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## Images of the Vietnam War That Defined an Era

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

Half a century after the nation's fateful early missteps into the quagmire, what are Americans likely to remember about the Vietnam War?

A Buddhist monk, doused with gasoline, squatting stoically in the street as roaring flames consume his body.

An enemy prisoner grimacing as a bullet fired from a pistol at the end of an outstretched arm enters his brain.

A 9-year-old girl running naked down the road, screaming as her skin burns from napalm.

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Perhaps even more viscerally even than on television, America's most wrenching war in our time hit home in photographs, including these three searing prize-winning images from The Associated Press newsmen Malcolm W. Browne, Eddie Adams and Nick Ut. They are the subject of retrospectives now, in a new book and accompanying exhibitions.

No single news source did more to document the bitter and costly struggle against North Vietnamese Communist regulars and Vietcong insurgents, and to turn the home front against the war, than The A.P.

From 1950 to 1975, this nonprofit news cooperative, founded during the Mexican War in 1846, fielded Saigon's largest, most battle-hardened cadre of war correspondents and photographers, including several women. Four died.

"What we did, we told the accurate story," said Peter Arnett, one of the last surviving members of the 1960s bureau, who was once berated by the United States Pacific commander, Adm. Harry D. Felt: "Get on the team."

Now, amid a flurry of anniversary commemorations of that tumultuous era and a surge of interest in war photography, The A.P. has, for the first time, culled its estimated 25,000 Vietnam photographs and reprinted some 250 in a book, "Vietnam: The Real War," with an introduction by Pete Hamill, to be published by Abrams on Oct. 1.

Chuck Zoeller, the agency's manager of special projects, said the dozens of rarely seen photographs in this collection include color plates of United States prisoners of war in a Hanoi prison in 1972 and historical images from the French colonial period. There is a photo of President John F. Kennedy in Florida, reviewing a commando unit back from action as early as 1962. And there are troubling scenes: Vietcong prisoners being kicked and subjected to water torture by South Vietnamese troops. A Vietnamese family of four, dead on a blanket, killed in a stampede as panicked refugees fled the advancing North Vietnamese in 1975.

On the book's cover is a grim yet elegaic photo by Art Greenspon showing wounded American paratroopers in a jungle clearing near Hue in April 1968, as one soldier, arms raised as if in prayer, guides to the ground an unseen helicopter that is to be their salvation.

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A related photography exhibition opens on Oct. 24 at the Steven Kasher Gallery, at 521 West 23rd Street, in Chelsea. And for its own staff, The A.P. is devoting wall space in its headquarters in Manhattan to the work of the photographer of that 1963 Buddhist protest immolation: Mr. Browne, who was later a reporter for The New York Times. He died last year, as did Horst Faas, the longtime A.P. editor in Saigon.

“Three photographs changed public perception of the Vietnam War, and it’s no coincidence the photographers were working for The Associated Press,” said Anne Wilkes Tucker, curator of photography at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

“It was the agency that consistently brought the clearest and toughest vision to what was happening in Vietnam home to the American public,” said Ms. Tucker, whose show “War/Photography” is at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington through Sept. 29 and opens at the Brooklyn Museum on Nov. 8.

Vietnam was a journalistic milestone: according to Daniel C. Hallin, professor of communication at the University of California, San Diego, and author of “The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam,” it was “the first war in which reporters were routinely accredited to accompany military forces, yet not subject to censorship.”

Hitching helicopter rides to battle zones while remaining free to write and shoot pictures, journalists made the most of it, recalled Richard Pyle, The A.P.’s Saigon bureau chief from 1970 until 1973. “Vietnam was where photojournalism came into its own, and kind of stayed there,” he said.

In one heart-rending 1964 photograph by Mr. Faas from his Pulitzer Prize-winning portfolio, a distraught Vietnamese father numbly holds up the limp body of his dead daughter to a truckload of impassive South Vietnamese Rangers.

“Photographs may be more memorable than moving images, because they are a neat slice of time, not a flow,” Susan Sontag wrote in her book “On Photography.” The photograph of the girl burned by napalm, she wrote, “probably did more to increase the public revulsion against the war than a hundred hours of televised barbarities.”

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Other celebrated photographers whose harrowing images carried the war home include Larry Burrows, of Life magazine, killed with The A.P.'s Henri Huet and two other newsmen in a 1971 helicopter crash; David Douglas Duncan; and Philip Jones Griffiths.

