



T/4 Donald Wiedenmayer provided his copy of a February 1945 *Sunday Stars and Stripes Magazine* which described the role of the U.S. Army Signal Corps still and motion picture photographers in recording the Italian Campaign of World War II and contained a dramatic photo by Sgt. John Mulcahy of the 196th Signal Photo Company . T/4 Edmund Burke O'Connell is quoted in the in its final paragraphs describing the difficulties of filming in combat. The image and text of the article are reprinted with permission from *Stars and Stripes*.

Photo by APS:

Behind the Familiar Photo Credit Line is Untold Story of GIs Recording Your War

By Sgt. STAN SWINTON

Staff Writer

WITH THE 5TH ARMY - Photo editors thumbing through the daily grab bag of glossy prints one day last month might have gasped at a great photograph: the blossoming shrapnel of a German shell caught at the instant of fragmentation. It was the picture of the month, wire-photoed across America and reproduced in five-column enlargements by the nation's press.

The credit line was familiarly brief – “Signal Corps Photo.” But behind it was the untold story of the anonymous cameramen who have brought home to American civilians the violence of modern war with an effectiveness that the most vivid words of war correspondents can never equal. That picture of a bursting shell, for instance, how did it come to be taken?

It began in the dreary Italian village of Loiano a week earlier when Pvt. Leonard Ryan of Clifton Heights, Pa., jockeyed his muddy jeep off Highway 65 and pulled up behind a building.

His passenger, photographer John Mulcahy of Chicago, clambered out to assist in lowering the windshield before continuing forward. Seconds later the first shell burst. Inside the building, where both had run for cover, Sgt. Mulcahy fumbled his Speed Graphic into adjustment. A second shell smashed into a church a few feet away. As the third hit, Sgt. Mulcahy was at the window. “Get the hell away from there,” shouted Ryan. “I think I can get a shot of a shell burst.” The prewar Chicago Tribune photographer replied imperturbably and moved to the open doorway. The seventh shell exploded 20 yards away and Mulcahy's shutter clicked at the second of impact. Then, waiting only long enough to make sure that a slightly-wounded GI could

reach an aid station on his own, Mulcahy and Ryan climbed into their jeep and drove and walked up to the battle line to complete their original mission, terrain studies of enemy positions.

Such is the behind-the-scene story of just one of the 20,000 still photographs snapped in Italy by front-line Army Pictorial Service photographers last year. Add to that enough combat movies to make 700 full-length feature pictures plus an equal footage covering special productions or rear areas, and you can understand why military bigwigs believe the Italian campaign has been recorded on film with a thoroughness unsurpassed in military history.

Today the web of photographers covers the front and many rear areas. Skilled teams of still men, motion picture cameramen and expert drivers are attached to each division and corps of the 5th Army while others operate out of 15th Army Group, MTOUSA and the Peninsular Base Section. Special laboratories in Rome and Florence process their films swiftly.

The task of the Army Pictorial Service was five-fold. It was to convey information on combat and field operations to the War Department with war battle operations taking precedence. Photo information of immediate tactical and strategic value was to be secured for the theater commander. A complete photographic history of the war was necessary so that future students of tactics and strategy could observe what occurred in the primitive era of the 1940s. Staff agencies of both theater and War Department would call upon it for photographic data on the personnel, material conditions and new techniques. Lastly, APS was charged with meeting War Department requests for special productions intended for orientation, the record and public relations.

Army Pictorial Service itself was a paradox. It was the operational brains, but except for a handful of key administrators, its personnel belonged to Signal Photo Companies and similar units. Like most outfits, it suffered from confusion in the early days. Cameramen were sent to cover the North African invasion with inadequate two-inch lenses for still cameras and 16 rather than 35 mm movie cameras.

It was chiefly the photographic know-how of enlisted photographers and the energy of Col. Melvin E. Gillette, father of APS in this theater and former photo officer for AFHQ's Signal Section, which put APS into smooth operating order.

But it was the GI cameraman who did the work. Picture hungry, they moved along with the infantry in search of combat action. There was Pfc. Morris J. Schimmel of St. Louis, Mo., who was struck in the arm by shrapnel as he crouched beside a tank. He kept taking pictures until the movie camera spring ran down, then collapsed. T-Sgt. Cecil Max Campbell jumped with the paratroopers in Sicily and came down in an olive tree in time to see a second chute bearing his camera disappear over the horizon. Despite a sprained ankle, he joined the paratroops and

fought his way to the Allied lines – but didn't make a single photo. When Monte Cassino was to be bombed, APS photographers bullied Big Bertha – a giant camera with a 40-inch lens – to a point where “we were looking down the necks of the Germans.” Before daylight they camouflaged both camera and themselves. *Life Magazine* called their photo of MAAF's mass bombing next day “the outstanding picture of the war.”

Living close to danger, the cameramen have suffered casualties. Last year five were killed among them T-Sgt. Campbell. Another 21 were wounded. The cost was high. The results?

“Every phase of the Italian Campaign has been recorded in pictures,” reports Maj. Linden G. Rigby, 5th Army Photo Officer who went from the infantry to Hollywood after the last war. “The Italian veteran can look forward to seeing four movies running from 20 to 25 reels on his deeds. One covers Salerno to the Volturno, another the Volturno to Cassino, a third from Cassino to Rome and a fourth Rome to the Gothic Line.”

Since last April, the Army Pictorial Service has devoted much of its energy to a little publicized activity – taking panorama pictures of the front. With these minute photo studies before them, patrols observation posts and troops going into attack can operate with a precision unequalled in the past.

“Those terrain studies are the most important thing we're doing,” reports Lt. Frank L. Morang. A veteran of 25 years in the movie business, Morang was sailing around the Gulf of Mexico “minding my own damn business” when the war broke out. He photographed the North African campaign as a private, and later won a commission.

Discussing panorama shots of enemy front-line positions is considerably easier than getting them, since machine pistols don't distinguish between the cameramen and the infantryman. APS photographers must go up to the most forward observation posts or positions to get their shots. Often they make the trip forward one night and return under the cover of darkness the next.

Sometimes a mission is even riskier. That same Sgt. John Mulcahy who photographed the bursting shell recently was convoyed by a special patrol to a prospective observation post (OP) in No Man's Land. Throughout the daylight hours he remained there alone. That night, under cover of darkness, a second patrol retrieved him. Another terrain specialist is Sgt. Robert Tacey of Binghamton, N.Y., who has skimmed low over enemy positions in light observation planes more than 24 times.

The civilian background of APS photographers ranges from years of service with metropolitan newspapers and newsreels to a dilettante amateur interest. Almost all plan to

continue photography after the war. Photo agencies newsreels and movie studios keep a close watch on the men and photographic unions have promised to ease membership requirements.

The Army ranks on about the same par with photographers as it does with any GI but they admit only two persistent complaints.

One is the question asked each a dozen times daily: Are you with The Stars and Stripes? They've finally given up on that one and just answer. "Yes."

The second concerns pictures snapped under dangerous conditions which look as though they were taken from the rear.

For example, Sgt. **Burke O'Connell** of Nashville, Tenn., once was pinned down by machine guns after accompanying a patrol five miles, ahead of our advancing infantry. His companions decided that one man would break and run for it every five minutes. To quiet his jittery nerves, O'Connell photographed each frantic dash for safety.

A few days later a colonel called O'Connell in and blustered: "Why waste film on something that's no good? All your pictures show is a guy running – nobody can see the machine gun bullets."

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