

World Press Photo's Investigation into Authorship Attribution: Conclusion by World Press Photo and Full Investigative Report

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Conclusion of World Press Photo's Investigation into Authorship Attribution

In its 70-year history, one of World Press Photo's most meaningful roles has been to create space for difficult but necessary conversations, grounded in honesty, integrity, and transparency. When an organization is responsible for evaluating tens of thousands of photographs from around the world each year, rigorous, fair, and transparent judging and evaluation processes are not only essential, they are foundational to our mission.

By selecting and showcasing these powerful winning images, we increase their visibility, and with that visibility comes the potential for real impact. These photographs don't just foster space for conversation; they often start conversations that matter. They provoke thought, challenge assumptions, and invite dialogue across borders and perspectives. Through the images we award, change can happen, and the conversations they spark have the power to influence public understanding, shift narratives, and shape history. This is the power of visual journalism, and this is what World Press Photo strives to achieve each year.

Our procedures are designed precisely with this in mind. They include protocols for re-evaluating awarded work when new evidence or significant questions arise. Crucially, we conduct these assessments in consultation with experts, with the intention of understanding, and taking action if required.

The Terror of War won both World Press Photo of the Year and a Pulitzer Prize and is widely seen as instrumental in sparking significant anti-war protests that led to the end of the war in Vietnam. It is important to note that the authenticity of the photograph is not in question, nor that its impact and importance warranted the awards it received, only that its authorship cannot be definitively established.

World Press Photo Investigative Analysis of the Authorship of *The Terror of War* Photograph

This report provides an analysis of the authorship attribution of the iconic 1972 photograph known as *The Terror of War*, long credited to Vietnamese staff photographer for the Associated Press (AP), Huỳnh Công “Nick” Út. Research for the report began in January 2025, in response to the information brought to our attention by the release of *The Stringer*, and continued until May 2025, incorporating the Associated Press’ report published that same month. The analysis prioritizes visual and spatial evidence rather than eyewitness testimonies, due to time-based unreliability, in order to reconstruct the events surrounding the image and assess competing claims of authorship.

The analysis draws on the following sources:

- The material presented in the documentary *The Stringer*,
- A visual-spatial reconstruction by INDEX, a Paris-based research group,
- AP’s internal investigation and contact sheets,
- Assessment of the cameras reportedly used,
- Feedback gathered over five months from AP, INDEX, the filmmakers of *The Stringer*, external experts in photography and archival research, and additional archival sources.

Findings

The cumulative evidence strongly suggests that it is highly unlikely that Nick Út is the author of *The Terror of War* photograph due to the following key points:

1. Position of Nick Út

The INDEX/*The Stringer* reconstruction shows that Út is not seen on film footage until after the photograph was taken, appearing farther back on the road. At the same time, AP says 'a distant blurry figure' appearing from down the road 'appears to show Nick Út'. While there is some disagreement about the precise distance—INDEX estimates approximately 60 meters, while AP suggests a range of 28.8 to 48 meters—both parties acknowledge that there is a brief and undefined time window between the taking of the photograph and Út's documented appearance in the film.

According to the INDEX/*The Stringer* reconstruction, it is highly improbable that Út could have taken the photograph, run back 60 meters with his equipment, and then returned to the scene appearing calm and composed, all within that narrow timeframe. AP argues that a shorter distance could theoretically be covered in at least nine to 13 seconds, and possibly longer, but concedes that the absence of continuous film footage makes the exact sequence of events unprovable. Based on this review of the available visual evidence—including Út’s calm demeanor in the footage—the possibility that he could have completed such a movement in time is indeed unlikely.

2. Camera type used

For over half a century, Út has said *The Terror of War* photo was taken with the Leica M2. Út publicly and widely described in many interviews he used two Leicas and additionally two Nikons on that day. Nguyễn Thành Nghệ, a Vietnamese freelance photographer, in contrast, says he used a Pentax.

AP revealed that they had managed to locate and borrow the Leica M2 purported to have been used by Út that day, and shot three rolls of film through it. AP concluded that this specific Leica M2 “likely” was not used to have taken the famous photograph. Further testing with additional period cameras, including Nikons and Pentax SLRs, led AP to determine that the frame was likely made by a Pentax, not a Leica.

3. Other potential photographers

Given the conclusion that Nick Út is unlikely to be the photographer, this report also examines alternative candidates.

1. Nguyễn Thành Nghệ

As suggested by *The Stringer*/INDEX, Nghệ emerges as a plausible author. He is visually documented to be closer to the location where the photo was taken. Furthermore, AP’s own technical findings regarding the use of a Pentax camera for the photograph *The Terror of War* matches Nghệ’s equipment. In contrast, Út has consistently stated in interviews that he was using two Leicas and two Nikons that day, not a Pentax.

2. Huỳnh Công Phúc

A third candidate also warrants consideration. A brief segment of film footage, not used in *The Stringer*, shows photographer Huỳnh Công Phúc, who has been misidentified as Út in the past, was positioned closer in both time and physical location to the estimated vantage point of the photograph than any other individual documented, including Nghệ. This represents the strongest visual evidence to date of someone potentially occupying the exact location from which the photograph was taken.

Conclusion

Based on the available evidence, this report concludes that:

- It is highly unlikely that Nick Út is the author of *The Terror of War*;
- The most plausible candidates, based on visual and technical analysis, are Nguyễn Thành Nghệ and Huỳnh Công Phúc;
- However, in the absence of definitive evidence, authorship cannot be established with absolute certainty.

It is important to note that all three investigations - by World Press Photo, the Associated Press, and the filmmakers behind *The Stringer* - acknowledge either a significant doubt regarding the authorship of *The Terror of War* photograph or that significant questions remain unanswered. Each organization has acted on these findings in its own way.

The filmmakers take a clear position that Nguyễn Thành Nghệ is the true author. The Associated Press maintains that, in the absence of definitive proof that Nick Út did not take the photograph, the existing attribution should remain unchanged.

At World Press Photo, we have taken a different approach. Given the high unlikelihood of Nick Út being the photographer of *The Terror of War*, and until new proof emerges, it is consistent with our values and standards to suspend the authorship attribution of this image. This decision reflects our ongoing commitment to accuracy, transparency, and the highest ethical standards. Our global audience can continue to trust that we make every effort to ensure that each World Press Photo award is given to work that has been rigorously verified and that reflects the highest standards of journalistic accuracy.

The process we followed for this investigation

In January 2025, the Executive Director of World Press Photo initiated an investigation after serious questions regarding the authorship of *The Terror of War* were brought to our attention through the documentary *The Stringer*. To ensure an independent and thorough examination, World Press Photo commissioned a report. This report is informed by an investigative analysis carried out by World Press Photo, with expert contributions from independent analyst Christiaan Triebert.

Upon completion of the investigation, and in line with our established protocols, a post-award review panel was convened to evaluate the findings. After careful analysis, the panel concluded that the level of uncertainty surrounding the photograph's authorship was too significant to uphold the existing attribution. As a result, the decision was made to suspend the authorship attribution of the image.

Following this decision, World Press Photo published an executive summary to inform our community in May 2025. We are now releasing the full report to ensure full transparency.

The post-award review panel was composed of: Joumana El Zein Khoury, Executive Director of World Press Photo; Janne Nijman, Chair of the Supervisory Board; Mark Sealy, Member of the World Press Photo International Advisory Committee; and Bas Visée, External Legal Counsel to World Press Photo. This was a closed process, with decision making strictly limited to the aforementioned individuals.

What follows is the full investigative report, commissioned by World Press Photo, providing a comprehensive account of the findings that informed our decision.

Investigative report

Independent assessment of the authorship of the 1972 photograph known as ‘The Terror of War.’



Introduction

This second opinion offers an independent assessment of the authorship — not the authenticity — of the iconic 1972 photograph known as *The Terror of War*, taken on 8 June 1972, near Trảng Bàng, Vietnam.

For more than half a century, the photograph known as *The Terror of War* has been an icon of conflict photography. Taken on 8 June 1972, near Trảng Bàng, Vietnam, the image of nine-year-old Kim Phúc fleeing a napalm attack has profoundly shaped global perception of the war, earning its credited photographer, Huỳnh Công "Nick" Út of the Associated Press (AP), both the World Press Photo of the Year award and a Pulitzer Prize.

Recent claims presented in the documentary *The Stringer*, and supported by a visual analysis from the Paris-based research group INDEX, have challenged this long-held attribution, putting forward Vietnamese freelance photographer Nguyễn Thành Nghệ as the likely author. This has prompted a public rebuttal from the AP, which stands by its attribution to Út while acknowledging its own investigation has raised “uncertainties, disparities and lingering questions.”

This second opinion provides an independent assessment of these competing claims, conducted between January and May 2025. The analysis is based on a review of materials provided directly by the primary parties. The filmmakers of *The Stringer* supplied the documentary, their separate video analysis of INDEX, collected visuals, and research, clarifying details through ongoing calls and emails. AP contributed Út’s contact sheets, their own video timeline, and engaged in several meetings and email exchanges. During the investigation, these materials were supplemented with additional research.

It must be underlined that this second opinion prioritized a detailed analysis of visual evidence over retrospective witness statements. While some witness accounts are addressed, particularly where they conflict with the visual record, this report did not set out to conduct new interviews. The objective was to reconstruct a visual, verifiable, geo-based timeline of the day's events to independently analyze the core points of contention. The following sections will outline the key disagreements, provide background on the event, and present the full timeline before offering a final assessment of the INDEX analysis, including AP’s response to it, and the authorship claim.

Key Points of Contention

This section outlines the main areas of disagreement between the claims made in *The Stringer*, supported by analysis from INDEX, and the position taken by AP in their May 2025 updated report. These points center on questions of authorship, camera analysis, spatial reconstruction, and whether the authorship issue is binary or open-ended.

Did Út Take the Photo?

