

In With the First Wave

By DOROTHY RABINOWITZ

WHEN ROBERT CAPA finally died covering one battle too many—this one Indochina, 1954—his grieving mother refused the U.S. government's offer of a burial place in Arlington, with the explanation that her son was a man of peace. Undoubtedly—and it is a point peculiarly belabored in the "American Masters" film "Robert Capa: In Love and War," airing Wednesday (9:30 to 11 p.m. EDT on PBS; check local listings)—Capa abhorred the suffering wrought by war. Still, it wasn't his abhorrence of war and yearnings for peace (not exactly exceptional points of view) that drove Capa's life and illustrious career—it was his interest in, and his images of, war, battles, bombings, invasion.

He went in with the first wave of infantry to land on Omaha Beach on D-Day—the only press photographer to do so. From the Spanish Civil War of the '30s on down to the one that ended his life, Capa was there with his camera. Indeed, he got to all the wars he could and would have nothing to do, at least not for long, with any life that would keep him from covering them. How could he get married, he asks his lover, after World War II? There might be another war he'd have to get to.

Up Close

A Hungarian who made his way to Berlin, at age 18, where he began training as a photographer, Capa—born Andre Friedman—fled to Paris when Hitler came to power. There he sat in cafés with other Jewish refugees, met the two friends who would become his lifelong colleagues, Henri Cartier-Bresson and David Seymour, and there he became Robert Capa—a name whose sound appealed to him because of its similarity to that of the American movie director, Frank Capra. The idea was to pass himself off to editors as a prominent American photographer. The life of this (soon-discovered) deception was brief, but the name lived on; Capa he would remain.

The extraordinary eloquence of the young photographer's Spanish Civil War photos secured their place in history and his as well, and also got him a contract with Life magazine. At least part of that eloquence derived from Capa's willingness to brave mortal danger to get up-close shots, as he did, most notably on D-Day. His view on picture-taking, boiled down, was "If it's not good enough, you

didn't get close enough." On D-Day, Capa got as close as it was possible to get—and out of this intrepid effort he emerged with just 11 pictures; in a wretched twist of fate, the rest of the 134 shots were ruined by, the film notes, a nervous darkroom assistant in London.

With Bergman

The "American Masters" film is never better than when it focuses on the particulars of those famous Capa pictures—whether the "Falling Soldier" of the Spanish Civil War, arms outspread as the bullet hits him, or those taken on D-Day. There is a lot to be said, in fact, for almost everything about this amply detailed portrait. Born to an adoring mother, Capa would command the affections of a good many others he met in his life. Relative strangers felt he understood them. Combat soldiers took comfort from his presence. Women found him devilishly attractive. His 1945 romance with the married Ingrid Bergman was sufficiently serious that the actress considered leaving her husband for him—an offer he was not prepared to accept. In all of this—for reasons we don't have to go into here—Alfred Hitchcock found, we're told, his inspiration for "Rear Window."

It shouldn't be surprising that the



Above: Robert Capa/Cornell Capa (2); Below: David James/HBO

The D-Day landing of U.S. Infantry forces on Omaha Beach (above), photographed by the legendary Robert Capa (top right). Right: Maggie Smith stars in HBO's film of William Trevor's 'My House in Umbria.'

most potent aspects of this film are the parts dealing with war footage. At the liberation of Paris, an ecstatic Capa rides in on an American tank. How many endless pictures of that inexhaustible liberation have we seen? And yet the ones here—Capa's faces in the crowd—manage to pack a strangely fresh emotional punch. A riveting view of a remarkable life.

