

Behind the Memorable Images

By JUDITH S. GILLIES
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Robert Capa's photographs inspired the opening sequence of Steven Spielberg's "Saving Private Ryan" and his love affair with Ingrid Bergman was the basis for Alfred Hitchcock's "Rear Window."

He marched with the infantry and talked with generals, associated with Ernest Hemingway and numerous Hollywood directors, and was called "the greatest war photographer in the world" by a British magazine.

"Robert Capa: In Love and War" will premiere on Wednesday at 9:30 p.m. on PBS as part of the "American Masters" series.

"He was dramatic and an unbelievably dashing figure who invented himself and is still legendary," said Anne Makepeace, director-writer-producer of the film. "But he was a hard-drinking, womanizing, gambling man's man in many ways. At first I wasn't sure that I could know him."

But in doing two months of research with co-producer Joanna Rudnick, Makepeace went through thousands of Capa's contact sheets at the International Center of Photography, founded by Capa's brother Cornell Capa, also a photographer, in New York.

"I began to see how he looked at things—the things around what became the famous pictures. I was impressed by the humanity in his pictures, especially in pictures of children. You could see this wonderful interaction going on, see how people opened to him. There was a generosity, a largeness of spirit, a way of connecting to all kinds of people."

The 90-minute documentary was filmed last year in New York, London, Paris, Madrid, Amsterdam, Switzerland and Budapest. "We traveled all over to meet and interview people who knew him. Everybody wanted to do [the interviews] for Capa, responding to his generosity and to honor



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Photographer Robert Capa covered five wars before he died at age 40 while on assignment for Life magazine in 1954.

his legacy, including photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson [in his 90s], who had not granted interviews in a long time."

The film weaves interviews, Capa's photographs, narration by Robert Burke, and voice-overs of Capa's own words from letters, stories and books that are read by Goran Visnji, who plays Dr. Luka Kovac in "ER."

"Goran was the only one I could think of who would be great for the voice-overs," Makepeace said. "He kind of looks like Capa. . . . He was sick with the flu," when he read the voice-overs, "but he wanted to do it and do it right. The sound engineer mixed a lemon juice, honey and God-knows-what concoction for Goran. He's really a trooper."

The documentary debuted at the Sun-

dance Film Festival in Utah in January and has been shown in festivals across the United States, Makepeace said.

The PBS showing between Memorial Day and the anniversary of D-Day on June 6 is especially timely, said Susan Lacy, "American Masters" creator and executive producer.

"We have been at war," Lacy said, "and this is a reminder about the costs on every level. That's what his photographs told us.

"He was incredibly brave and clearly loved his work. . . . He's not glorifying war. But his pictures tell you a story in ways words never could," Lacy said.

One of Capa's favorite sayings was that a war photographer's greatest wish was for unemployment.

This from the same Capa who covered five wars—the Spanish Civil War and the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s, World War II, the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948 and the French Indochina War.

He was born Endre (sometimes spelled Andre) Friedmann in Budapest in 1913 and left home at age 17 after being arrested in a demonstration against the Hungarian government. He found a job in the darkroom of a Berlin picture agency, began shooting photos with a small Leica camera and had his first success with photos of Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky speaking in Copenhagen.

When Hitler took over Germany, Friedmann left for Paris. In the mid-1930s, he met Gerda Pohorylles, also a refugee from Germany. The two lived and worked together, struggling to get established.

"And they decided they would invent an American photographer named Robert Capa," says biographer Richard Whelan in the film. "The name Capa seems to be a play on the name of Frank Capra, who had just won an Academy Award." Gerda, influenced by Greta Garbo, called herself Gerda Taro.

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"Eventually the ruse was discovered, that Endre Friedmann was making the photographs that Gerda was selling as Robert Capa's," Whelan says, "... since the photographs were so good, and they were getting published, Endre Friedmann might just as well become Robert Capa." So Robert Capa was born in Paris at the age of 22, Makepeace said, becoming the man who invented himself.

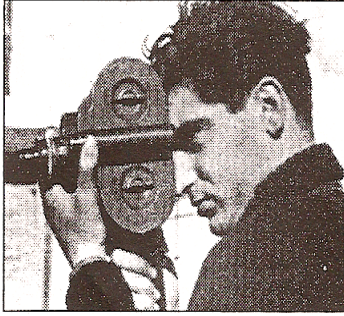
Capa and Taro went to Spain to cover the Spanish Civil War, where he took the photo of "The Falling Soldier" that made him famous. He taught her how to take pictures. By several accounts, they were in love and worked well together.

But in July 1937, on the battlefield, a tank swerved out of control and crashed into Taro, who was riding on the running board of a car. She died just before her 26th birthday.

"All his hope and all his future ... disappeared [at] once," says Eva Besnyo, Capa's childhood friend from Budapest who had introduced him to photography. "It changed him. I am sure it changed [him] completely this time."

From 1941 to 1945, Capa photographed World War II in Europe for Collier's and Life magazines. He covered the German Blitz of London and volunteered to parachute into Germany with the soldiers of 17th Airborne division, jumping directly into enemy fire.

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Photographer Robert Capa in 1936.

Day. "Capa took the most unbelievable risks to go in with the first wave," Makepeace said. "When he sent the images back to London to be processed, the darkroom assistant was being rushed. The temperatures got too hot and melted the images—blurring some, destroying most.

"Initially he was told that the images were ruined by seawater. But finally they did tell him that of the hundreds of pictures he took, only 11 were left," she said. "When he learned the truth, he said, 'if you fire that guy, I'm quitting.' It was so emblematic of his generosity. He remembered his darkroom days and stood up for the darkroom guy. It shows why people loved Capa."

Capa partied and moved among many international circles, including leftists and socialists in Eastern Europe; American literary figures such as Hemingway and John Steinbeck, with whom he produced a book

on Russia in 1947; Hollywood stars such as Gary Cooper and Humphrey Bogart; and artists such as Picasso.

Capa met Ingrid Bergman in Paris in 1945, "and she found Bob Capa tremendously charming and amusing. And in fact, she fell in love with him," says her daughter, actress Isabella Rossellini.

During their two-year affair, Capa spent time in Hollywood where "he briefly became Hamsa the Egyptian in a B movie called 'Temptation.' He decided that the movie world was not for him," the film says.

"Mother was ready to ask for a divorce and marry Capa. But Capa said, 'I cannot marry you. I cannot tie myself down. ... I'm not the marrying kind.' Apparently Hitchcock wrote 'Rear Window' inspired by this love affair," says Rossellini in the film.

In 1947, Capa—who had become an American citizen and legally changed his name—founded the photo agency Magnum with Cartier-Bresson and several other photographers. "His idea was to form a cooperative of independent photographers committed to capturing important stories around the world," the film says.

He also became known for gambling and "when he won, his gambling kept the office going," the film says.

He was wounded during fighting in Tel Aviv and vowed never to cover war again. But in 1954, he accepted an assignment for Life to cover the French Indochina war. On May 25, at age 40, he was killed when he stepped on a land mine while crossing a field.

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