- ***The Stringer*: No / “It is highly unlikely”**
Nghệ is identified as the photographer in the documentary's central claim. INDEX supports this conclusion through visual-spatial analysis, though it frames the finding in probabilistic terms, stating that it is “highly unlikely” that Nick Út took the famous photo.
- **The AP: “Út could have taken this picture”¹**
While acknowledging “uncertainties, disparities and lingering questions” raised by its own investigation², AP maintains credit with Út. By internal policy, attribution changes only with definitive proof that the credited person did not take the image.³

Út's Position and Movement Feasibility

- ***The Stringer*: 60 meters**
INDEX places Út about 60 meters behind the scene in ITN footage. They imply this distance makes it implausible that he took the photo and then appeared calmly further back moments later.
- **The AP: 32.8-56 meters⁴**
AP disputes the accuracy of the 60m figure, offering a shorter range with a 20% error margin. They argue the movement is feasible, especially given timeline gaps and Út's account of repositioning.

¹ [AP updated report](#), p. 3.

² [AP updated report](#), p. 30.

³ [AP updated report](#), p. 23 and 82.

⁴ AP rightly points out that the 60 meters between the distant figure and the ITN camera doesn't measure the extra distance it would have taken towards where the photo was taken.

The INDEX/*The Stringer* reconstruction shows that Út is not seen on film footage until after the photograph was taken, appearing farther back on the road. At the same time, AP says 'a distant blurry figure' appearing from down the road 'appears to show Nick Út'. Both sides state that Út was, or could have been, farther back from the scene when he first appears on film after the photo was taken. They differ on whether he could have covered that distance in time (AP suggests it is at least 9 to 13 seconds, possibly longer). INDEX's reconstruction suggests it was highly unlikely he could have taken the photo, run 60 meters back on the street, and returned calmly while carrying his gear, all within a brief window. AP argues the distance was actually shorter, and the footage gap makes the exact timing unknowable. This analysis finds the movement unlikely whether the distance is 30 meters or 60 meters — Út appears composed in the footage — but not impossible. With no continuous recording, the question remains open.

Camera Used: Pentax vs. Leica

- ***The Stringer*: Pentax**

The film claims the photo was taken by Nghê with a Pentax — not Út's stated Leica.

- **The AP: Likely a Pentax**

AP's forensic analysis agrees the photo was likely taken with a Pentax, but says Út may have used one that day. Some of his other Vietnam-era photos also show Pentax traits.

Both sides generally agree on the camera type. The dispute is interpretive: *The Stringer* notes that Nghê used a Pentax but does not present it as decisive proof, while AP acknowledges the inconsistency with Út's account but considers it inconclusive. The detail does favor Nghê, as Út has consistently stated he carried two Nikons and two Leicas that day — none of which were Pentax. However, there is no visual evidence confirming exactly which cameras Út had with him at the time. Nghê indeed seems to carry a Pentax.

Beyond Út vs. Nghệ: Could Others Have Taken the Photo?

- ***The Stringer*: No — if not Út, then Nghệ**
The documentary treats the question as binary: if Út didn't take the photo, then Nghệ did. Other photographers are not seriously explored.
- **The AP: Yes — could have been Út, Nghệ, Phúc, or Shimkin**
AP widens the field. They identify other plausible photographers present, including Huỳnh Công Phúc (seen in archival footage at the right position and time) and Alexander Shimkin (present but no photos have been found).

AP's broader framing is more accurate. While Nghệ remains the strongest challenger, the possibility of a third photographer — especially Huỳnh Công Phúc — must be considered.

Background

The iconic photo was captured on 8 June 1972, as over a dozen journalists gathered near Trảng Bàng, northwest of Saigon, to cover an intense battle between North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese forces.

The fighting — part of the Vietnam War's broader Easter Offensive — involved two battalions of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) clashing with troops from South Vietnam's Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Reporters, including photographers and TV crews, positioned themselves at a military checkpoint along Highway 1, where civilians and ARVN soldiers from the 25th Division had assembled, even as heavy combat erupted nearby.

As the journalists observed from the checkpoint, at least one A-1 Skyraider from the 518th Vietnamese Air Force Squadron mistakenly dropped napalm on its own forces and civilians attempting to flee the fighting. In the aftermath, a photograph captured nine-year-old Kim Phúc, badly burned and fleeing the scene — an image that would soon become one of the most iconic and influential of the Vietnam War. Published worldwide shortly after, the photograph profoundly impacted global perception of the war and remains a powerful representation of its human cost.

Methodology

This assessment relied primarily on visual evidence — rather than eyewitness testimony alone — to reconstruct the scene and assess the competing claims about the photo's authorship.

The review began by identifying as many individuals present at the scene as possible. Establishing who was there helped guide the search for visual records and determine where such materials might be located. Through extensive cross-referencing of photographs, archival footage, news reports, memoirs, and published interviews, sixteen individuals were identified, fourteen of whom could be confirmed by name.

Visual materials associated with these individuals and organizations were then located through a range of public and private archives. In some cases, footage had already been digitized and was accessible online. In others, original negatives and reels remained undigitized, requiring direct outreach to archivists and researchers with relevant expertise. Where possible, copies of the materials were obtained for closer examination. Many of the images reviewed in this analysis are not included in this report, as the World Press Photo Foundation did not acquire the rights to publish them.

Using the compiled visual evidence, a location-based timeline was constructed to independently assess the analysis conducted by INDEX. This also included a review of the camera Út was said to have used, as well as a close examination of the AP's contact sheets — particularly the film notches, or lack thereof — which can help determine sequencing and authorship, though no conclusive links were found.

Unpublished research was also shared by *The Stringer's* filmmakers and by INDEX, including two visual timelines, some identified individuals, and eyewitness statements not featured in the final film. AP contributed contact sheets of Út's photographs and issued a public rebuttal to the documentary's claims in a report published in January 2025, and an updated version of that report in May.

Part I: Identification

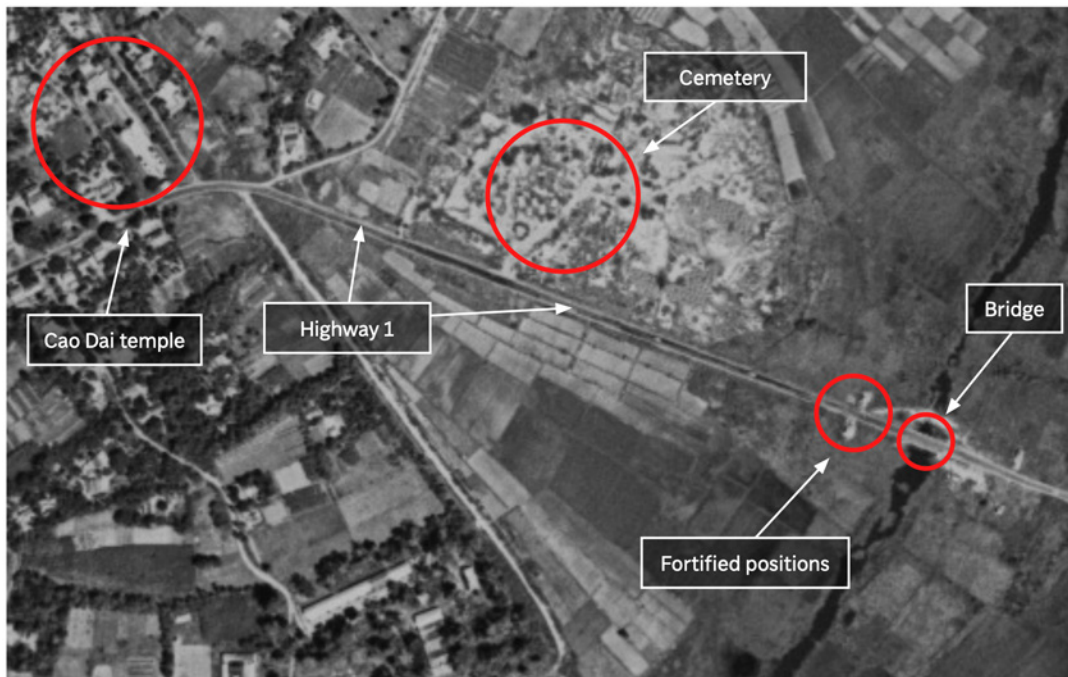
This section identifies key locations, individuals present, and available visual material from 8 June 1972. Establishing who was on the scene and where they were positioned provides the foundation for analyzing the visual evidence and assessing the competing authorship claims.

The Location

The location of the events is not in dispute: they occurred near a military checkpoint on Highway 1, adjacent to the Cao Đài temple in Trảng Bàng, Vietnam. The area in question spans only a few hundred meters, and all parties agree on this point. INDEX based its spatial reconstruction on a satellite image from November 1972, taken several months after the incident and made available by the United States Geological Survey. What follows are annotated versions of that satellite image, showing key locations as identified by both INDEX and the Associated Press — whose reconstructions are in agreement — alongside annotated video frames highlighting key visual markers, including the temple, vehicles, bridge, barbed wire (marking the checkpoint, with fortifications on both sides of the road), and roadside signage, as well as a photo taken by Út and annotated by the AP.



