

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
NEW YORK

11 WEST 53rd STREET
TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900
CABLES: MODERNART, NEW-YORK

SARAH NEWMAYER, PUBLICITY DIRECTOR

June 10, 1943

TO City Editors
News Photo Editors
Art Editors

Dear Sirs:

You are invited to come or send a representative to

Press Preview of

TUNISIAN TRIUMPH
War Photographs by Eliot Elisofon

Wednesday, June 16
2 to 6 P.M.

at the Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 Street.

Mr. Elisofon, LIFE war photographer, has just returned from North Africa where he photographed the American invasion from the landing on November 8 to the fall of Cape Bon, May 15. The thousands of photographs he took at the front were made not for LIFE exclusively but for the Still Photo Pool, organized at the request of the War Department and composed of ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS, INTERNATIONAL NEWS PHOTOS, ACME, and LIFE Magazine. Pictures made by any member of the Pool are released simultaneously to all members. Elisofon's war photographs have been seen extensively in almost every newspaper in the United States.

The exhibition will open to the public Thursday, June 17.
For further information please telephone me at Circle 5-8900.

Sincerely yours,

Sarah Newmeyer
Sarah Newmeyer

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TUNISIAN TRIUMPH WAR PICTURES BY ELISOFON

EXHIBITED AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

A photographer has come home from seven months of war in North Africa--and has had his first glimpse of the thousands of pictures he took. The photographer is Eliot Elisofon, who landed with the troops at Casablanca in November and was the last war correspondent off Cape Bon in May. He took a greater variety of pictures than any other war photographer in North Africa. His photographs, released to thousands of newspapers all over the country by A.P., Acme, and I.N.S., and published in Life Magazine, have given millions of Americans close-up views of the fighting in North Africa.

An exhibition of the best of these photographs (including some that have never been published) will open Thursday, June 17, at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, under the title Tunisian Triumph: War Photographs by Eliot Elisofon. The exhibition will remain on view approximately one month and will then be sent to other museums and art galleries throughout the country by the Museum's Department of Circulating Exhibitions.

Attached to both Navy and Army as a war photographer, Elisofon discovered through numerous narrow escapes that the first duty of a photographer at the front is to stay alive, the second to photograph. Armed to the teeth with cameras pre-set for instant shooting, he was catapulted off a Navy ship; flew in the glass nose of a bomber attacking Maknassy at a height of fifty feet; galloped around in a Peep (baby Jeep) in the midst of a tank battle; lost his supplies and clothes at Feriana, where he was nearly cut off by the German counter-attack; was trapped in a Stuka bracket of bombs; caught in a heavy artillery barrage--and yet came nearest losing his life at the close of his seven months' adventure when he boarded a peaceful transport plane which a moment later blew a tire in taking off.

Swerving out of control and off the runway the plane headed at ninety miles an hour for a group of parked planes and crashed into one. With fire licking up around the sides of the plane, Elisofon, one camera strapped around his neck, reached out to get his other two, plus the pants he had taken off because of the heat. But the pilot ordered him to "get the ... out of here before she blows." He escaped

with the rest in the plane just a moment before it exploded in a column of fire and smoke. Elisofon turned and shot picture after picture until he collapsed. One of the magnificent pictures in the exhibition is a photograph of this flaming pyre in which he so nearly lost his life.

On his trip across last Fall, Elisofon obtained an aerial view of the largest convoy in history: the Fleet escorting our troop ships to North Africa for the surprise attack. Among the other stories he covered were the landing of the troops, the bombing of Maknassy at a height of fifty feet, an armored force battle at Sened, infantry holding at Ousseltia, artillery barrage and attack at El Guettar, bombing of Axis shipping off Bizerte, ruins of the Tunis airport, the tank graveyard near Mateur, Hill 609, capture of German prisoners at Cape Bon, flying nurses, 4th Indian Division, Sultan of Morocco, visit of General Clark to Cahid El Ayadi of Rehmneh, and Corps Franc (the Foreign Legion of this war).

