


# People are Talking about

4760.

Joan Juliet Buck  
tells all about the  
glamorous,  
dangerous life of  
Robert Capa:  
the world's greatest  
war photographer.

## a life exposed



WAR SHOTS:  
THE FAMOUS  
PHOTOGRAPH  
TAKEN DURING  
THE SPANISH  
CIVIL WAR,  
1936; CAPA  
BEHIND THE  
CAMERA, 1938.

**a** war photographer's most fervent wish is for unemployment," said Robert Capa, who was himself, from the age of 25, considered the world's greatest war photographer. He said this after he had covered nearly every war in the world between 1936 and 1954 except Korea. His images are unforgettable, most of all the emblematic photo from the Spanish Civil War of the republican fighter in white, falling



backward as a bullet hits him, still holding his gun. Robert Capa: In Love and War, in WNET/PBS's documentary series *American Masters* (airing May 28), is directed by Anne Makepeace, who takes a liberal and enthusiastic approach to the man's life. The author of many documentaries, including a well-regarded one on Edward Curtis and his photos of American Indians, she uses every means available to tell the story of the dashing and glamorous photographer, and almost succeeds. We see Capa's great photos, old footage, interviews with his friends, his brother, Cornell Capa, and even Henri Cartier-Bresson, with whom he founded the photo agency Magnum (named after the size of the bottle of champagne they drank at the first meeting) in 1947. The rich documentary is marred only by dramatizations of certain moments in Capa's life that have the weird, stilted look of reconstructions from a true crime show.

## television

Charismatic people have messy lives, and Capa was handsome, generous, brave, romantic, glamorous, velvet-eyed, a Hungarian exile with an invented name who personified the charm and daring of the war journalist. His peacetime life was full of conflict and exile, roistering, and gambling. Most of all, Robert Capa did not exist.

He was invented in Paris in 1933 by a young Hungarian named Endre, Andrei, or Andre Friedmann (or Frydman), who was born in Budapest in 1913, to a Jewish family who lived on the Pest side of the city (Buda was the chic quarter). Arrested in a demonstration in 1930, imprisoned and beaten, he was given 24 hours to leave the country, and fled to Berlin. There, working for a photo agency called Dephot, at eighteen he got his first assignment: photographing Trotsky in Copenhagen. *television* ▶ 164

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By 1933 he had to leave Berlin for Paris, where he fell in love with Gerda Pohorylle, a beautiful young journalist. When editors were slow to hire him, he and Gerda invented a famous American photographer. They tweaked the name of director Frank

## television

Capra and came up with Robert Capa; Gerda borrowed a few vowels from Greta Garbo and came out Gerda Taro. The masquerade was inventive and delightful, and it worked: Frydman's photos, under the name of the "famous" Robert Capa, were immediately successful, and Frydman vanished into Robert Capa.

Together they covered the Spanish Civil War. Capa's famous photo of the dying republican soldier was published three years in a row by different magazines: *Vu*, *Life*, and *Picture Post*, which called him "The Greatest War Photographer in the World." A legend was born, but Gerda was killed near Madrid while covering a battle. "All his hope and his future left him," says a friend in the film.

He went to Hankow, where in 1938 the Japanese were attacking China, and moved in 1939 to New York, where he

tried to be American. Fearless, he documented the London Blitz from a house in Waterloo Road. A gambler, he was on the first ship in the Normandy landings, but 61 of the 72 frames

he shot were lost when a dark-room assistant accidentally melted the emulsion. Steven Spielberg explains how he carefully reconstructed Capa's eleven remaining photos of the Normandy landing for scenes in *Saving Private Ryan*.

In 1945, he was drinking at the Paris Ritz with Irwin Shaw when In-

**UNDER COVER:  
FRANCOISE GILOT  
AND PABLO  
PICASSO AT  
GOLFE-JUAN IN  
THE SOUTH OF  
FRANCE, 1948.**

grid Bergman walked in; they sent her a note, took her out to dinner, and so began Capa's love affair with the woman who was the biggest star in the

world at the time. It did not last, but he went on the set of *Notorious*, and he hung around Hollywood long enough to play a character called Hamza the Egyptian in a film called *Temptation*. He returned to Europe and the wars. "If your photos aren't good enough, you're not close enough," Capa said. He was 40 years

old when, in Indochina, he wandered away from a convoy in the Red River delta and stepped on a mine. □