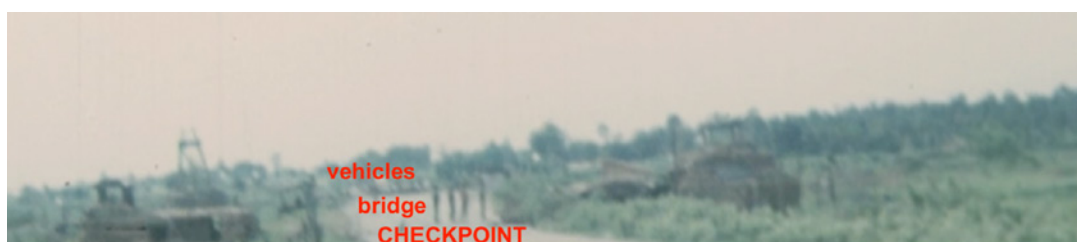
A satellite image from November 1972 shows the area where the events occurred, including the Cao Đài temple, top left, the bridge, bottom right, and surrounding fields near Highway 1. (USGS)



The satellite image from the USGS, annotated by the Associated Press. The annotations accurately reflect the known geography of the site. (USGS, annotated by the AP)



Looking northwest towards the temple, from the immediate area east of the bridge. The barbed wire where the journalists are lined up (see later in report) is visible in the forefront, which comes right after the bridge. The yellow sign is one of a multiple signs and are in the immediate area of where the Kim Phúc and the others would enter Highway 1. (Frame from ITN via Getty Images)



This frame is taken in the opposite direction from the one above. It looks southeast toward the checkpoint, the bridge, and the cluster of civilians and vehicles positioned on the west side. Due to the quality of the image, the barbed wire is hard to see. (Frame from ITN via Getty Images)



Also looking southeast, this view shows the barbed wire just ahead of the bridge, with civilians and vehicles gathered along the west side. (Frame from ITN via Getty Images)

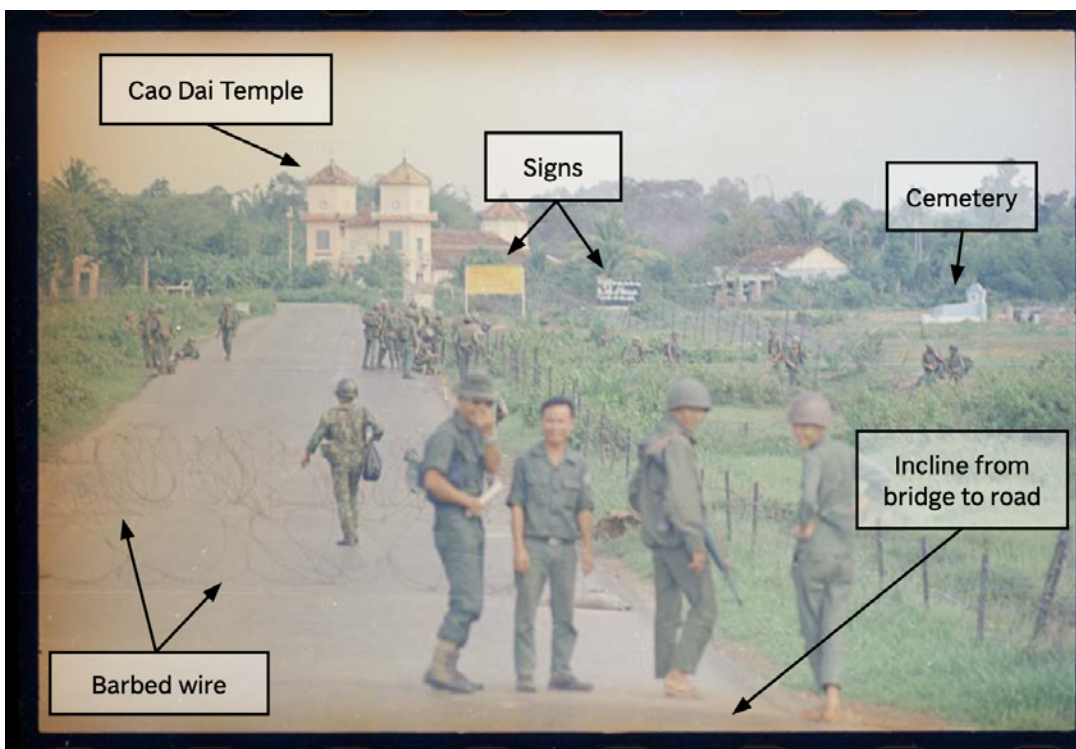


Photo of the street looking towards the temple (AP Photo / Nick Út, annotated by the AP).

Individuals Present

A critical step in assessing the photo's authorship is identifying who was present at the scene. The napalm strike and its aftermath were witnessed by a large group of journalists — including photographers, television cameramen, and print reporters — who had been covering the fighting in and around Trảng Bàng that day.

By cross-referencing news archives, photographs, film footage, and personal memoirs, it is possible to compile a roster of media personnel who were at the Highway 1 checkpoint before, during, and after the strike. The list includes Út, Nghệ, and more than a dozen others, many of whom were professional media and also captured visual material, and others that were military freelance photographers.

Present were at least three film crews: one from NBC (U.S.), one from ITN (U.K.), and another likely from Visnews (U.K.). Several print journalists and still photographers were also on site — at least one of whom, and likely more, had material published by United Press International (UPI). In addition, multiple victims have been identified, which is useful for referencing later stages of the timeline.

Also present were Marina Warner, a reporter for the *Spectator*, and her partner William “Willy” Shawcross, a writer. Although they have not been identified in any visual materials, Warner is cited in several sources describing what she witnessed.⁵ As previously noted, the soldiers at the scene were from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam's (ARVN) 25th Division, recognizable by their insignia.

Each profile includes the following sections:

- **Images** showing the individual in question.
- **Notes** highlighting key background details and relevant context.
- **Footage** indicating whether the individual personally captured film footage or still photos.
- **Visual Identification** offering specific visual cues — such as clothing or distinguishing features — to help recognize the individual in available footage or images.

⁵ For example, her article in the July 1972 issue of the *Spectator* is called “[The Bitch Route Thirteen](#),” and available online. Also, in Phillip Knightley's book, pp. 435–436, (“Marina Warner, reporting at the time for the *Spectator*, recalls the effect on her of her first encounter with civilian casualties. “I saw this old woman coming down the road with a child in her arms. The child's flesh was falling off. I said to myself, ‘My God, I've seen this all before.’”), as well as in [Newsweek magazine](#) (“It was after witnessing a napalm attack on the Vietnamese village of Trảng Bàng that Warner turned her sceptical gaze on the cult of the Virgin Mary [...] Warner had accompanied her first husband, writer William Shawcross. “A peaceful day, water buffalo in the paddy fields – then ...” She watched, running out of the smoke, the naked nine-year-old girl, “The Girl in the Picture” who appeared in Kim Phuc's infamous photo. “The camera isolated her with a long lens. What we saw were women rushing out holding babies who had been terribly burned, with skin coming off.” It was a defining moment.”)

Nick Út (Huỳnh Công Út) — AP Staff Photographer



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⁶ <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/vietnamese-children-flee-from-their-homes-in-the-south-news-photo/515342798?adppopup=true>

Notes

At the time, Út was a 21-year-old Vietnamese staff photographer for the AP. He is officially credited with capturing the iconic photograph. He reportedly carried multiple cameras that day, including at least two Leica rangefinders (M2 and M3) equipped with 35mm f/2 Summicron lenses, as well as two Nikon bodies. He used Kodak Tri-X black-and-white film, Kodacolor-X color film, and two Nikon cameras. He shot a total of eight rolls of film — six in black-and-white (Kodak Tri-X) and two in color (Kodacolor-X).⁷ Additional technical details are discussed in a later section.

Út captured numerous photographs of civilians fleeing or injured. He later recalled, “As I was photographing a fleeing grandmother, I saw a girl running with her arms stretched out in the corner of my viewfinder.” That moment prompted him, he has said repeatedly, to turn his camera toward Kim Phúc and the other children.

After taking the photographs, Út reportedly poured water on Kim Phúc’s burns and transported her and other injured civilians to a nearby hospital in his press vehicle. Later that day, he returned to Saigon to deliver the film.

Footage

Yes.

Visual Identification

- Relatively short
- Wears fatigues
- Helmet with a visible tag
- Carries multiple cameras
- Bulky poncho on right hip
- Hard photo bag over shoulder
- Wears a vest resembling an M-69 flak vest

⁷AP initial report, p. 9.

Alan Downes — ITN Cameraman



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Notes

Downes was a cameraman for ITN, and worked alongside British television reporter Christopher Wain and soundman Tom Phillips. He operated the film camera that day and captured key footage — including the moment Kim Phúc and other children ran down Highway 1 past a group of reporters. Downes passed away in 1996.⁹

Footage

Yes.

Visual Identification

- Tall
- Wears fatigues
- Camera covered with plastic, tarp, or other material

⁸ <https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/itn-65/timeline>.

⁹ <https://www.deseret.com/1996/10/10/19270774/war-cameraman-dies-of-cancer/#:~:text=Cameraman%20Alan%20Downes%2C%20who%20filmed,He%20was%2058>.

and <https://www.the-independent.com/news/people/obituaries-alan-downes-1357789.html>.

Christopher Wain — ITN Correspondent



Notes

Wain was the British television correspondent for ITN, reporting alongside cameraman Alan Downes and soundman Tom Phillips. In footage from the day, Wain is seen attending to Kim Phúc, at one point without his helmet. He later recalled that Kim was the first to reach the group, and that he and Downes then turned their attention to filming her grandmother.

Footage

No visual footage is known to have been taken by him, but his voice is heard in ITN's recorded report.

Visual Identification

- Seen with and without helmet (which has a white triangle on the back)
- Seen giving water to Kim Phúc
- Wears a poncho

Tom Phillips — ITN Soundman



Notes Phillips was the sound technician for the ITN film crew consisting of, besides him, Wain and Downes.¹⁰

Footage No. (He recorded the sound.)

Visual Identification

- Camouflage-pattern helmet
- Carries sound equipment
- Water bottle on hip

¹⁰ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ngcap.htm>, <https://www.the-independent.com/news/people/obituaries-alan-downes-1357789.html>.

Arthur A. Lord — NBC Reporter



Notes Lord was there with a cameraman and a soundman, but he hasn't been positively identified in any available footage from Highway 1. He is visible earlier in the NBC footage, the image above is him reporting near South Vietnamese troops seemingly firing into the direction of Trảng Bàng.