Even reporters routinely carried cameras. "We talk about multiformat coverage — we were doing that then," said Santiago Lyon, vice president and director of photography for The A.P. "The access was extraordinary."

Partly as an official backlash, experts say, journalists never again enjoyed the same combination of military cooperation and freedom to report.

The story of The Associated Press in Vietnam begins in February 1950 with a cable reassigning the 28-year-old China correspondent Seymour Topping to "Saigon, Indonesia": he guessed that the foreign desk meant Indochina.

He and his wife, Audrey, had just settled into the Continental Palace hotel when a cafe across the square exploded in a Viet Minh bombing that left the street strewn with bodies of French soldiers and sailors. In an interview, Mr. Topping (later to join The New York Times and become its managing editor) recounted the debacle of the French colonial occupation and the Truman administration's support of it. Too bad, he said, that he was the only American reporter there to report it.

As such, he was sought out by the young Congressman John F. Kennedy in November 1951. The future president came away more dubious of any entanglement, Mr. Topping wrote in his 2010 book, "On the Front Lines of the Cold War."

Mr. Topping also said, "If the American people had more information about the war in Indochina and that the French effort was not succeeding, and the considerable amount of corruption, the American people might have taken a stand against our involvement at that point."

The A.P. bureau's ranks began to grow with the arrival, in late 1961, of Mr. Browne, a Korean War veteran, followed the next year by Mr. Arnett, a New Zealander, and Mr. Faas, a German: "the Basie band of Vietnam coverage," as the A.P. book puts it.

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They and other skeptics, like David Halberstam of The Times and Neil Sheehan of United Press International, soon ran afoul of the command, revealing that American “advisers” were already in combat and that many trumpeted victories were hollow.

Mr. Browne’s graphic 1963 photographic series of the fiery suicide of the monk, Thich Quang Duc, exposed the deep hostility to the Saigon regime months before the ineffectual South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem was shot, three weeks before Kennedy’s assassination.

In a confidential cable to his editors in 1964, Mr. Browne called America “incapable of handling the situation in Viet Nam,” and he likened the effort to “so many babies turned loose in a tiger’s cage.”

During the Tet offensive, in early 1968, the A.P. photographer Eddie Adams snapped the gruesome image of a captured enemy insurgent being shot in the head, point blank, by the South Vietnamese Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan, who explained, “They killed many of my people, and yours, too.”

Mr. Adams said that he felt that he had ruined the life of General Loan. “Two people died that day,” he said.

The A.P.’s Nick Ut was on photo assignment in Trang Bang, northwest of Saigon, in 1972 when refugees began fleeing a bombing strike. Mr. Ut, who was Vietnamese, had been a bureau photographer since 1965 when, at 16, he replaced his brother, Huynh Thanh My, who was shot dead by the Vietcong.

Mr. Ut saw a grandmother cradling a year-old boy, dying from napalm burns. Then he saw the 9-year-old girl, screaming.

He helped rush her to a hospital.

News outlets resisted running the A.P.’s photo of a naked child. Mr. Faas insisted. The picture won the 1973 Pulitzer Prize. The girl, Kim Phuc, survived. “Today,” Mr. Ut says, “She calls me Uncle Nick.”

In a digital world, the pre-eminence of Vietnam-era photography is unlikely ever to be duplicated, experts say.

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Today's war photographers produce work "every bit as good as anything out of Vietnam," said Michael Kamber, a freelance photographer who covered Iraq for The New York Times and is the author of "Photojournalists at War." "But when you put more stuff on the Internet, it competes with more stuff on the Internet."

Back then, he said, "great photographs had tremendous staying power: you didn't have access to billions of photos."

*Ralph Blumenthal, a former reporter for The New York Times, covered Vietnam and Cambodia for The Times from November 1969 to February 1971.*

*This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:*

*Correction: September 7, 2013*

*An article on Thursday about a new book of Associated Press photographs of the Vietnam War, "Vietnam: The Real War," referred incorrectly to a 1963 photo by Malcolm W. Browne of a Buddhist monk's self-immolation. It was named World Press Photo of the Year for 1963; it did not win a Pulitzer Prize. (Mr. Browne shared a Pulitzer with David Halberstam in 1964 for international reporting.) The article also misstated Richard Pyle's tenure as bureau chief for The Associated Press in Saigon. While he served there from 1968 until 1973, he was bureau chief from 1970 until 1973, not 1968 until 1973.*