Berlin’s Youth Campaign

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In June 1948, ACME Newspictures distributed a twelve-image feature about children living amid the ruins of Berlin. The three prints in this exhibition show how the feature used familiar scenes of childhood to direct attention toward the material remains of war.

Read the setting, gestures, and surviving captions together. The pictures and captions show what the agency chose to emphasize. They leave many questions about the children and their lives unanswered.

Photographs

Boys playing war on the Reichstag steps

Two boys with a German carbine

Girls with dolls beside a wrecked tank

BERLIN’S YOUTH CAMPAIGN

Boys playing war on the Reichstag steps



ACME Newspictures, distributor · June 25, 1948 · BER-872925

The damaged Reichstag gives the scene a recognizable setting. ACME’s caption frames the boys’ play as a reenactment of war. Look at how their placement on the steps turns the ruined building into part of the story.

This print belongs to the June 25, 1948 ACME feature Berlin’s Youth Campaign. It is No. 2 in the twelve-image sequence. The Getty archive records the same composition with ACME reference u872925acme. The photographer is unidentified. The 2026 auction described the three-print lot as approximately 8 × 10 in.; the image and sheet of this individual print have not been measured.

Sources

1. ACME Newspictures, Berlin’s Youth Campaign, no. 2 of 12, June 25, 1948
2. Getty Images, archival image 515242226, ACME reference u872925acme
3. Alexander Historical Auctions, Children in the Ruins of Berlin (3), lot 251
4. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, August 2026. A search of ten related New York World-Telegram & Sun folders did not locate additional images from the series.

Unidentified photographer (distributed by ACME Newspictures). “Boys playing war on the Reichstag steps.” 1948. Silver Gelatin Street, object BER-872925. https://silvergelatinstreet.com/works/ber-872925

Two boys with a German carbine



ACME Newspictures, distributor · June 25, 1948 · BER-872926

The boys' lowered gazes draw attention to the carbine across their laps. The closer view shifts the scale of the series from a public ruin to a weapon a child can hold. The frame leaves open how the boys came to have it.

The collection identifies the carbine scene as BER-872926 from the June 25, 1948 ACME feature Berlin's Youth Campaign. The individual photographer and the print date remain unidentified. The 2026 auction described the three-print lot as approximately 8 × 10 in.; the image and sheet of this individual print have not been measured.

Sources

1. ACME Newspictures, Berlin's Youth Campaign, June 25, 1948. Collection identification BER-872926.
2. Alexander Historical Auctions, Children in the Ruins of Berlin (3), lot 251
3. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, August 2026. A search of ten related New York World-Telegram & Sun folders did not locate additional images from the series.

Unidentified photographer (distributed by ACME Newspictures). "Two boys with a German carbine." 1948. Silver Gelatin Street, object BER-872926. https://silvergelatinstreet.com/works/ber-872926

Girls with dolls beside a wrecked tank



ACME Newspictures, distributor · June 25, 1948 · BER-872928

Dolls and a disabled tank share the scene. The surviving caption identifies this as photograph five in the feature. Its description of playing house makes the contrast between domestic play and military wreckage part of the agency’s account.

The surviving ACME caption identifies the tank scene as No. 5 of the twelve-image Berlin’s Youth Campaign feature. The series position comes from the caption. BER-872928 is the collection’s object identifier. The 2026 auction described the three-print lot as approximately 8 × 10 in.; the image and sheet of this individual print have not been measured.

Sources

1. ACME Newspictures, Berlin’s Youth Campaign, no. 5 of 12, June 25, 1948
2. Alexander Historical Auctions, Children in the Ruins of Berlin (3), lot 251
3. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, August 2026. A search of ten related New York World-Telegram & Sun folders did not locate additional images from the series.

Unidentified photographer (distributed by ACME Newspictures). “Girls with dolls beside a wrecked tank.” 1948. Silver Gelatin Street, object BER-872928. https://silvergelatinstreet.com/works/ber-872928