

Riveting Capa profile just a snapshot of a fabulous life

Anne Makepeace's documentary is filled with his indelible photos and comments from a marvelous array of friends and colleagues

By **TED MAHAR**
THE OREGONIAN

Justly legendary photographer Robert Capa's life played out like a series of incredibly romantic adventures. To see writer/producer/director Anne Makepeace's riveting "American Masters" documentary, "Robert Capa: In Love and War," is to wish for more. Dozens of Capa's exploits could make feature-length movies.

In 90 minutes Makepeace can only offer cogent details, show engaging film clips or photos and move breathlessly on to Capa's next episode. He was the quintessential man without a country, always stalking the big story. Capa created his own identity like a suit and then wore it.

He became a photographer as a result of being in the right place at the right time and discovered a natural skill somewhere between talent and genius. He went on to cover five wars and become friends with celebrities at the top of their professions.

Covering the Spanish Civil War, he became a lifelong friend of Ernest Hemingway. In World War II he was buddies with correspondents Ernie Pyle, Quentin Reynolds and John Steinbeck, as well as filmmakers George Stevens and John Huston. He hung out with Gary Cooper, Howard Hawks, Leiland Stanford and Alfred Hitchcock.

He had an affair with then-married Ingrid Bergman, whom he met in Paris at war's end. She wanted to marry, but he said he just couldn't; his career and his very nature precluded it. Hitchcock used the incident as a plot element in "Rear Window," which came out the year Capa died at age 40.

Capa had photographed, under fire, the Spanish Civil War, the Chinese war against



ROBERT CAPA

A loyalist soldier is mortally wounded during the Spanish Civil War in 1936.

Japanese invaders, World War II, the Israeli Sinai war and France's war in Indochina. His longtime motto was, "If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough." He stepped on a land mine on May 25, 1954, just weeks before the Indochina war ended.

That he lived to age 40 was improbable. Men and women were killed around him in Spain, China, London, Naples, Omaha Beach, Belgium in the Battle of the Bulge, Germany, Palestine and Indochina.

His first career-making shot was a Spanish loyalist soldier falling backward, dead, his rifle still in hand. Another was a soldier lying in the surf on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944; the soldier 50-odd years later recalls Capa taking the photo. Steven Spielberg admits that he modeled his "Saving Private Ryan" landing scene on Capa's photos. Capa flew on a B-17 bombing mission and later parachuted with Americans in Germany.

His love life was also extravagantly colorful. Bergman was his most famous lover, but his first great romance was with a woman,

who, like himself, created a persona and inhabited it. He was born Endre Friedmann in Budapest on Oct. 22, 1913. He invented the name Robert Capa, partly from Frank Capra. She called herself Gerda Taro, partly after Greta Garbo.

They marketed themselves as a photo team, living in Paris but ready to go anywhere. Their photos of each other are naturalistic yet suffused with romantic passion. When she was killed in combat in Spain at age 25, he read it in a newspaper in a barbershop. He was 23.

He had another long-term affair with a married woman in England, his base during World War II, a commuter romance that was great for both. He had many other brief encounters. He was passionate, friendly, world-famous, daring, quick-witted and better looking than the average movie star. And he was never anywhere for long.

Even so, the man without a country became a U.S. citizen and later spent thousands defending himself against the chicanery of Sen. Joe McCarthy.

PREVIEW

Robert Capa: In Love and War

Filmmaker: Anne Makepeace

Time: 9:30-11 p.m. Wednesday

Channel: KOPB (10)

Bottom line: So much more to tell

Makepeace assembled a marvelous array of friends, colleagues and acquaintances to discuss and describe Capa, including his 94-year-old brother, Cornell. Capa's photos and his colleagues' shots of him fill the documentary, and no film could create a greater desire for an accompanying book than this. Capa took an estimated 70,000 shots in his career, hundreds of which bear scrutiny and just simple reflection.

Capa sometimes said that, as a war photographer, he wanted only to be unemployed. He was surely sincere, but, like a movie hero, he instinctively geared up and followed his own advice: to find the story, follow the sound of the guns.

War aside, Capa was a great photographer by reflex, instinct and taste. His intimate portraits and candid shots of celebrities and others — especially children — rekindle the hoary thousand-words cliché.

Makepeace doesn't have the time to get into it, but one must simply marvel at how Capa got what he photographed under fire with the equipment and film available at the time: no autofocus, single-lens reflex, built-in flash, built-in light meter or battery-driven film advance. He had to recognize the shot in an instant, focus, adjust for parallax, shoot, advance the film, re-focus and so on. Then he had to rewind and reload, usually more than one camera, often under fire.

Also, no zoom lens. To get the right shot, he had to be at the right distance himself. He died being close enough.

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