Elisofon has come out of his seven months of war with profound admiration for the men in our armed forces who go not once on some dangerous mission, but again and again, as do the crews of our B-25s and A-20s. He says of them:

"They go on bombing missions every day as a matter of routine. I've been twice and was terrified both times. When I was in the glass nose of that A-20 flying over Maknassy at the height of fifty feet I was almost petrified. I kept adjusting my camera and instruments to take my mind off what was happening. I was curious about the rear-gunner who kept warming up his guns--also of the gunners on the right doing the same. But all I actually saw of Maknassy was a blur as the ground whizzed by. I kept snapping pictures and never even saw the scenes that the camera got until I returned a few days ago to New York. Then I saw what Maknassy really looked like when I flew over it because the camera caught a clear, sharp picture of it when we let loose with our bombs.

"As a matter of fact, I never did know what was happening until we all got safely back to our base after that bombing mission. I then asked the rear gunners why they had been warming up their guns. They roared with laughter and said they had been doing no warming up but were firing at the M.E.-109s which were letting loose with their cannons at us. Lucky for me I didn't know 20 mm. cannonballs were whizzing at the plane while I was shooting with my camera."

Eliot Elisofon was born in a tenement half a block from the Bowery, in 1911. From childhood he showed an aptitude at art, and in high school was advised by his teachers to enroll in the major art course. Instead, he was forced to take the more practical way of regular schooling and, upon graduation, passed a Civil Service examination to become a clerk in the State Workmen's Compensation Bureau. He earned his living five years in this way and at the same time attended evening classes at Fordham University five nights a week, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree at the end of four years. In what remained of his spare time he continued his interest in painting and added photography to it. In 1935 he left the State Compensation Bureau to become a commercial photographer. He has worked both as a free-lance photographer and has had many assignments from the large picture magazines. For the past few years he has been a staff photographer for Life Magazine.

From childhood Elisofon frequented art museums. He was first taken there by his mother; as soon as he was capable of negotiating the trips by himself, he went alone. In addition to being one of the country's leading news and war photographers, he is especially noted as a photographer of the social scene. The outstanding quality of his photographs is that he seems to have pressed the button always at the high moment of character revelation and inevitable composition---an instinct no doubt developed both by the drama in the daily life of a small boy of the Lower East Side and the devoted hours the same small boy spent assimilating old and modern masterpieces of art. These left in his mind thousands of images of composition and character which Elisofon himself feels unconsciously influence his camera work.

In his war work Elisofon for actual battle scenes carried two Contaxes fitted with 35 mm. F.2.8 Biogon; 50 mm. F.1.5 Sonnar; and 135 mm. F.4 Sonnar. For quieter scenes back of the lines he carried a 2 1/4 x 2 1/4 Rolleiflex.

Mr. Elisofon has analyzed the job of war photographer as follows:

"The first problem of the photographer at the front is to stay alive. The second is to photograph. And that divides itself into four questions:

1. What are the physical possibilities of photographing a war? Where are you going to be when? You can't control this show. You just try to figure out where the Jerries are going to hit and sit there. Of course your luck varies. I sat a whole day once in Kasserine Pass during that great engagement overlooking an artillery position without any luck. The worst is to get caught in a bombardment. Then you spend your time in a foxhole with a fine opportunity to get closeups of the crumbling earth next to your face and nothing else.
2. What mechanics are you going to depend on? Your equipment has got to be so flexible that you can photograph as quickly and easily as seeing. The man who hesitates or fusses or has to reload loses the picture. That's why I used several Contaxes and Rolleiflexes and kept them all pre-set and loaded.
3. What are the esthetics of war photography? Are you going to ruin the realism with fancy filters and camera angles? Preciousness and pseudo art are out of place here. Of course you should have an innate sense of quality and composition. Art, if it is to come into war photography, will come indirectly and unconsciously.

And what are you going to photograph? Are you going to specialize in, say, the war of machines? I feel war should be shown in relation to people and try to cover as many aspects of it as possible.

4. What are the ethics of war photography? Are you going to use fake bandages and dynamite (which is a lot easier and safer than waiting for real enemy shells), or are you going to be utterly honest? I feel that as a free individual representing a publication I have no right to deceive the people back home; they're entitled to look at the thing as it actually is and that's what I photograph for them."