Lord wrote a letter to the *Los Angeles Times* about three decades later, stating that, besides Út, his cameraman, Lê Phúc Định, was present there as well. This letter is reportedly being used in the court case brought forward by Út.¹¹ It could be that Lord was sitting in his car, and it has been mentioned that his partner was pregnant at the time, and he spent multiple days at Trảng Bàng and may not have been at the front row of reporters. Lord passed away in 2002.¹²

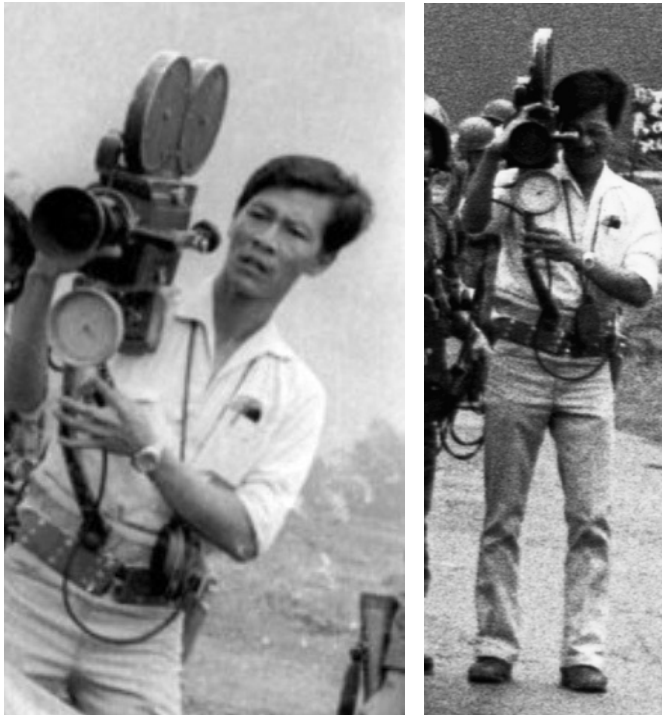
Footage No.

Visual Identification N/A

¹¹ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14338059/explosive-twist-claims-iconic-vietnam-war-napalm-girl-picture.html>

¹² <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2002-sep-28-me-lord28-story.html>

Lê Phúc Định — NBC Cameraman



Notes

A Vietnamese cameraman working for the NBC News crew, consisting of himself, soundman Trần Văn Thân and Arthur A. Lord, the TV reporter for NBC.¹³ He later moved to Louisville, Kentucky, in the U.S., and worked as a cameraman for the local ABC affiliate. He has since passed away.¹⁴

Footage

Yes.

Visual Identification

- No helmet
- Short, neatly combed hair, slightly longer on top
- Wears a white, short-sleeved, button-up shirt tucked into slim-fit light-colored trousers
- Object clipped to shirt pocket (possibly a pen)
- Thick utility belt, likely used to carry film or gear
- Wears a wristwatch on left wrist
- Operates a large apparent¹⁵ 16mm film camera with dual reels, front lens, and mounted light meter or battery pack
- Wiring or strapping system hangs from the camera

¹³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20240923121438/https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-10-01-tm-624-story.html>.

<https://www.worldradiohistory.com/BOOKSHELF-ARH/History/Towers-Over-Kentucky-Nash-1995-ARH-2020-04-28-21-35-30.pdf>.

¹⁴ <https://carlrobinson2.substack.com/p/the-real-napalm-girl-story>.

¹⁵ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng2.htm>.

Trần Văn Thân— NBC Soundman



Notes

Nicknamed “Uncle Thân,” Trần Văn Thân, also referenced as TB Thân,¹⁶ was a sound technician working for NBC and is Nghệ’s brother-in-law.¹⁷ Now 92 years old, Thân was interviewed in *The Stringer*. In the film, he recalls that after the photo was taken, he and Nghệ went to the AP office, where Thân delivered Nghệ’s film because the office was nearby. Thân says, “I could bring [Nghệ’s] film and sell to AP... [their] office was nearby,” adding that Nghệ was present during the handoff.

Footage

No. (He recorded the sound.)

Visual Identification

- Wears a dark military helmet
- Dressed in military-style fatigues, including a vest with straps
- Fatigue trousers tucked into boots
- Cords or wires visible from his sound equipment

¹⁶ <https://substack.com/home/post/p-156718784>

¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/articles/c0lz94zkxzno>.

Alexander Dimetri Shimkin — Freelance



Notes

Alexander Dimetri¹⁸ Shimkin, by some referred to as Alex or Alec,¹⁹ was a U.S. freelance journalist, often contributing to *Newsweek* magazine. He was 27 years old at the time, and seen running in the footage up the road towards the temple.

Shimkin died on 12 July 1972, just a month after the events at Trảng Bàng, and his accounts of that day are known only through others' testimonies.

Several sources describe Shimkin's profound emotional reaction to the horror he witnessed. "Goddam you. Leave me alone. Get the hell out," Shimkin said according to *Spectator* journalist Marina Warner.²⁰ She writes that he was "waving his hands, shouting at the reporters clustered on the road who thirsted for his first-hand, eye-witness report. "[H]e was, for a moment, crazed, stomping down the road in fury and grief. Later, he came up to us, recovered. "I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to cut up on you guys. It was just..." Everyone nodded and said, "That's OK,." And then asked him to tell."

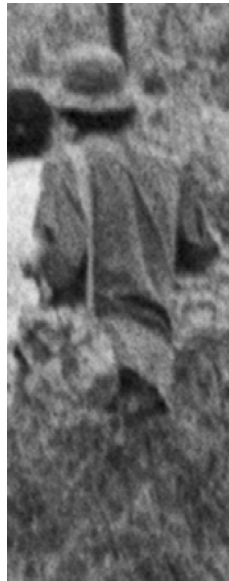
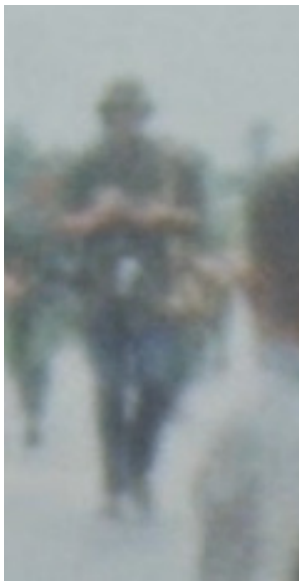
¹⁸ Spelling according to a family tree on Geni: <https://www.geni.com/people/Alexander-Shimkin/6000000035818822712>.

¹⁹ Phillip Knightley, in his book *The First Casualty*, refers to him as Alec Shimkin.

²⁰ Warner, "The Bitch Road Route Thirteen," *Spectator*, July 1972. This article is cited in Phillip Knightley, in his book *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker*, p. 435.

Footage	No. (Though there may be footage as he was carrying a stills camera.)
Visual Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No helmet• Short, slightly unkempt hair• Wears glasses• Loose-fitting, oversized, military-style fatigue jacket, matching camouflage pants• Sleeves are rolled up• Carries a small camera• Very tall

David Burnett — Freelance Photographer



(AP Photo / Nick Út)

Notes

Burnett was 25 at the time, mainly working for *Time* and *Life*, but on this day also for *The New York Times*.²¹ Burnett and Butterfield arrived hours later at the scene than other journalists:²² “In the early afternoon we headed further north, shortly coming across a group of our colleagues massed on the edge of a small village, Trảng Bàng.” Burnett said he saw Út and Shimkin sprint ahead of the others and take photos of Kim Phúc.²³ Burnett himself said he missed the precious shot because at that moment he was struggling to change the film in his camera. In a presentation, he said “an old, non-wind Leica, a Leica Model 3.”²⁴

Footage

Yes. (Famously said to have been changing film in his camera during peak moments.)²⁵

Visual Identification

- Bucket-style or boonie hat
- Olive-colored shirt

²¹ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0905/we-re-just-sayin-closing-the-circle.html>.

²² <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0905/we-re-just-sayin-closing-the-circle.html>.

²³ David Burnett Oral History Interview, The Associated Press, 13 July 2016, p. 13.

²⁴ https://youtu.be/9RRhDd8YWtk?si=Ux_UucDL1s6OvrFA&t=224.

²⁵ David Burnett Oral History Interview, The Associated Press, 13 July 2016, pp. 13-14; https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/fifty-years-after-napalm-girl-picture-a-photographer-reflects-on-the-moment-that-might-have-been-his/2012/06/13/gJQAfoToeV_story.html

Donald Kirk — *Chicago Tribune*



Notes

Kirk, working for the *Chicago Tribune* at the time, arrived when there was already black smoke in the sky, and he drove there with a driver he trusted, as well as William “Willy” Shawcross and Marina Warner, who were partners.²⁶ He spoke to the documentary makers and AP, too. “I saw the girl and her little brother running toward us, and did a story that wound up beneath the photo on page one of the *Chicago Tribune*. I saw a gaggle of photographers but couldn't say who took the photo.”²⁷

Footage

No.

Visual Identification

- Tall
- Glasses
- White shirt with short sleeves

²⁶ <https://www.nysun.com/article/the-day-i-saw-a-naked-girl-running-from-the-war-and-into-the-history-of-vietnam>. And see Newsweek <https://www.newsweek.com/man-booker-chair-marina-warner-i-desperately-wanted-be-saint-330348>.

²⁷ https://groups.google.com/g/vietnam-old-hacks/c/_jIMQcHV8Ss.

Fox Butterfield — NYT Bureau Chief



Notes

Fox Butterfield was the Saigon Bureau Chief for NYT at the time. Butterfield says he was 10 to 15 yards from where he claims Út took the photo, though he does not appear in the photos and footage from the immediate scene. This raises the possibility, according to the AP, that there were blind spots in the spotty visual record of those moments.²⁸

Footage

No.

Visual

Identification²⁹

- Wearing a boonie hat
- Fatigues

²⁸ [AP initial report](#), p. 9.

