

10 War Photographs That Changed the World Forever

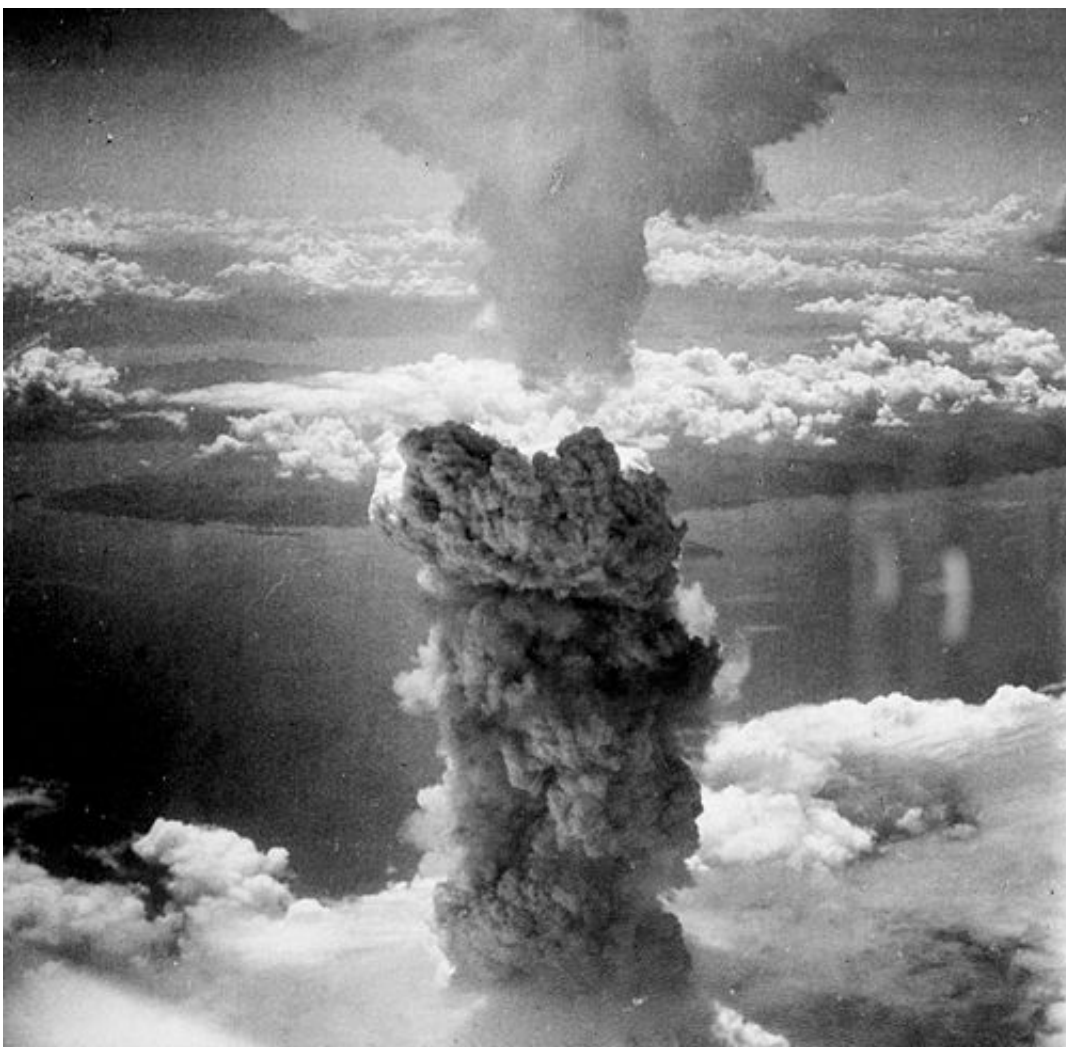


Image: *Eddie Adams*

Popular photography as we know it was presented to the public in the 1840s. It was proposed as the ultimate portrayal of reality and the eternal confinement of history - unlike art or prose, photographs are not easily altered. They have been used to depict the terrors and truths of war, to inform the public of conflicts worldwide and to advertise, subliminally, the importance of national pride and patriotism through the bravery and commitment of young soldiers on the frontlines. Today war photography has taken a frightening turn; manipulation and alteration are the order of the day and it is often difficult to confirm their authenticity. Many of the photographs below were questioned and studied in depth, but their impact on the world has remained powerful despite doubts and criticisms.

