
War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath is, as its name suggests, a collection of photographic images that pertain to all aspects of armed conflict, from recruitment and training through conflict and, finally, the cessation of hostilities and the often devastating aftermath. It is a companion piece to an exhibition of the same name that will be shown in Houston, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and New York City through February 2014.

It is organized in an exceptionally linear and easy-to-follow fashion, divided as it is into six primary sections (in addition to the introduction, index, photographer biographies, and other addenda), with each of the primary sections dedicated to a particular phase of conflict. Within each primary section, there are subsections dedicated to the minutiae of conflict, such as training, patrol and troop movement, executions, prisoners of war and interrogation, faith, and remembrance. Each subsection is preceded by a brief two or three page essay on the topic, drawing attention to various images contained on subsequent pages. Scattered throughout the book are an additional seven extended essays and interviews on the confluence of photography and conflict from various leading scholars. There are a total of nearly 500 images contained in the book, from the iconic - such as with the raising of the American flag at Iwo Jima - to the unheralded.

Despite being a book primarily dedicated to photography, it is also densely laden with information on aspects of both conflict itself and the nature of being a photographer in a conflict zone. Indeed, the first essay asks the pertinent question – “War Photographers: A Special Breed?” It is made decidedly clear that while the end result is to the benefit of the eventual reader, there was tremendous danger faced by many of the photographers whose images are so beautifully reproduced here. Befitting its weighty subject matter, War/Photography is just as substantial, weighing in at nearly nine and half pounds. Unfortunately, its binding is decidedly less weighty, as the back board split entirely from the spine the first time it was laid flat on a table, but this is a relatively minor quibble.

Although there are many works on both individual wartime photographers and images of war and conflict in general, most do not even approach the high production value and overall cohesion of War/Photography, which should now easily take its place as one of the leading texts in the field. Its appeal is rather broad, as it is a text that should appeal equally to military and art historians, as well as photographers and photography enthusiasts. It would be ideally suited for libraries whose collections are focused on photography, history, and conflict studies. It is that rare text that strives to be all things to all people and actually succeeds in doing so.

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