²⁹ Based on the Burnett photo.

Hoàng Văn Danh — Freelance Photographer



Notes

A Vietnamese photographer on assignment for United Press International (UPI). According to Horst Faas, the chief of photos at AP in Vietnam, Hoàng Văn Danh managed to sell a few of his photos to UPI.³⁰ His name is sometimes spelled as Doanh.³¹ AP, in 2025, also said he sometimes sold photos to AP.³²

The VII Foundation's Terri Lichstein said that they interviewed him but that he doesn't appear in the film as they made contact very late in the process. In his interview, "he identified himself," Lichtstein added, and "explained the sequence of events. His is the first photo of the children stepping on the road. He runs out [of] film and he's rewinding his film in the famous shot. When asked if he saw Nick Út anywhere near him he said, "no he was in the back." Hoàng Văn Danh didn't want to go on camera as he's suffering [with] cancer."

³⁰ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng2.htm>.

³¹ [https://01746611663758466212.googlegroups.com/attach/fccb5b81c95c6/Weekend%20Australian%20Magazine.%208%20February%202025%20\(2\).pdf?part=0.1&view=1&vt=ANaJVrFHFds3Tl8UYOYPiiFzDZcuvza4yyRrgd1fgB0PE4AOXfgV34SDu7Ls0sY6AV-ZNc9D0diu_G4uf-DCxLaHj54nfxW5-KDpsWUqajYr-GzQlKtwVM](https://01746611663758466212.googlegroups.com/attach/fccb5b81c95c6/Weekend%20Australian%20Magazine.%208%20February%202025%20(2).pdf?part=0.1&view=1&vt=ANaJVrFHFds3Tl8UYOYPiiFzDZcuvza4yyRrgd1fgB0PE4AOXfgV34SDu7Ls0sY6AV-ZNc9D0diu_G4uf-DCxLaHj54nfxW5-KDpsWUqajYr-GzQlKtwVM).

³² AP updated report, [interactive version](#)

Position-wise, he was completely at the front most of the time. Based on this account, along with Getty Images crediting the Bettmann Archive, the fact that one crop of the first photo on Highway 1 is credited to UPI, and his confirmed presence at the scene, it is most likely that these photos were taken by him. Additionally, Carl Robinson, the photo editor on duty the day the negatives were processed, also states that Danh took that first photo of Kim Phúc walking onto the street.³³

Hoàng Văn Danh also said he did not see Út in the immediate area when the children ran across the field toward Highway 1.³⁴

Footage

Some of it is available via Getty Images, which acquired the Bettmann Archive, which apparently received part of the UPI archive. Most if not all of those photos are not credited to Hoàng Văn Danh.

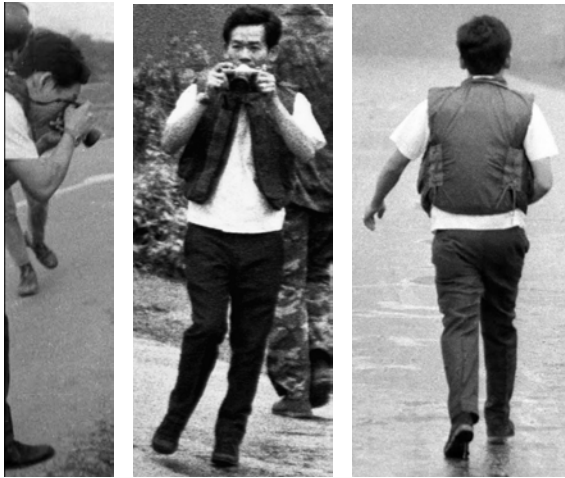
Visual Identification

- Camouflage helmet, dark green with lighter green camouflage, “UPI” written on it.
- A white object is seen stuck onto the left side of his helmet.
- Dark green military vest over a short-sleeved, or rolled up, shirt.
- Holding a camera.
- He’s been described as taller than Út, which helps differentiate him in the footage.
- White or lighter cloth around his belt.

³³ [https://01746611663758466212.googlegroups.com/attach/fccb5b81c95c6/Weekend%20Australian%20Magazine.%208%20February%202025%20\(2\).pdf?part=0.1&view=1&vt=ANaJvRFHFDds3TI8UYOYPiiFzDZcuvza4yyRgd1fgB0PE4AOXFgV34SDu7Ls0sY6AV-ZNc9D0diu_G4uf-DCxLaHj54nfxW5-KDpsWUqajYr-GzQIKtwVM](https://01746611663758466212.googlegroups.com/attach/fccb5b81c95c6/Weekend%20Australian%20Magazine.%208%20February%202025%20(2).pdf?part=0.1&view=1&vt=ANaJvRFHFDds3TI8UYOYPiiFzDZcuvza4yyRgd1fgB0PE4AOXFgV34SDu7Ls0sY6AV-ZNc9D0diu_G4uf-DCxLaHj54nfxW5-KDpsWUqajYr-GzQIKtwVM).

³⁴ Email from Fiona Turner/*The Stringer*, on 19 January 2025: “When we spoke to [Hoàng Văn Danh], he confirmed that he did not see Nick in the area when the children came across the field nor did he know where he was at this time.”

Nguyễn Thành Nghệ — Freelance Photographer



Notes

Born in Vinh Long in 1937, and, according to Carl Robinson, worked as a driver and fixer for the NBC News team that day, said to be just filling in³⁵ Fiona Turner of *The Stringer* told World Press Photo that Nghệ was “definitely not working for NBC nor driving for them that day.” Instead, the documentary makers say, Nghệ was alerted to the events at Trảng Bàng by a colleague from “one of the channels” and rented a car and drove three other media to the checkpoint.³⁶ The documentary makers added that Nghệ did have accreditation from NBC who had offered him a permanent job that he did not take.

Nghệ had a camera with him — visible on photos, resembling what could be a Pentax — and was positioned among the frontline journalists on the road. Nghệ says he captured the image of Phúc running down the street with arms outstretched and sold it to AP for \$20, and that they gave him a print of the photo that his wife later destroyed.

Footage

No known photos are available. If he took the famous photo, there are at least two photos taken by him given the negatives that we have.

Visual Identification

- White shirt
- Dark vest
- Dark trousers
- Stills camera, resembling a Pentax

³⁵ [https://01746611663758466212.googlegroups.com/attach/fccb5b81c95c6/Weekend%20Australian%20Magazine.%208%20February%202025%20\(2\).pdf?part=0.1&view=1&vt=ANaJVrFHFds3TI8UYOYPiiFzDZcuvza4yyRgd1fgB0PE4AOXFgV34SDu7Ls0sY6AV-ZNc9D0diu_G4uf-DCxLaHj54nfxW5-KDpsWUqajYr-GzQIKtwVM](https://01746611663758466212.googlegroups.com/attach/fccb5b81c95c6/Weekend%20Australian%20Magazine.%208%20February%202025%20(2).pdf?part=0.1&view=1&vt=ANaJVrFHFds3TI8UYOYPiiFzDZcuvza4yyRgd1fgB0PE4AOXFgV34SDu7Ls0sY6AV-ZNc9D0diu_G4uf-DCxLaHj54nfxW5-KDpsWUqajYr-GzQIKtwVM)

³⁶ Email from Fiona Turner/*The Stringer* to World Press Photo, dated 8 June 2025.

Huỳnh Công Phức — Freelancer



Notes

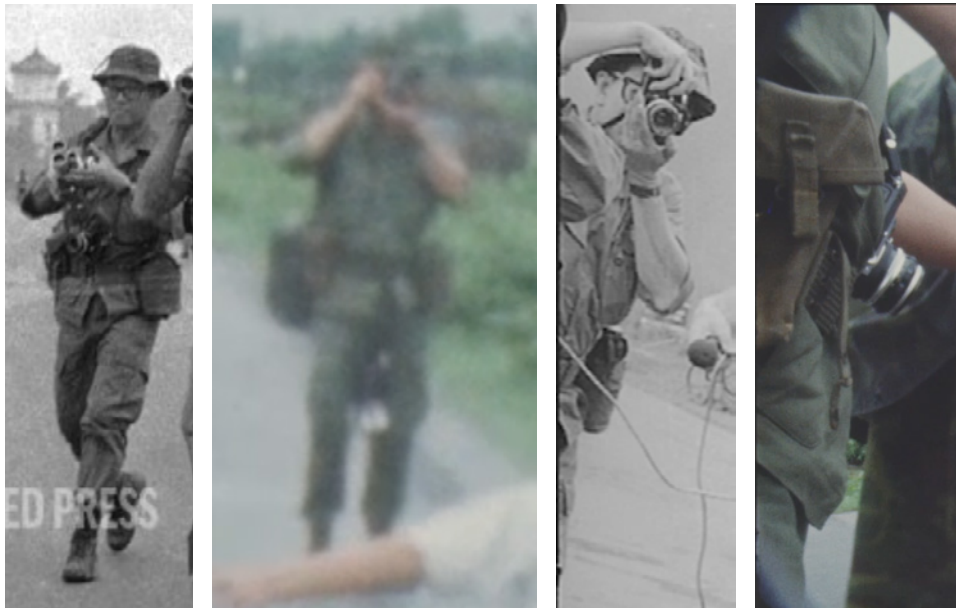
Huỳnh Công Phức (1937–2009) was a Vietnamese photographer. He died at age 72 in An Giang during a photo assignment, after a motorbike accident while carrying heavy camera gear in 2009. Though often misidentified online as Nick Út, Phức is visible in archival footage at the front of the scene near Hoàng Văn Danh, beyond the barbed wire. Danh later told the VII Foundation he did not know the other individual's name. A comparison with Út's own photo confirms that the man in question could not be Út, as he appears in the frame. Visual differences in clothing, build, and stance further rule this out. Both the VII Foundation and photojournalist Michael Ebert independently confirmed that the individual is not Út. In April 2025, AP relayed that, according to UPI photographer David Hume Kennerly, the person was identified as Huỳnh Công Phức — whose presence at the scene and position at the frontline raise the possibility that he, too, may have taken the iconic photograph.

