

The Photo Blog

July 10 2015 11:02 AM **These Altered Images Show Photojournalism at Its Worst By [Jordan G. Teicher](#)**



Adnan Hajj was found to have used Photoshop to clone and darken the smoke in this 2006 photo of Beirut to exaggerate the bombing damage. This photo was distributed throughout the media before the manipulation was caught by a blogger. Reuters news agency, which worked with the freelance photographer, immediately fired him. Reuters then withdrew all 920 photographs by Hajj from its database after it was discovered that he had manipulated a second photo.

Adnan Hajj

Mistakes, misrepresentations, and downright deceptions in photojournalism are as old as the practice itself. And according to photojournalist [Michael Kamber](#), founder of the [Bronx Documentary Center](#) and curator of its exhibit “Altered Images: 150 Years of Posed and Manipulated Documentary Photography,” these problems are only getting worse.

“The newspaper industry is disintegrating before our eyes, thousands of professionals have been laid off, and freelancers who came up in the digital age are used to changing things and altering things. Then you have some professionals who feel that as standards are slipping they can fake and lie and cheat,” he said.



This iconic photograph from World War II shows a triumphant Red Army soldier waving a Soviet flag over the Reichstag building in Berlin, signifying communist conquest over Nazi Germany. Many discoveries regarding the construction and continued manipulation of this photo have been made since its original publication.

Yevgeny Khaldei



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Arthur Rothstein, a photographer for the Farm Security Administration, moved and photographed a steer skull at several locations in South Dakota during a severe drought in the region in 1936. Several frames of this exist, all showing different backgrounds. After one of the photos was distributed by the Associated Press, Republican opponents of President Roosevelt seized on the opportunity, and articles about the staging of this photo were published in conservative newspapers around the country.

Arhtur Rothstein (Library of Congress; The Crowley Company)



Eugene Smith's photo essay "Spanish Village," which depicts a small rural village in Spain under the rule of dictator Francisco Franco, was published in *Life* magazine in 1951. In this photograph, an intimate scene of the wake of a Deleitosa villager, Smith retouched the wife and daughter's eyes. Originally the two women had been looking toward the photographer, but in the darkroom he printed their eyes much darker

and then applied bleach with a fine-tipped brush to create new whites, thereby redirecting their gazes downward and to the side.

Eugene Smith

In decades past, manipulation was harder but still prevalent. Fewer photographers had the capacity to expertly airbrush or retouch—Eugene Smith was a notable exception—but there were other ways of misrepresenting or altering reality. As early as 1936, for example, Farm Security Administration photographer Arthur Rothstein moved a steer skull around South Dakota to illustrate drought there. And during World War II, Yevgeny Khaldei gave a homemade Soviet flag to soldiers in Berlin and asked them to pose with it. The photo was later altered to hide the fact that the soldiers had been looting. Clouds of smoke were also added.

Today, altering images is easy and fairly commonplace, and it's a problem not just among young freelancers but professionals at the top of their game. The most prominent instance came to light this spring when the World Press Photo contest took away a prize it had awarded to Giovanni Troilo after it emerged that he had staged and lit a photo of a couple having sex in a car. That event sparked a conversation about the increasingly blurry line between art and photojournalism, but Kasper said the distinctions should be clear. "I met young photographers at portfolio reviews and they're telling me, 'I'm re-enacting my dream states and my sexual fantasies with my friends and this is documentary work.' I'm like, 'No, it's not. That's you doing some personal artistic vision and in my opinion it has nothing to do with documentary work,'

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BRIAN WALSKI/Los Angeles Times

WARNING: A British soldier manning the Azubayr Bridge orders fleeing Basra residents to hit the dirt as Iraqi forces open fire.

In Basra, Panic as a Tactic of War

The British face hostile fire and surging refugees at a bridge checkpoint. Hussein's forces try sneaking into city amid chaos.

By MARK MAGNIER
Times Staff Writer

OUTSIDE BASRA, Iraq — Women clutching babies and men gripping overstuffed duffel bags had gathered Sunday at the Azubayr Bridge, hoping to flee the tumultuous city of Basra, when a signal went up from Iraqi scouts hidden among river-

front mud huts.

Within seconds, paramilitaries in pickups opened fire on the British forces manning the bridge checkpoint. From another direction, mortar shells rained down on the British, whose massive Challenger tanks returned fire.

Caught in the cross-fire, panicked refugees surged toward the British, who struggled to defend themselves, control the crowd and fire back all at the same time.

