Photographer: Catherine Leroy
Born 1945

Reflections

What do you think the soldier is thinking in this picture?

What makes the setting of this picture so effective?

What difference do you think being a woman made to the pictures that Catherine Leroy got in Vietnam?

What is your view of her reaction to want to photograph and interview her captors in Vietnam?

Photograph: Corpsman in Anguish
Vietnam
1967

Contextual information

Known for her fearless approach to photography, Leroy began life in Paris, France, in 1945 before travelling out to Vietnam, armed only with her Leica camera. Her time in Vietnam was eventful, including being captured in North Vietnam, and surprising her captors when she photographed and interviewed them after she was released from detention.

She was the first woman to win the Robert Capa Gold Medal Award for conflict photography, in 1976.

Her approach to war photography is perhaps demonstrated by Marianne Fulton, writer of Eyes of Time: Photojournalism in America, who said the following: “Like Capa, she wanted to show war up close and personal. In one of her photographic sequences from Vietnam (1967), corpsman Vernon Wike applies first aid to a downed buddy, listens for a heartbeat, and then looks up from the body with an anguished and confused look having realized that the Marine is dead. The last photo shows the dead Marine alone – the landscape destroyed and the horizon blank. The series is a powerful reality check about the Vietnam War.”

The approach that Leroy took to war photography is inspirational, showing a real bravery and fearlessness. She really was one of those photographers whose only aim was to get ‘the picture’. As a result, she took some amazing shots. Sadly, she died from cancer in 2006, in hospital in Santa Monica, California.