up perfectly.

Some of the narrative drags, and some recollections are too short. Kramer's medical experiences are given short shrift, though individual accounts, such as of him bandaging a superior officer's ankle, are well detailed. Conversely, scenes where Kramer finds some respite from the war stack up and meander.

To the Fire of Normandy and Beyond sets out to balance the horror of war with morality and wisdom, and succeeds wonderfully. Paul Kramer's wartime experiences are vividly recorded, and his return to civilian life brings him warmth and love. This fantastic read stays true to history and remains faithful to Kozol's worldview.

JOHN M. MURRAY (January 10, 2018)

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