10) Fat Man Bomb, Japan, 1945





Taken from one of the B-29 Superfortresses used in the attack /

Image: [U.S. military](#)

This classic is undeniably one of the world's most famous photographs. It depicts the nuclear explosion over Nagasaki, known as the Fat Man mushroom cloud, on August 9th, 1945. The US bombing of Japan, in the final stages of World War II, obliterated three city miles and killed 70,000 people immediately and many more through radiation exposure in the years to come.

At the time, news of the atomic bombing was heartily greeted in America and highly publicized with this image (and the censorship of photographs showing death and human sacrifice). Years later, however, documentaries and photographs were unearthed and the world was made aware of the human tragedy. From then on this photograph has come to represent the true nature of war and the extreme potential of human invention.

9) Dr Fritz Klein stands in a mass grave in Belsen





Image: Oakes, H (Sgt) No 5 Army Film & Photographic Unit

In this famous photograph, Dr Fritz Klein, the camp physician, is standing in a mass grave at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp; his main duty was the selection of prisoners to be sent into the gas chambers. From 1942-1944 transport trains delivered Jews, Romani, people with disabilities, Soviet war prisoners, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and other political and religious opponents to "forced labor camps". Here, after a selection process, prisoners were made to work 12-15 hour shifts, wearing only striped fatigues and wooden shoes. The weaker, older and more defiant were sent directly to the gas chambers (where everyone eventually landed up), to be gassed alive, with their bodies disposed of either in mass graves or incinerated atop pyres.

It is disputable how much of this the world actually knew – photographs circulated and rumors traveled – but it took over three years before action was taken and in the mean time two thirds of Europe's Jewish population had been exterminated.

8) Civilian Resistance, 1943





*Photo from Jürgen Stroop Report to Heinrich Himmler from May 1943 /
Image: [Unknown Stroop Report photographer](#)*

The Warsaw ghetto in Poland was the largest in Nazi-occupied Europe and was established in 1940 to “contain” 400,000 Jews within guarded walls and barbed wire. Disease, starvation and attacks and murders by the guards decimated the inhabitants who, despite it all, established underground organizations to run schools, hospitals, orphanages and recreational facilities.

The photo above shows the aftermath of the world-famous Warsaw resistance effort of 1943, in which Nazi forces were held back with homemade and smuggled weapons. Afterward 13,000 were killed in the ghetto and the rest were captured and deported to concentration camps. The picture above was taken by a Nazi soldier and was published by the German press with the caption “Forcibly pulled out of dug-outs”. It was later used as evidence in the conviction of Nazi officers in the Nuremberg Trials of 1945-46.

7) Omaha Beach, D-Day 1944





Image: Robert Capa, 1944

Robert Capa, a Hungarian combat photojournalist, is famous for the pictures he took during WWII and thanks to whom the world was able to glimpse the reality of warfare. This photograph shows the June 6th 1944 invasion of Nazi-occupied Normandy by British, American, Canadian and Free French troops. The public embraced the image as a “true” war photo thanks to its fuzzy nature, attributed to the allegedly shaking hands of the photographer. In reality the lack of focus is reported as a darkroom error at the hands of a young trainee. Life magazine, for which Capa worked, chose to publish the image anyway as it depicted the efforts of Allied troops swimming for cover at Omaha beach whilst surrounded by machine gun and artillery fire. It is this kind of photography that fed national pride and to this day brings honor to the fallen soldiers of a most vicious war.

6) Falling Soldier, Spanish Civil War, 1936





Image: *Robert Capa, 1936*

“Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death” is the official name of this photograph, which depicts the lapsed second in which a militiaman is shot and, almost in slow motion, falls to the ground. The fallen man is said to be Federico Borrell Garcia, a Spanish Republican and anarchist soldier in the Spanish Civil War. Until the 1970s the image was reported as one of the most notorious and striking photos of the Spanish Civil War, both in Spain (where it was censored by Franco's government) and abroad. However, the validity of the photograph, taken by Robert Capa, has been questioned and some have argued that it was staged; indeed, an entire book, *Shadows of Photography*, has been dedicated to proving it to be a fake.