Footage

Not found.

Visual Identification

- Camouflage-patterned helmet.
- Fatigues, likely a green or camouflage-patterned uniform.
- No vest.
- Large bulky object on right hip, possibly a soft leather photo bag, and a smaller pouch on left hip, fatigue/green in color, likely used for additional gear.

Unidentified A — Likely UPI**Notes**

Standing next to ITN's Christopher Wain in the ITN footage, as Kim Phúc runs toward them, is an unidentified man. His photos ended up with UPI and were also included in the Bettmann Archive, as confirmed by Getty Images, which acquired the archive and credits a cropped version of the photo to UPI. The VII Foundation speculated that he might have been a military photographer.³⁷ Gary Knight, from the VII Foundation, initially thought he could be Wain's translator, but Wain denied knowing him and instead suggested he might be Nick Út. However, this individual is not Út. AP describes this person as a UPI camera operator.³⁸

Footage

Yes, via Getty Images, not credited except Bettmann/UPI:

- [517292620](#)
- [514693350](#)

(crop of same image, but now with UPI credit)

Visual Identification

- Bolex and stills camera
- Wears a soft boonie hat with a slightly floppy brim
- Full military fatigues, dark green colored, matching shirt and trousers
- Glasses

³⁷ Email to author.

³⁸ AP updated report, [interactive version](#).

Unidentified B**Notes**

This is the third film footage available that did not come from ITN or NBC so it is possible this videographer filmed for Visnews, a U.K.- based international news agency at the time, acquired by Reuters.

Footage

Possibly the footage that ended up on Reuters, though some film rolls are missing.

Visual Identification

- Soft boonie hat
- Dark green military-style fatigues, button-up short-sleeved shirt and matching trousers
- Watch on left wrist
- Bag on left hip (likely film magazine bag or battery pack case)
- Bolex camera

Victims

Phan Thị Kim Phúc
(referred to through the analysis as Kim Phúc)



The nine-year-old girl famously photographed running from the napalm attack.

Phan Thanh Tâm



Kim Phúc's younger brother, who suffered an eye injury during the attack.

Phan Thanh Phước



Kim Phúc's youngest brother, aged 5.

Hồ Văn Bôn



A cousin of Kim Phúc.

Hồ Thị Ting (sometimes also referred to as Hồ Thị Hiền)



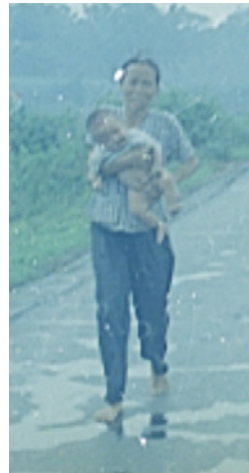
A cousin of Kim Phúc.

**Tào, or Lý Thọ, with
Phan Văn Danh³⁹**



Grandmother of Kim Phúc carrying three year old Danh, a cousin of Kim Phúc, who died of his injuries.

**Nguyễn Thị Xí with
Phan Cẩm Cường**



Nguyễn Thị Xí is the name of the lady, per an AP caption, and Cường, the 9-month-old cousin of Kim Phúc, in her arms.⁴⁰

³⁹ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng3.htm>; name also spelled as Dahn.

⁴⁰ <https://www.alamy.com/an-unidentified-vietnamese-woman-carries-9-month-old-cuong-cousin-of-kim-phuc-moments-after-a-misplaced-napalm-bomb-strike-on-the-outskirts-of-trang-bang-25-miles-nw-of-saigon-south-vietnam-on-june-8-1972-cuong-died-six-weeks-after-this-photo-was-taken-cuongs-grandmother-tao-carries-his-3-year-old-brother-danh-in-the-background-on-the-right-danh-dies-shortly-after-this-picture-was-taken-ap-photonick-ut-image506086453.html>; <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng3.htm>.

Available Photos and Video

A range of photographic and film records document the events at Trảng Bàng on 8 June 1972. This section organizes the available material by source, distinguishing between film footage and still photographs.

Film Footage

Several news crews captured moving images that day. Existing footage is available through various archives:

- **Independent Television News (ITN)**
 Filmed by Alan Downes, with Christopher Wain as the correspondent. The primary report (01:20 in duration) is [available](#) on ITN’s Facebook page. A slightly longer version (1:32) is available via Getty Images under identification number [804941208](#), and a slightly less cropped version is archived as [1182617625](#).
- **NBC News**
 Filmed by Lê Phúc Định, with Trần Văn Thân (“Uncle Thân”) as the soundman. The footage runs for 3 minutes and 25 seconds, with segments now hosted by Reuters. However, NBC’s material exists in varying versions and resolutions across multiple archives, likely re-digitized for use in documentaries. Notably, a French documentary includes three seconds of key footage taken just after the famous photo, showing Kim Phúc and other children running toward Wain and an unidentified photographer (“*Unidentified A*”).
- **Visnews/Reuters**
 This footage appears to have originated via Visnews, a London-based agency later acquired by Reuters.⁴¹ While it does not capture the moment of the napalm strike or the fleeing children, it helps establish the timing and location of some of Út’s earlier photos. A 4-minute, 26-second segment is available on [Reuters Connect](#) and [Reuters Screenocean](#). However, the descriptions on these platforms appear to be inaccurate: it labels the footage as NBC/UPI material and references two additional film rolls — rolls 3 and 4 — that are now missing. This is especially unfortunate, as the roll descriptions specifically mention scenes of the napalm bombing and children running — suggesting that footage directly relevant to the authorship question may once have existed and, if found, could offer new evidence.

⁴¹ Faas, in a statement made sometime after 1999, suggested that the BBC had a presence at Trảng Bàng that day. However, this may have been a reference to Visnews, which, during the early 1990s, was jointly owned by NBC News, the BBC, and Reuters before being fully acquired by Reuters: <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng2.htm>.

Photographs

Several still photographers were also present at the scene. The following materials have been located:

- **David Burnett**

At least six photos were published by Burnett, who was working for *The New York Times* that day, on his website, as well as articles he wrote.⁴² The VII Foundation said he retains the rights with Contact Press Image, and that he had sent some outtakes to the documentary team. An image showing Kirk, Butterfield, and Shimkin, taken by Burnett, was published on Kirk's website.⁴³

- **Hoàng Văn Danh**

At least one photo (ID: [515342824](#)) is available via Getty Images, sourced from the Bettmann Archive.

- **Nick Út**

Photographs were sourced from negatives provided by the Associated Press (AP) and additional images from the AP's online database. AP supplied six contact sheets with 84 frames in total: *Ut_BWContact01.jpg* (18 frames), *Ut_BWContact02.jpg* (11 frames), *Ut_BWContact03.jpg* (2 frames), *Ut_BWContact04.jpg* (2 frames), *Ut_CContact01.jpg* (26 frames), and *Ut_CContact02.jpg* (25 frames). These images, later published in overview form in the updated AP report,⁴⁴ form the foundation for the timeline reconstruction. However, a complication arises because at least five photos credited to Út in the AP's online database do not appear on any of the provided contact sheets. As a result, placing those images in chronological order is more difficult. Substantial portions of Út's work from that day, who is said to have returned eight rolls,⁴⁵ have been lost as AP states in its updated report: "[M]any negatives from that time have been lost".⁴⁶

- **Unidentified A**

At least one photo from UPI, now housed in the Getty Images-acquired Bettmann Archive. No additional images by this photographer have been located.

⁴² <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0905/we-re-just-sayin-closing-the-circle.html>; <https://werejustsayin.blogspot.com/2012/06/trang-bang-40-years-later.html>.

⁴³ <https://www.donaldkirk.com/images/donad-kirfk-with-fox-butterfield--alex-shimkin--trangbang--vietnam--1972--5-.jpg>.

⁴⁴ AP updated report, p. 16.

⁴⁵ AP updated report, p. 9: "Ut says he returned to the AP hours later with eight rolls of film to be processed, two in color and six in black-and-white."

⁴⁶ AP updated report, p. 29.

Unavailable Footage

A part of the material shot near Trang Bang on 8 June 1972, has not been located. No still photographs credited to Alexander D. Shimkin or Huỳnh Công Phúc have turned up; two of four Reuters/Visnews rolls, likely filmed by *Unidentified B*, (one labelled “children hit by napalm”) are missing; and the footage that another cameraman, *Unidentified A*, filmed on the spot has never surfaced.

AP itself keeps just 84 negatives and five prints from the eight rolls Nick Út carried back that day. The rest were discarded in routine editing, lost during the 1975 Saigon evacuation, or thrown away after being loaned out. Horst Faas later said that “thousands” of Vietnam-war images had already been thrown away in New York.

What may still remain is hard to obtain access to. Some stills by some photographers ended up in the Bettmann Archive, now hosted on Getty Images, while UPI’s archives are scattered and only partly digitised.

Part II: A Timeline Reconstruction

This timeline reconstructs the events of 8 June 1972, at Trảng Bàng by analyzing available photographs and film footage. The objective is to determine the sequence of events leading up to and following the iconic photograph, assessing how Út's negatives align with other media sources. Due to the absence of exact timestamps, the timeline is approximate, organizing events relative to one another.

Early Morning: Departure from Saigon

At dawn of 8 June 1972, at about 5 a.m., photographer Nick Út loaded his camera gear, field survival kit, flak jacket and steel helmet into one of the AP's Japanese made minibuses (AP correspondents called them 'command modules') parked outside the Eden Building, where AP's Saigon office was. He wore a Vietnamese Marines style uniform with the nametags 'Bao Chi' (for 'Press'), Nick Út and Associated Press.⁴⁷

This account comes from Horst Faas, AP's chief photographer for Southeast Asia and Út's boss at the time. According to Faas, Út's assignment was to reach South Vietnamese forces attempting to reopen Highway 1, which had been blocked by North Vietnamese troops. Faas states Út traveled alone.