The skirmish — in which the Iraqis made use of human shields, mobile weapons and panic — underscored the problems facing British soldiers as they try to take Basra, Iraq's second-largest city. It

also made clear some of the pitfalls U.S. forces would confront in Baghdad.

"In a way, we can't really do an awful lot," said Maj. Peter MacMullen with the 1st Battalion of Irish Guards, sitting on a curb as the firefight raged at the bridge on the edge of town. "The Iraqis work in groups of two or three, driving white vehicles and dressed in civilian clothes. They have no position, they're moving and use the slums to our left and right, making it difficult to fire back."

At the same time, British military leaders say they must move forward.

"We've got to go in," said Maj. Duncan [See Basra, Page A7]

Allies, Iraqis Clash in Streets of Three Cities

British commandos report killing several officers in Basra and plan to enter downtown soon. Three Marines die in a helicopter crash.

By DAVID ZUCCHINO
AND GEOFFREY MOHAN
Times Staff Writers

WITH U.S. FORCES IN IRAQ — U.S. and British troops flushed out paramilitary fighters street by street in three cities of central and southern Iraq on Sunday as warplanes hammered the Republican Guard surrounding Baghdad and American soldiers inched to within sight of Karbala, a gateway to the capital.

An American military helicopter crashed in the south, killing three Marines and injuring another, the Pentagon said. A military spokesman said the UH-1 Iroquois helicopter, known as a Huey, went down for undetermined reasons just after sunset near a military base and was not under hostile fire.

Elsewhere on the 11th day of the war, allied forces foiled an apparent suicide-bombing attempt near Najaf, about 90 miles south of Baghdad, and mounted urban firefights against paramilitary forces in Najaf and Nasiriyah, as well as in Basra, Iraq's second-largest city, to defeat irregular forces who have ambushed and harassed them.

During an overnight raid into southern Basra, British commandos reportedly killed several Iraqi officers. One British Royal Marine was killed in the opera-

Sunday evening, the Arab satellite news station Al Jazeera said. There was no immediate confirmation of the report.

In the move toward Karbala, the 2nd Brigade of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division swept into the town of Hindiya, to the southeast, at dawn today and encountered Iraqi forces at a bridge over the Euphrates River. Armored troops drew sporadic fire from paramilitary and regular Iraqi forces.

[See War, Page A4]



TIM AUBREY/Reuters

DEFENDING PLAN: Army Gen. Tommy Franks denies that political pressure played a role in the timing of the invasion.

U.S. Brass Stands by Strategy

By ESTHER SCHRADER

” he said.

The photograph, taken in the earliest days of the Iraq invasion, is a composite of two images taken seconds apart. After the *Hartford Courant* published the image, a *Courant* employee noticed a duplication of civilians in the background. The *Los Angeles Times*, which first published the image on its cover, confronted the photographer, Brian Walski, who confessed to having digitally merged the two photographs to improve the composition. He was immediately fired.

Brian Walski/Los Angeles Times



Giovanni Troilo's photo was part of a winning photo essay in the 2015 World Press Photo awards. This image, of the photographer's cousin and a woman having sex in a car, lit by the photographer's remote flash inside the car, was set up. WPP judges eventually rescinded the award after numerous other complaints surfaced.

Giovanni Troilo

In the digital age, a pressure to “feed the Web” has also led to sloppiness in newsrooms. “I think the bottom line is there’s literally hundreds of millions of images ricocheting around the Internet everyday and editors are looking for new material, and they’re grabbing things that are not coming from trusted sources,” Kamber said. That problem showed up in April as riots broke out in Baltimore following the death of Freddie Gray. FOX13 Memphis posted a picture to Facebook of what was described as Baltimore in flames. The photo was actually taken in Venezuela a year earlier.

While the Internet has been the cause of many problems in photojournalism, Kamber said it also frequently provides the solution. Independent researchers and bloggers online can often catch manipulations or mistakes before editors do, using reverse image search on Google. Still, as long as economic pressures make newspapers depend on cheap, unreliable workers and ethical codes remain inconsistent between publications and contests, Kamber said problems will likely continue to arise. His primary source of hope for the industry lies with some of the younger photojournalists he meets.

“Since I came back from Iraq three years ago, there’s been a steady stream of young photographers coming to the Bronx Documentary Center. They’re coming with new work, with questions, and they’re constantly asking about what’s fair, what’s ethical, what’s right. If young people didn’t care they wouldn’t be beating down my door with these questions. It’s the new generation that’s going to change things because the old generation has mucked it up pretty bad.”

“Altered Images: 150 Years of Posed and Manipulated Documentary Photography” is on view at the [Bronx Documentary Center](#) until Aug. 2.

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