

War and peace

MAX NASH'S PICTURES TELL THE STORY OF NEWS AND SPORT IN THE UK ON A DAILY BASIS. NICK BLACKMORE DISCOVERS THAT THIS PHOTOGRAPHER'S PERSONAL STORY IS EQUALLY RIVETING

"HELLO, IT'S THE famous Max Nash here." Some people like to offer a wry greeting when answering the phone, even to strangers. Max Nash's salutation is indicative of his humour and its self-deprecating irony sums up his career: you may not have heard of Max Nash but chances are you've seen one of his pictures.

Max has been taking striking photographs for four decades, but you could have caught one of his images in the past four days on the front page, back page or homepage of a newspaper. You may well have seen one of his motorsport images; Max regularly covers motor racing, as he did when he first became a professional for *The New York Times* back in 1963. However, if you thought the intervening years were spent schmoozing by the track and dodging champagne corks, you'd be wrong.

The London-born photographer's career can be divided into distinct periods of turbulence and tranquillity. There are the years (1967-1991) mostly spent covering wars (nine, by his reckoning) and terrorism abroad, and the years (1991 to present) spent in the UK covering headline news, sport and the red carpet. As his CV suggests, Max has spent the majority of his life as a citizen of the world. "When I was eight I could speak French, Italian, German and English" he says, by way of confirmation, "and I couldn't read or write in any of them!"

Max lived and studied in France from the age of four, boarding in Switzerland and the UK before attending HMS Conway, a naval college on the Island of Anglesey. His eyes lead him to a career in photography, but not for the usual reason – he needed glasses and so couldn't join the navy as an officer. Instead he specialised in photography and landed his first job with *The New York Times* in Paris covering motor racing. After three years, the glamour began to pall and he joined the Associated Press (AP) in Brussels. The first assignment outside of Europe marks the point at which his years of living dangerously began.

Dispatched to cover the activities of Congolese mercenaries led by the infamous Jean 'Black Jack' Schramme, he ran into trouble when



Northern Ireland during the bad years, 1996



Vietnam, 1969



The last of two US Air Force B-52 bombers takes off for bombing missions in Iraq, England, 2003



Trouble in Israel



Stephen Harmison makes an appeal against Bangladesh's Khaled Mashud at The Oval, London, 2005

Sreesanth makes a catch during India's nets session at The Oval, London, 2007



Lewis Hamilton at the 2007 British Grand Prix in his McLaren Mercedes



he visited the capital Kinshasa to photograph a national holiday. His photographs accompanied an article that criticised the militaristic tone of the events: something the government took umbrage with. Max was swiftly thrown out of the Congo.

Nonetheless, the AP was impressed with the calibre of his work, and in 1968 sent him to Vietnam to cover the war under the auspices of double Pulitzer-prize-winning photography legend Horst Faas. Being a member of the press in the region meant leading a risky, storied existence, and Max's assignments into civil-war-ravaged Cambodia were arguably even more treacherous. On more than one occasion, his fluent command of the French language saved his life, and his knowledge of Milton's poetry helped him win the pardon of an eccentric colonel when Max and a colleague found themselves surrounded

by 250 surly Kalashnikov-toting soldiers.

Most of Max's subjects were not so lucky – the events Max describes photographing during this period are so horrific your mind actively recoils from imagining them. Indeed, he had to develop mechanisms for dealing with his experience: "I learned not to see what I photographed. It's a play of shadows and images that you don't actually assimilate in your mind." In his view, this was necessary to maintaining his sanity in unreal circumstances, a process that continued into the developing lab. It is only at a distance of decades that he's been able to go back and truly see what he photographed.

The other skill he acquired during this time was a habit of making his professional billet his home. He was assigned to Vietnam for nine months and stayed for five years. When the AP subsequently sent him to Israel for a

three-year contract, he stayed for 19 years. Machismo played a role in keeping him in the former location, marriage the latter.

His location in Israel allowed him to cover two decades of upheaval in the Middle East. From the Yom Kippur War to the First Gulf War, he got close to the action, though sometimes the action got too close to him – while visiting an Israeli kibbutz in the Golan Heights he found himself being strafed by a MiG aircraft. He finally returned to the UK to live there permanently in 1991.

After reaching the age of 63, Max was forced to retire, but he was unable to relinquish his passion, so he continues to do jobs for the AP, the Press Association and Agence France-Presse. He shoots current affairs, sport and entertainment and takes a far less cynical view than you might imagine a war-weary veteran would. I suggest that his

current subject matter is often frivolous in comparison to his war-zone photography. "But it's not frivolous!" he protests sincerely. "People love looking at pictures of celebrities arriving on the red carpet. 'Bang-bang' is all very nice but you can't do it all your life." His red-carpet work is certainly striking. Many such shots create a palpable physical and psychological distance from the subject, but this is not so with Max's work: "Many of us forget that the most important picture is that star and their fans together," he points out. "People are enthralled by being able to get so close to their heroes."

As well as working exclusively in the UK, Max also works exclusively with Olympus equipment. His love affair with Olympus cameras began with the OM-3, which he used extensively from Vietnam onwards, becoming one of the few AP photographers who didn't

use AP gear. Today he takes his trusty E-3 with him on every assignment: "The best thing is the speed of focus, especially in bad light. I have no other camera whatsoever."

For amateur photographers hoping to make it in any strata of the industry, he offers one golden rule: "Before you even leave the house, you have to ask 'why am I doing this and what do I want to show?' You then know what lens to take and you have a vague idea of what shot you want to take. You cannot go to a film premiere, a sports event, the scene of a terrorist attack, a war zone, or a political meeting if you don't know why you're there."

Max's golden rule seems to be that he keeps allegiances to a minimum – partly because of his international upbringing and partly because he's had intimate experiences of both sides of several long wars. "I'm 'anti' absolutely everything and every side of every

war I've covered," he explains. "I don't support any football team. If you're 'pro' or 'anti', I think you're compromised."

It's a controversial view, but one that's helped him survive (even in the face of a recent quadruple heart bypass) all the while taking consistently stunning photographs in vastly contrasting circumstances. It's what makes him the famous Max Nash.

Left-hand page: Martin Adams celebrates during the World Professional Darts Championships, Lakeside, 2008

Clockwise from top left: Natalie Portman at the Royal Premiere of *The Other Boleyn Girl*, in Leicester Square, 2008; David Moore and his Giant Human Batsuit at the 2005 International Bognor Birdman competition, Bognor Regis, 2005; Keith Richards at the London premiere of *Shine A Light*, 2008; Italy's Luca Morelli and Australia's Joshua Brookes at the Superbikes World Championship, Silverstone, 2007