En Route to Trảng Bàng

The contact sheet *Ut_CCContact01.jpg* has 26 color negatives from a Kodacolor-X film, numbering 3 to 30A.⁴⁸ The first 8 negatives of this first contact sheet are photos by Út seemingly taken on the way to the scene near the entrance sign of Trảng Bàng. We see an apparent military truck with soldiers going in the same direction, and civilians going in the opposite direction, said to be fleeing in other reports.

⁴⁷ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng2.htm>.

⁴⁸ Photographers using manual cameras like the Leica M2, Leica M3, or Nikon F often manually advanced film past the first few frames during loading to avoid light leaks or partial exposures, ensuring the first usable frame was not compromised. This practice often resulted in the first captured frame starting at 2 or 3 rather than 0 or 1.



The first photos on the contact sheet show civilians passing by on what presumably is Highway 1. (Provided by AP)

An ox cart carrying people's belongings appears in several of Út's color negatives — and interestingly, it was also filmed by the NBC crew, though on a different road. While this isn't directly relevant to World Press Photo's main analyses, it shows that members of the media were already documenting some of the same individuals on the road to Trảng Bàng. Below is a side-by-side comparison of a photo taken by Út and a frame from the NBC footage, with matching individuals marked by numbers for reference.



A side-by-side of a photo of the contact sheet and a frame from the NBC documentary show it's the same group of civilians. (Left: Provided by AP. Right: NBC via Reuters)

“We passed hundreds of refugees fleeing the village,” Út would later say, according to Faas.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng2.htm>.

On Highway 1 with a View of the Temple

The next two negatives capture the location of interest for the first time, featuring approximately twenty apparent South Vietnamese soldiers. The Cao Đài temple is clearly visible, along with the yellow and black signs, which will become relevant later. In the background to the right in the right image marked 12 to 12A, there is a white and blue-painted grave — this is the same grave from which Kim Phúc and the others will later emerge.



Soldiers in the foreground stand near the bridge and look towards the temple and other soldiers in the distance. In the photo on the right, they look towards the photographer. The two lines of barbed wire are visible in front of them. (Provided by AP)

In Faas' account, he said Út reached the outskirts of Trảng Bàng at around 7:30 a.m., and that his driver joined a long queue of waiting vehicles.

Civilians with Dogs Close to Temple

While it's difficult to be completely certain, cross-referencing the available footage with eyewitness accounts and reports from that day suggests that the next scene Út captures shows a group of civilians carrying some of their belongings. Among them are three children — one carrying a younger child — a woman, a small black dog, and a larger white dog.



Civilians carrying some of their belongings. Among them are three children — one carrying a younger child — a woman, and a small black dog. (Attributed to Út, Provided by AP)

A key reference point to place this in time is the NBC footage, hosted on Reuters, from 1:54 to 2:05, which captures this same group of civilians coming from Trảng Bàng. They are near the Cao Đài temple, with gunfire heard in the background. The children are visibly running. This footage must be captured slightly before Út's photos, as they have not yet passed the signs. In the NBC report, Arthur Lord, their correspondent, says: "Small groups of civilians were still trying to get out of Trảng Bàng. Communist snipers shot at them as they ran up the highway toward the roadblock."⁵⁰



The NBC footage (on the left) and one of the photos attributed to Út (on the right) shows the same group of civilians. The NBC footage was taken earlier than Út's photo, as indicated by the group's position on Highway 1 in relation to the temple and the road signs. (Left: NBC footage via Reuters. Right: Provided by AP)

⁵⁰ NBC news report, from 2:31 to 2:42.

As the group moves farther from the temple and closer to the checkpoint, Út captures these two photos, indicating that he is still on the road. Visibility of the signs and no barbed wire suggests he moved a bit closer to the temple.

The contact sheets provided by AP are incomplete. One photo credited to Út in the AP's public database does not appear on any of the contact sheets.⁵¹ This image, shown below,⁵² is nearly identical in composition to two known photos that follow it in the sequence. Based on the dog's position, it was likely taken just before them. On the far left, a figure appears who matches the visual characteristics of either *Unidentified A* or *Unidentified B*, as both are seen wearing a boonie hat and short sleeves. On the far right, Hoàng Văn Danh is visible.



Based on the dog's position, this photo was likely taken just before the two previous photos. On the far left, a figure appears who matches the visual characteristics of either *Unidentified A* or *Unidentified B*, as both are seen wearing a boonie hat and short sleeves. On the far right, Hoàng Văn Danh is visible. (AP)

⁵¹ [AP updated report](#), p. 16.

⁵² [22104599545204](#).

Soldiers Walking into Paddy Fields

The next two negatives show a group of soldiers walking into the field. This aligns with Faas' report, which said that Út had left the car, introduced himself to a South Vietnamese battalion commander, and then joined the troops.⁵³



South Vietnamese soldiers walk into paddy fields, seen in two subsequent color photos attributed to Út. (Provided by AP)

The Reuters footage also shows this scene. The matching tree line in the background indicates that these photos were indeed taken before any visible smoke. In the second image, a frame from Reuter's footage is overlaid with a photo captured by Út, to indicate it shows the same perspective.



On the left, a frame from the Reuters footage. On the right, that same frame overlaid with a photo from a color photo to Út, showing it is the same location based on the trees. (Left: Reuters. Right: Reuters and provided by AP, overlay by World Press Photo)

⁵³ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng2.htm>.

The First Visible Smoke — in the Distance

The Reuters footage has a cut, and at the 2:11 mark, it shows a view of the paddy field with smoke rising in the distance. Út's next photo captures the same smoke, though it appears slightly more dissipated by then. This matches Faas' report, stating that there were some firefights, including artillery and airstrike support, and casualties ensued.⁵⁴ It is unclear, however, whether this smoke rising is due to an airstrike, or any other kind of fighting.

The two images below are looking at the same area. The image on the left is from Reuters, and the image on the right is from AP's contact sheet. The gravestone and fields show they were taken from roughly the same position, looking into the same direction. A dark smoke plume is visible in the Reuters footage, but not clearly visible in the Út photo.



A comparison between a video frame showing the smoke and one of Út's earlier photographs — specifically the one image featuring the gravestone — confirms that Út and the videographer whose footage later appeared via Reuters were positioned at the same location. (Left: Reuters. Right: Provided by AP)

⁵⁴ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng2.htm>.

The First Smoke Nearby

The remaining photos on this roll, which are discussed in more detail below, show soldiers walking and watching smoke rise in the distance. In one of the AP captions, it says, “Vietnamese 25th Division soldiers move out into the paddies near [Trảng Bàng].”



Grouping of negatives showing South Vietnamese soldiers move out into the paddies near Trảng Bàng (Provided by AP)

The Cao Đài temple is visible in the distance, with smoke rising behind it. By cross-referencing these negatives with the Reuters footage, it can be determined that Út was positioned on the north side of the road, having walked into the field and standing further away from the reporters at the barbed wire. This conclusion is based on the matching treelines and structures visible in both Út's photo and the Reuters footage. While the road itself is not visible in Út's photo, it appears in the Reuters footage, which has been stitched together from two frames to provide a wider perspective.



On the left is a color photo attributed to Út, showing South Vietnamese soldiers walking into a paddy field north of Highway 1. On the right is a panorama stitched from two frames of Reuters footage, displaying the same row of trees from the same viewpoint, but positioned slightly closer to the road. (Left: Provided by AP. Right: Frames from Reuters, stitched together by World Press Photo)

The next shot of Reuters footage returns to showing the road. However, based on the negatives, Út remains in the field, positioned further north. This is evident from his photos of the subsequent bombing runs near the Cao Đài temple and his relative position to the temple in those images.



The image on the left is a color photograph attributed to Út, showing South Vietnamese soldiers walking through a paddy field with smoke rising in the background. The image on the right is a close-up crop of that same photo, highlighting dark smoke rising behind the temple and demonstrating that this particular smoke plume was located on the temple's southwest side. (Provided by AP)

A set of three black-and-white negatives from Út's contact sheet, 10 to 12A, capture a similar perspective of the Cao Đài temple as the color photo discussed above.⁵⁵ The first of those three images captures four bombs midair, the second and third show thick black smoke rising southwest of the temple.⁵⁶



Three black-and-white photos attributed to Út show dark smoke rising southwest of the temple. (Provided by AP)

Below is a comparison of two photos, both attributed to Út by the AP, showing how the temple appears from different vantage points — one from Highway 1 near the checkpoint and the other from the field, as seen above. Due to the change in perspective, the two towers appear to be "touching" when viewed from the field. Additionally, note the smaller building in the foreground relative to the temple; from the road, it appears further to the right in relation to the towers, than in the perspective from the field. This vantage point indicates that, at this point, Út is not on the road but in the paddy field.



The crop of a photo on the left shows the temple viewed from Highway 1 near the checkpoint, while the crop of a photo on the right shows the temple viewed from the field to the northeast of Highway 1. (Provided by AP)

⁵⁵ Note that the towers are closer together than when on the road, showing he moved further northeast of the church, off the road.

⁵⁶ <https://newsroom.ap.org/detail/VietnamNapalm1972/e9ea26b1e53e42b18b78f7f3aa6bdd53/photo?Query=trang%20bang&mediaType=photo,video,graphic,audio&sortBy=&dateRange=Anytime&totalCount=138¤tItemNo=22>.

One photo appears to have been taken around this time but is not included on the contact sheet. It was published and credited to AP in an article by Horst Faas.⁵⁷ Although there is no immediate relevance to this analysis, the photo is included for completeness, especially since it remains unclear which AP photographer captured it — but was likely taken by Út as he was the only AP photographer there that day.



Soldiers assist fleeing villagers from Trang Bang while the air strikes go on behind them., June 8, 1972. Photo by AP.

