

# A Portrait Of a Man Who Knew War's Face

By TED LOOS

**F**ORTY-NINE years ago today, Robert Capa stepped on a land mine in Vietnam while covering that country's war against France, becoming the first American war correspondent to die there.

Capa was only 40, but he had already become one of the world's top war photojournalists. His coverage of the Spanish Civil War produced "The Falling Soldier," the image of a Spanish Loyalist militiaman collapsing into death, which, despite debatable claims that it was staged, still ranks among the indelible images of the 20th century.

During World War II, Capa risked his life many times, even parachuting into the Rhine Valley with G.I.'s, and got close to the action with his lightweight Leica camera. He was the only photographer to capture the first wave of the Allied landing at Omaha Beach.

"Capa largely invented the way photojournalists look at war today," said Anne Makepeace, who wrote, produced and directed "Robert Capa: In Love and War," an "American Masters" documentary that is to have its premiere on Wednesday night at 9:30 on WNET and other PBS stations.

"Before him war photography was about generals and the glory of battle," Ms. Makepeace said. "Capa really showed the human costs of war."

For all of Capa's significance as an artist — his Life magazine work is legendary — his personal life was just as compelling.

Handsome and dashing, he loved to gamble and party, and he spoke a multi-language hybrid that a friend, the writer Irwin Shaw, called Capanese, the product of a Hungarian upbringing and many travels.

In the 1940's he had a romance with Ingrid Bergman, whom he photographed on the set of Alfred Hitchcock's "Notorious," and it is thought

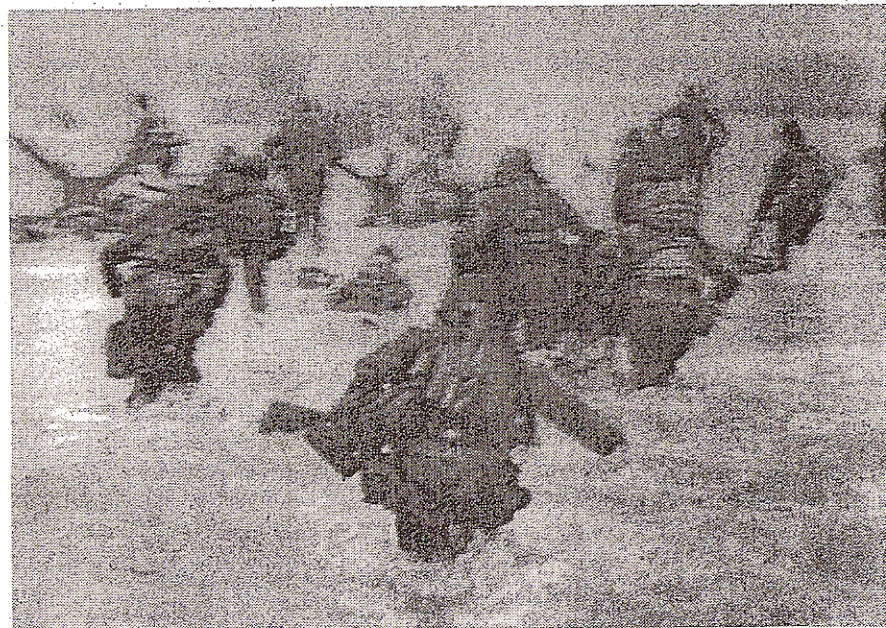
## ROBERT CAPA: IN LOVE AND WAR

Wednesday at 9:30 P.M. on WNET

On the cover: Robert Capa in 1936.



Photograph of Robert Capa from David E. Scherman. All others by Robert Capa, courtesy Cornell Capa



that Hitchcock based his 1954 film "Rear Window" on their affair.

Naturally filmmakers have been interested in Capa's story, but the rights are controlled by his brother, Cornell, who is dedicated to preserving Capa's legacy.

"Ever since my brother died, I wanted to make a documentary," said Mr. Capa, 85. "But I did not want a Hollywood-style movie."

