Title?

“I’ve seen cities and homes in ashes. I’ve seen thousands of men lying on the ground, their dead faces looking up at the skies. I tell you, War is Hell!”-William Tecumseh Sherman

Excellent use of this quote!

During the Vietnam War, there have been thousands of photos taken that not only show the atrocity that occurred, but also the mental state of the American soldiers. Horst Faas explored this idea during his assignment to Vietnam; where he took this now iconic photograph titled War is Hell; an image published in the Star and Stripes Newspaper in 1965. However, this brings to question: Out of all the photographs that have been taken during the war, why does this picture still show up today? Excellent introduction

One could state—word choice? Argue? that this photograph is similar to that of the famous work of art: the Mona Lisa (in MLA commas and periods go inside quotation marks) This is because the two share one thing in common: the enigmatic smile. Bearing this in mind, one is able to realize that the secret to the popularity of Horst Faas’ image lies within the soldier’s face. Good

However it isn’t as simple as that; since Faas used multiple strategies in order to completely utilize this man’s stare. Firstly, Faas was able to crop the image in such a way that the viewer is forced to look at the soldier’s face. To further clarify, Faas stops the audience from looking too far up by cutting out the top of the man’s

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2 http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/youngphotographer/article3428776.ece
helmet, as if he were saying: No no, you’re not supposed to look up there! Another instance of cropping is seen on the right side of the man’s face, where the viewer gains a sense of feeling trapped; this tension makes the viewer look away from that small gap and onto the man’s face. Lastly, though used slightly differently, Horst Faas uses cropping once again to give information to the viewers. On the left side of the man’s face, the viewer sees that there’s a bit more room to wander around. This is done so that the audience could find the word “Army” on the soldier’s shirt; allowing the viewer to remove any doubt that he is a part of the military. However, Faas then used a different strategy to keep the viewer engaged with the man’s face. Next to the word “Army” there are vectors of attention; more specifically: the shirt’s collar guides the viewer back up to the soldier’s face. This isn’t the only instance where vectors of attention are used; two more places where they’re located are: 1. The creases on the man’s helmet point back towards the soldier and 2. The line created from the ridges of his helmet is used to force the viewer to keep their attention around that general vicinity. Having said that, what is the reason for Faas wanting the audience to concentrate so much at looking the soldier’s eyes? Good analysis

When looking at this image, one of the first things the viewer would point out is not only the eyes, but also the phrase on the man’s helmet: “War is Hell”. Almost as it were instinct, it causes the viewer to feel uncomfortable when looking at the image; because the innocent smile on the man’s face does not correlate with the dark, ominous phrase on his helmet—excellent. Horst Faas did this intentionally because throughout his career as a frontline photographer for the Associated Press, he had a specific goal in mind. Upon accepting an award for his photography, the Pulitzer Prize, he said the intention of his work is to “record the suffering, the emotions and the sacrifices of both Americans and Vietnamese in ... this little bloodstained country so far away” Good quote By revealing this innocent-looking man showcasing such a harsh phrase, it forces the viewer to feel bitter about the war; causing the audience to wonder what horrors has this man witnessed? Excellent

2 http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/youngphotographer/article3428776.ece
Another reason Americans were attracted to this image was because of their confusion of the Vietnam War. It was revealed that politicians used the Vietnam War for their own political gain, an example being the then presidential candidate Richard Nixon. Apparently, Nixon stalled the Vietnam War because his campaign would've been unsuccessful without it: his supporters being people who opposed the war—good use of context here. According to an article—name the article or the author here—this quote is long so must be reformatted to a block quote like this:

> The FBI had ‘bugged’ the telephones of the South Vietnamese ambassador and of Anna Chennault, one of Nixon’s aides…Chennault was dispatched to the South Vietnamese embassy with a clear message: the South Vietnamese government should withdraw from the talks, refuse to deal with Johnson, and if Nixon was elected, they would get a much better deal.3

Due to politicians like Nixon giving the public inaccurate information, the audience would be confused when seeing images like War is Hell. To further elaborate, if the war was what the government made it out to be then why is there an image of an innocent man with a menacing phrase on his helmet? For that reason, the audience would feel betrayed by the government when looking upon this man’s gaze; realizing that there are soldiers in Vietnam that are suffering. Excellent point—nice use of context here to unravel the significance of the phrase.

However, why would reproductions of this photograph keep reappearing today? There are many assumptions, but the death of Horst Faas could play a major part in the rebirth of this photograph; it’s been seen countless times where the death of an individual causes their works to be noticed. Therefore, his death in 2012 sparked people’s interest in his photography; retrospective exhibitions revisit what he did in his lifetime. Yet this doesn’t answer why did War is Hell obtained more attention than Faas’ other photographs. There isn’t a definitive answer, but a possible cause could be a combination of this soldier’s face and the caption from the Associated Press. This caption reads, “An unidentified U.S. Army personnel wears a hand lettered "War Is Hell" slogan on his helmet, June 18, 1965, during the Vietnam War. He was

with the 173rd Airborne Brigade Battalion on defense duty at Phouc Vinh airstrip in South Vietnam (AP Photo/Horst Faas). One cannot help but notice the words “unidentified U.S. Army personnel”. This influences the modern audience to think that this man could be anyone in the military. Upon realizing this, people involuntary think of the countless soldiers who’ve witnessed the horrors of war; like the man in the photo. Do you think Faas was trying to protect the soldier by keeping him anonymous?

With his photography, Horst Faas was able to showcase the suffering of those in Vietnam. After all, the power of this man’s gaze has been shown to be able to warp people’s outlook on war, no matter the time period; though its impact wouldn’t have been as great if it weren’t for Horst Faas’ use of vectors of attention and cropping and Associated Press’ caption. Therefore it’s not a surprise for his picture War is Hell to be regarded as iconic. The popularity of this image is so extraordinary that it solved a question people longed for an answer: who in fact was this man? After years without an answer, his family finally stepped forward to reveal the identity of the man to be Larry Wayne Chaffin! And there is another story altogether.

Excellent analysis Steven. Your paper is well organized, well written and interesting to read. Your compositional analysis reveals astute observations about the image, and your contextual analysis works well to support these findings. You also do a good job introducing relevant quotes to strengthen your ideas. On a technical level, Your MLA is holding up—some tweaking here and there, you have used footnotes effectively, and your document layout looks professional.

For revision:

Please do delve into the story of Larry Chaffin—It provides good context for exploring why perhaps Faas chose not to name his subject. It also points to the rhetorical function of “mystery” surrounding an image. I think this is an important aspect that addresses our question—why is this image still resurfaces today. GRADE: A-
Works Cited


By the Photographers Who Died in Vietnam and Indochina: He captured the War Is Hell image while touring South Vietnam in 1965. The picture was always left uncaptioned and the face unidentified until it was revealed that the man was Larry Wayne Chaffin. “War Is Hell.” The Famous Pictures Collection, Oct. 2015, http://www.famouspictures.org/war-is-hell/.


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