

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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WAR PHOTOGRAPHER, VETERAN OF PACIFIC BATTLES, WOUNDED
ONLY IN CAMP MANEUVERS AT HOME. MUSEUM OF MODERN ART HOLDS
PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION OF EUGENE SMITH'S "PACIFIC REPORT"

Just returned from eight months in the battle areas of the Pacific, W. Eugene Smith, twenty-five-year-old war photographer for Popular Photography, Flying, Radio News, received no injuries although he photographed action against Rabaul, the Gilberts, the Marshalls and the Marianas. An exhibition of his pictures, Pacific Report, will open to the public Wednesday, May 10, at the Photography Center of the Museum of Modern Art, 9 West 54 Street. They will be on view through June 30.

Gene Smith gave up his seat to Raymond Clapper in the plane that took the famous war correspondent to his death, and from a companion plane made the only picture of that fatal accident--two puffs of smoke above the engulfing waves. Several times Navy planes on either side of the one in which Smith was flying were shot down. He went on fifteen missions against the Japs. He flew in our great attack on Truk. He photographed the attacks on the Makin Islands, Kwajalein, Eniwetok and Tinian. Through holes knocked in the plexiglas housing of a TBF, he made pictures of invasion barges, fleets, the strafing and sinking of Jap ships, and Jap islands left smoking and pitted with bomb craters.

Yet the only injuries Gene Smith has suffered in this war happened to him in the peaceful United States. In war maneuvers in Massachusetts he wanted to get a picture of a soldier just escaping a bomb blast. The Army authorities considered it too dangerous for any of the Army personnel, but after much persuasion permitted Smith and a co-worker to don Army uniforms and make the experiment themselves. To simulate bomb explosions Smith planted one dynamite charge eight feet from where he and his co-worker were to stand, and another charge twelve feet in the other direction. Smith held in his hand a wire attached to the shutter release and when the dynamite went off pulled the wire. The resultant picture won prizes and was published everywhere.

But the picture did not satisfy Smith. In fact, as soon as he had taken it he was sure it was not what he wanted so he set two more dynamite charges as before and this time decided to make the experiment

alone. Taking his stand a little in front of the line of dynamite charge, he held the wire in his hand, ready to plunge toward the camera. The explosion from the left, however, threw him to the right. In mid-air the other charge tossed him in the opposite direction. He did not knowingly pull the wire to release the shutter, but thinks the explosion did it. At any rate, the resultant picture satisfied him, though at the cost of a severe head injury which for a while left him dazed and then affected his speech. Since then he has had almost continuous headaches which are greatly aggravated when he flies.

Still on his quest for pictures he made a parachute jump in the Middle West and was so absorbed in getting his camera paraphernalia untangled that he became fouled in his landing gear and tore his side muscles when he hit the ground. Later, riding in a jeep in an Army show which travelled over the country, he was banged up and his sternum torn loose when the driver of the jeep turned his head to hear a joke being told on the back seat--and crashed the jeep ahead. Again, riding on a truck in a Florida storm, he was bounced off the fender and injured his knee.

So the safest place for Smith is apparently in the midst of battle. He spent eight months in the Pacific, crossing the Equator on various missions forty times. During his first two assignments on a cruiser and a small carrier the scope of his photography was limited to deck activities and the life of the men on board. For the last four months of his stay he was based on a carrier of the Essex class and, although he was not hurt, his battery of cameras (2 Ikoflexes, Rolleiflex, 4 x 5 Graflex, 2 Speed Graphics, Contax, Medalist, and a borrowed Fairchild K-20 Aerial) met one mishap after another. Now, within a few days, he will go to a hospital for general overhauling and patching up of his non-battle scars, then will return to the Pacific area with new equipment.

Twenty-seven of Smith's photographs are being shown in the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art Photography Center. Among them are shots of rough crosses marking the graves of United States Marines at Tarawa; smoke clearing from bomb craters just made on the Jap airstrip on Eniwetok; the late Lt. Commander Butch O'Hare being briefed for one of his last missions; the first wave of invasion barges setting out for Tarawa where more than half were destroyed by enemy fire; a Hellcat fighter with 130 holes in it crash-landing on the deck of a carrier; rescue of a fighter pilot shot down over Truk; and the solemn moment as the white-shrouded body of a gunner plunges seaward while the flag whose covering folds it has just left still retains the shape of the body of the boy who died defending it.