Mr. Capa had a distinguished photojournalism career of his own at Life and became the founding director of the International Center of Photography in 1974.

"Cornell went with us because he wanted his brother's work to be the centerpiece, and he didn't want the life to

overshadow it," said Susan Lacy, the executive producer of "American Masters."

Once the rights were secured, Ms. Lacy tapped Ms. Makepeace, a longtime friend and collaborator whose first "American Masters" film, about the photographer Edward Curtis, was shown in 2001.

"At the beginning I only knew what the average person did — his war photographs — but not his life," Ms. Makepeace said. "You cannot find a more amazing story than that of Robert Capa."

Born Endre Friedmann to a family of Jewish tailors in Budapest, Capa was politically active from an early age, and at 17 left Hungary, where he had pro-

The work of Robert Capa (below right): left, crying girl in Israel (1950); bottom left, American troops land at Omaha Beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944; right, children play in the snow in Hankow, China (1938); below, woman mourns at her husband's grave in a military cemetery in Namdinh, Vietnam (1954).

tested against the fascist dictatorship.

Despite a life of bearing witness to violence, Capa always hated it. He once said, "A war photographer's most fervent wish is for unemployment."

Although Ms. Makepeace called Capa "the first embedded photographer" for his close-up view of five wars, it was not his only beat. He took memorable photographs of movie stars like Humphrey Bogart, captured Picasso frolicking on the beach with Françoise Gilot and documented life in the postwar Soviet Union.

Probably the most fantastical element of Capa's story is his name and persona change, which occurred in the 1930's, when he and his girlfriend, Gerda Taro, were living in Paris.

Taro posed as the agent for a famous photographer named Robert Capa (a name some say was inspired by the film director Frank Capra). The invented Capa was an American photographer too busy to meet with editors. When not out taking the pictures himself, Capa (then Friedmann) pretended to be the darkroom assistant.

The ruse worked, and the pictures were good enough to get plum assignments. By the time someone figured it out, Capa's reputation was already established. And in 1946, when he became an American citizen, he legally changed his name.

"Within 10 years he had become exactly the description he created: a famous American photographer, always away on assignment taking these incredible pictures," Ms. Makepeace said.

To make her 90-minute documentary, Ms. Makepeace filmed in seven countries, and moved from her home in Santa Barbara, Calif., to New York City, where she lived for more than a year while poring over many of the 70,000 Capa negatives housed at the International Center of Photography.

"The hard part was, I had to deliver the film in a year," Ms. Makepeace said. "There was a massive amount of material."

In looking through the images, about 500 of which were used in the film, Ms. Makepeace said that empathy was the common denominator.

"If you look at the pictures in my film that he took of Nazi soldiers surrendering, they are full of humanity," she said.



## Robert Capa captured the human costs of war.

"The Nazis killed some of his relatives. He would have had every reason to make them look like monsters, but you see their suffering."

To illuminate Capa's sensibility, both on the job and off, Ms. Makepeace wrangled some big-name interviews. Steven Spielberg appears in the film to talk about how he used Capa's photographs of D-Day for the opening sequence of "Saving Private Ryan." The actress Isabella Rossellini discusses Capa's famous charm and his relationship with her mother, Ingrid Bergman.

The documentary also includes an interview with the 94-year-old French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, who founded Magnum, the photographers' agency, in 1947 with Capa and three other photographers.

"It's a real achievement for a film-

maker to tell the story when so few of the principals are around," said Cornell Capa, who appears in the film in an older interview since Parkinson's disease has made it difficult for him to talk on camera.

Ms. Makepeace said, "Part of the urgency of getting the film done was that we wanted Cornell to be able to see it while he was still alive."

Mr. Capa, who took his brother's new name when he came to America, said he was pleased with the film, adding that it brought home to him the unlikely trajectory of his brother's life: a pacifist war photographer who dreamed up an impossibly successful life and then lived it for only a short time.

"It was all imaginary," Mr. Capa said. "Except that it happened to be true." □