5) General Nguyen Ngoc Loan Executing a Viet Cong prisoner, Vietnam, 1968



Image: *Eddie Adams*

This Pulitzer Prize winning photograph by Eddie Adams is among the most famous war photographs of all time. The man with the gun is General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, the Republic of Vietnam's Chief of National Police, while the man about to die is Nguyen Van Lem, a Vietcong soldier. Story has it that the prisoner was found near a ditch

filled with the bodies of 34 police officers and their relatives, including those of the General...

The uproar created by this photograph opened an entire chapter in the world of photojournalism: “a picture is worth one thousand words.” The image soon became an anti-war icon, but Adams replied: “I killed the general with my camera... What the photograph didn't say was, 'What would you do if you were the general at that time and place on that hot day, and you caught the so-called bad guy after he blew away one, two or three American soldiers?’”

4) Saddam Hussein's Statue Toppled in Baghdad, 2003



Image: Unknown U.S. military or Department of Defense employee

This photograph, the most recent of this set, has had considerable symbolic influence. As an icon of his all-encompassing power, Saddam's cult of personality infused Iraqi culture; statues, portraits and posters were constructed in his honor all over the country and his face was displayed everywhere, from the facade of buildings, schools and airports to the surface of the national currency. When Saddam's regime was toppled in 2003 by the American-led invasion, “Operation Iraqi Freedom”, images of the demolition of the large statue in Baghdad were televised globally.

The destruction of all portrayals of the man at the hands of Iraqi citizens was meant to symbolize the end of an era of terror and the beginning of peace. However, despite Saddam's capture, trial and subsequent execution in the following years, peace has not yet arrived in Iraq.

3) Burning Alive in Vietnam, 1972



Photograph taken in Trang Bang, 1972 /

Image: [Huynh Cong Ut \(also known as Nick Ut\)](#)

This photograph has gone down as one of the most hair-raising, heart-wrenching images of modern history. The naked girl at the center, Phan Thi Kim Phúc, is a victim of a South Vietnamese napalm attack; she is running away from the bombsite whilst literally burning alive. In 1972 South Vietnamese planes, in agreement with the US military, dropped a napalm bomb on the village of Trang Bang, at the time occupied by North Vietnamese forces. The photo earned photographer Nick Ut a Pulitzer Prize despite the public and President Nixon's initial doubts as to its authenticity. Adamant he would prove a naive world wrong, the photographer made public the details of the small Barksy Hospital in Saigon where 9-year-old Kim Phúc was being treated for over 14 months. The girl survived and became the founder of the Kim Phúc Foundation in 1997, providing medical and psychological help to child victims of war.

2) The Most Reproduced Image of All Time, 1945





Taken on February 23, 1945 /

Image: [Joe Rosenthal](#)

The raising of the flag at Iwo Jima is perhaps the most famous war photograph ever. The flag was raised by five US marines and one navy corpsman atop Mount Suribachi in 1945. Few are aware that this was the second flag; the first was too small and couldn't be seen by the Marines on the island, and photographer Joe Rosenthal, who received a Pulitzer Prize for the image, only arrived in time for the second shot.

Iwo Jima was the first piece of Japanese national soil to be captured by the Americans – hence the area was heavily fortified and required four days of bloody battle before its mountaintop, Suribachi, was captured. The battle persisted for a whole month, in which three of the flag raisers were killed. In 1951 the picture was used by Felix de Weldon to sculpt the USMC War memorial just outside Washington, D.C.

1) The Legendary Kiss in Times Square, V-J Day, 1945





Image: Alfred Eisenstaedt, taken on V-J Day, 1945

This is a memorable war photograph? Indeed it is, for this too played a part in the grand scheme of things, on August 2nd 1945. Signs of affection and happiness were greatly encouraged by photographers during wartime; they provided a positive image amidst all those of calamity and destruction, bringing strength and hope to soldiers and marines. This particular photo, however, commemorates the spontaneous event that occurred in Times Square when victory over Japan was proclaimed by President Truman. Photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt wrote in his book: "I saw a sailor running along the street grabbing any and every girl in sight. Whether she was a grandmother, stout, thin, old, didn't make a difference."

Since then, the photograph has come to represent VJ Day and the end of WWII - and can be seen almost anywhere from postcards to Hollywood films.