

Slightly out of focus

Robert Capa redefined wartime journalism by joining soldiers in the **trenches** and documenting their battle in **grim**, close-up detail. He once said, “If your pictures aren’t good enough, you aren’t **close** enough”. His first **assignment** was in the Spanish Civil War. It is rare for a single photo to evoke both a discrete moment and an epoch. But that is exactly what Robert Capa’s now-iconic “Falling Soldier” manages to do; there, in one **frame**, in a picture made at the very moment a Loyalist fighter in Spain is shot and killed, one encounters a distillation of the Fascist violence – and the brutally extinguished Republican sense of hope for a new, free, egalitarian society – that **ultimately** came to define the Spanish Civil War. However, before Capa’s falling soldier became Capa’s “Falling Soldier” – that is, before his picture acquired the patina of reverence – the photograph was just a photograph in a magazine.

After Spain, he went on to cover World War II, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the First Indochina War. Capa joined the armed troops on D-Day in 1944. He stood with the American soldiers as German **machine-guns** were firing at them while they waited in the **waist-deep** water of the beach. As the soldiers around him were **reloading** their **rifles**, Capa was **reloading** his camera, looking for the next great picture that could help him tell the true story of this **pitiless** war he was involved in. After **dodging bullets** and using **random steel** objects for cover for over an hour, Capa saw a boat. He later wrote in his book, *Slightly Out of Focus*, “I did not think and I didn’t decide, I just stood



up and ran towards the boat.” He remembered feeling “a new kind of fear shaking my body from toe to hair, and **twisting** my face.” With great difficulty his trembling hands reloaded his camera. He had **gone through 3 rolls** of film and 106 frames in his short time on the beach but many of those pictures are images that define the war itself to this day. A **darkroom** technician was almost as anxious to see the invasion images as Capa himself. In his haste, the technician dried the film too quickly. The excess heat melted the emulsion on all but 10 of the frames. Those that remained were **blurred**, surreal shots, which succinctly **conveyed** the chaos of the day.

Sadly, after putting his life in danger through so many different combat situations, Capa finally **ran out of** luck when he **stepped** on a **land mine** while covering the conflict between the French and Viet Minh in Indochina in 1954 at the age of 40. Capa’s memory lives on his photography however, and few will **argue** that his pictures weren’t “good enough”.

to argue: *mettere in discussione*

assignment: *incarico*

blurred: *sfocato*

bullet: *proiettile*

close: *vicino*

to convey: *conferire*

to dodge: *schivare*

frame: *fotogramma*

to go through: *finire, esaurire*

grim: *cupo*

land-mine: *mina*

machine-gun: *mitragliatrice*

pitiless: *spietato*

random: *a caso*

random: *casuale*

to reload: *sostituire il rullino,*

ricaricare un'arma

rifle: *fucile*

roll: *rullino*

to run out of: *finire, rimanere senza*


to step: *salire sopra, mettere il piede su*

steel: *acciaio*

trench: *trincea*

to twist: *distorcere*

waist-deep: *immerso fino alla vita*

- 1  While reading the following passage (adapted from *Slightly out of Focus*), choose the right verb from the list below and put it in the right tense.

be (2) • begin • feel • get • give • leave • look • make for • mistake • share • tear

"My beautiful France (1) sordid and uninviting. I was waist-deep in the water to take my first real picture of the invasion. The boatman, who (2) in an understandable hurry to get the hell out of there, (3) my picture-taking attitude for explicable hesitation, and helped me make up my mind with a kick in the rear. The water was cold, and the beach still more than a hundred yards away. The bullets (4) holes in the water around me, and I (5) the nearest steel obstacle. A soldier (6) there at the same time, and for a few minutes we (7) its cover.



He took the waterproofing off his rifle and (8) to shoot without much aiming at the smoke-hidden beach. The sound of his rifle (9) him enough courage to move forward, and he (10) the obstacle to me. It was a foot larger now, and I (11) safe enough to take pictures of the other guys hiding just like I (12)"