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## An incredible will of creativity

LIFE began in 1936 with four staff photographers; one of them, Margaret Bourke-White, is officially retiring this week. Carl Mydans, now stationed in Tokyo, joined the photographic staff that same year. He cabled his reaction to the news.

"My first view of Margaret Bourke-White was of two shapely legs, two petite feet shod in luxuriant alligator shoes and the rest of her hunched under a great black cloth which covered her head and part of her 4x5 Linhof. 'Put it on the table,' she said. And an arm appeared and pointed. She came out from under the cloth and reached for her pocketbook. Then she saw me and instantly laughing away her mistake exclaimed, 'I thought you were the sandwich man. Come quick and look. My caterpillar eggs are turning into caterpillars. Oh! I'm so glad you've come at this very moment. It's so exciting, isn't it?'"

"Later, after I left, still swept up by her excitement and enthusiasm, I realized that she did not know who I was. And still later, after we became friends, and these more than 30 years since, I have understood how significant that first meeting was: how profoundly it revealed the key to Margaret Bourke-White's greatness as a photographer and as a person. It did not matter that day who I was. What mattered was the opportunity for her to share with me—with anyone, with everyone—the excitement she sees and feels in the world around her.



BOURKE-WHITE

"Margaret Bourke-White's creative years opened whole new vistas to the world of photography. It was her eye which saw the excitement in industrial wheels and pipelines, in the sweep of farmlands at dusk, in the curve and flow of rivers. And she cried out when refugees limped from battle and sharecroppers stared in painful want. Her eye functioned like the focus of her lens; when she saw something she turned it up sharp in her mind and in her will, excluding everything else. She saw only that. 'If anybody gets in my way when I am making a picture,' she once told me, 'I become irrational. I'm never sure of what I am going to do, or sometimes even aware of what I do—only that I want that picture.' This incredible will of creativity has often made her the target of professionals who said she shot 'hundreds of sheets of film to get a good one.' But of course this isn't so. What has made her the target is that she is a woman shining in a man's world. And what has made Bourke-White what she is is simply that she is a great photographer: an artist, a true photo-journalist.

"Not since 1952, when the cruel attrition of Parkinson's disease finally forced Bourke-White to put up her cameras, have we had the thrill of seeing any photographs added to her great portfolios. Instead, she has turned herself to writing. Yet in her writings her goal is the same as it was when she was using her cameras: to share with others the excitement and enthusiasm she still feels and sees about her.

"Margaret Bourke-White has set a standard and established a tradition in the art of photography. Not long ago she said, 'We grew up on this magazine. It has been our life. In fact it's been much more than that. It has been a kind of family.' And so retirement for her is a mere formality. One can never really retire from a family."

*Ralph Graves*


RALPH GRAVES  
Managing Editor



# LIFE

## The Faces of The American Dead in Vietnam

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