Screenshot of image included in an article by Horst Faas. (AP)

⁵⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20010126155600/https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng2.htm>.

At the Checkpoint

The next photo is taken from a position where civilians, along with vehicles, are watching. This suggests that Út moved from the paddy fields back to the road away to document the scene from a different perspective. The AP caption for this photo says, “Traffic on Rt. 1 comes to a halt after fighting breaks out near [Trảng Bàng].”⁵⁸



This image attributed to Út is taken from a position where civilians, along with vehicles, are watching. This suggests that Út moved from the paddy fields back to the road away to document the scene from a different perspective. The AP original caption says, “Traffic on Rt. 1 comes to a halt after fighting breaks out near [Trảng Bàng].” (Provided by AP)

⁵⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20010126155600/https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng2.htm>.

It appears that Út switched cameras at this point, moving from a zoomed-in shot in black and white to a wider shot on color film. The sequence begins at frame 2A, indicating the start of a new roll. In the black and white photo above, note the man walking closest to the Oldsmobile vehicle. In the color image below, he is seen again, now walking slightly further along. The people standing next to the bus remain visible, as does the man squatting by the roadside, looking toward Út. The other squatting man may be obscured due to a slight change in perspective.



This image shows that Út switched cameras, moving from a zoomed-in shot in black and white to a wider shot on color film. Contrary to the black and white photo above, we see the man previously walking closest to the Oldsmobile vehicle now walking slightly further along. (Provided by AP)

Another Bombing Run

Út then appears to move past the vehicles and closer to the bridge, heading in the direction of the temple — but not crossing the bridge. He switches cameras again, and captures the next two black-and-white images of another bombing run. In these photos, several soldiers are seen standing on a sandbag fortification. A man carrying a piece of cloth or clothing over his shoulder walks past them. Beyond him, the group of reporters closest to the temple are visible.



Images attributed to Út suggest he switched camera again, moved past the vehicles and closer to the bridge while not crossing the bridge and captured another bombing run. Images show several soldiers standing on a sandbag fortification. A person carrying a piece of cloth or clothing over his shoulder walks past them. Beyond him, the group of reporters at the barbed wire are visible. (Provided by AP)

This sequence matches roughly with Faas' report, which says:⁵⁹

About noon the field commander of the Vietnamese troops outside Trảng Bàng asked for additional air support from South Vietnam Airforce units based at Bien Hoa, some 15 miles away. Nick made his way back to [Highway 1], waiting like the soldiers, the travellers caught in their cars in the traffic jam outside Trảng Bàng, and a flock of other reporters for the planes to arrive and perform their bombing runs.

⁵⁹ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng2.htm>. Though, not entirely clear whether this was the sequence of events because Út already captured smoke rising from near the temple before he returned to the road.

Another photo, credited to the Bettmann Archive, captures the same scene as the second photo above, identifiable by the matching smoke pattern.⁶⁰ This photograph was taken from the barbed wire, and no other media personnel are visible between the photographer and the temple.



Image capturing the same bombing run as the second one above taken from the barbed wire and showing no other media personnel are visible between the photographer and the temple. (Bettmann Archive via Getty Images)

Regarding the bombing runs, Faas wrote the following:

*The two Skyraider aircraft of the VNAF bombed the edge of the village, near the Cai Dai pagoda, in a familiar pattern - first explosive bombs, then incendiary bombs - large containers with a mix of explosives, white phosphorus and the black oily napalm - and ending up with heavy machinegun fire during closing strafing runs.*⁶¹

Determining the exact number of bombing runs is challenging due to overlapping factors such as multiple smoke plumes and reports of mortar and artillery fire.⁶²

⁶⁰ That is [515342806](#). There is also, which may have been taken moments earlier or later [515342780](#). Though, for the purpose of this report, placing that photo in the timeline is not necessarily really important.

⁶¹ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng2.htm>.

⁶² Visual evidence from that day indicates at least two smoke plumes before any aircraft are observed. There were at least seven bombing runs, visual evidence shows. Reuters footage captures at least four bombing runs: one to the left of the Cao Đài temple, another behind it, a third suggesting a new overpass with rising smoke, and a fourth again to the left. These four bombing runs are distinct from the three bombing runs visible in other videos and photographs, as described by ITN, underscoring the complexity of accurately counting the total number of airstrikes during that period.

The man walking in Út's photos is a key reference for sequencing the next set of at least 10 color photos, all attributed to Út and arranged in order. In this larger series of color images, the same man appears progressively farther from the photographer, helping establish the timeline. Several of these photos also show journalists standing at the barbed wire, confirming that Út was not positioned there, but others were.



A sequence of 10 color photos attributed to Út and arranged in order showing a man walking in Út's photos and appearing progressively farther from the photographer. This sequencing helps establish the timeline. Several of these photos also show journalists standing at the barbed wire, confirming that Út was not positioned there, but others were. (Provided by AP)

The Last Bombing Run

The final bombing run was carried out by a Skyraider, a propeller-driven plane of the Vietnamese Air Force's 518th Squadron. It dropped four napalm bombs southeast of the Cao Đài temple. This event was captured on video by both the ITN⁶³ and NBC crews⁶⁴ as well as in a photograph taken by Út. The comparison below confirms that this is the same bombing run, as the four bombs — as well as the dissipating smoke from a previous strike — is visible in the images. The helmet seen in the ITN frame belongs to ITN correspondent Wain, as the white triangle on the back of this helmet becomes visible in the subsequent frames.



The final bombing run, carried out by a Skyraider, a propeller-driven plane of the Vietnamese Air Force's 518th Squadron dropping four napalm bombs southeast of the Cao Đài temple. This event was captured on video by both the ITN⁶⁵ and NBC crews⁶⁶ as well as in a photograph taken by Út.

Út has stated before, in at least one interview, that he “had a long lens, so” he “shot pictures of the bombs coming down and the bomb explosions.”⁶⁷

The continuous footage from ITN's cameraman Downes and NBC's cameraman Lê Phúc Định later shows Huỳnh Công Phúc standing closest to the bombing site. Two negatives attributed to Út by the AP⁶⁸ capture this exact moment, confirming that Út was positioned farther back, near the civilians and vehicles. This also makes sense as his previous color and black-and-white photos are taken from around there. Other negatives attributed to Út also depict Huỳnh Công Phúc and a separate group of journalists at the barbed wire.

⁶³ On Getty Images as [1182617625](#).

⁶⁴ In the AP's “Trảng Bàng Timeline,” said to be rarely seen NBC footage, according to AP.

⁶⁵ On Getty Images as [1182617625](#).

⁶⁶ In the AP's “Trảng Bàng Timeline,” said to be rarely seen NBC footage, according to AP.

⁶⁷ <https://petapixel.com/nick-ut-napalm-girl-photojournalist>.

⁶⁸ Specifically frames 32 and 33 on *Ut_BWContact02.jpg*.



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Footage from ITN's cameraman Downes and NBC's cameraman Lê Phúc Định later shows Huỳnh Công Phúc standing closest to the bombing site, beyond the barbed wire. Two negatives attributed to Út by the AP⁷⁰ capture this exact moment, confirming that Út was positioned farther back, near the civilians and vehicles.

Interestingly, Huỳnh Công Phúc, visible in the ITN screenshots above, has been suggested in at least two instances to possibly be Út.⁷¹ However, as discussed in the previous section, Huỳnh Công Phúc and Út, despite their similar clothing and posture, are clearly not the same person. This distinction has also been previously noted by German photojournalist Michael Ebert.⁷²

Út did not capture images of the moments that followed. However, the ITN and NBC footage continued recording, and these sequences can be matched with two photos credited to the Bettmann Archive via Getty Images, as shown in the comparison of the frames and photos below. Note that in the NBC footage, Hoàng Văn Danh can be seen looking into the direction of the cameraman, as Huỳnh Công Phúc looks at his own camera.

⁶⁹ The CCK marking near frame 33 on a Kodak film roll from the 1970s typically indicates the end of the roll, as Kodak often added batch codes or markers at the end of usable frames. This indicates Út appears to have changed the film for that camera after.

⁷⁰ Specifically frames 32 and 33 on *Ut_BWContact02.jpg*.

⁷¹ See "Forensic info for analysis," provided by the VII Foundation via e-mail, p. 6; <https://cherrieswriter.com/2015/08/19/the-napalm-girl>.

⁷² See <https://www.michaelEBERT.de/dozent/vortr%C3%A4ge> and Ebert's presentation, "Did Nick Út take this photo" PDF provided by VII Foundation via email.

NBC



ITN



Bettmann Archive, via Getty Images



Bettmann Archive, via Getty Images



ITN and NBC footage that can be matched with two photos credited to the Bettmann Archive via Getty Images, as shown above.

The voiceover in the ITN footage states, “After a few moments, a group of we press men who’d been watching moved cautiously down the road into the smoke.” Based on the available footage, this appears to refer to Hoàng Văn Danh and Huỳnh Công Phúc, and possibly Alexander D. Shimkin, who can be seen in the NBC footage — identifiable by his fatigue uniform and glasses — running toward the other two reporters. It remains possible that others also moved forward, but this is not captured in the surviving footage.



Footage by NBC showing what appears to be Hoàng Văn Danh and Huỳnh Công Phúc, and Alexander D. Shimkin — identifiable by his fatigue uniform and glasses. (NBC)

First View of Kim Phúc — in the Fields

Both the ITN and NBC footage then cut. When they roll again, Hoàng Văn Danh and Huỳnh Công Phúc are seen running down the road in the direction of the temple. According to AP, this happened about 2 minutes after Út took the photos from the bridge and the napalm bombing.⁷³ In the video footage, we see Kim Phúc, along with other civilians and South Vietnamese soldiers, for the first time. In the ITN footage, she emerges from the smoke behind the blue grave seen in earlier photos and video footage. There are no photos taken by Út, or showing him, in this specific period of time.



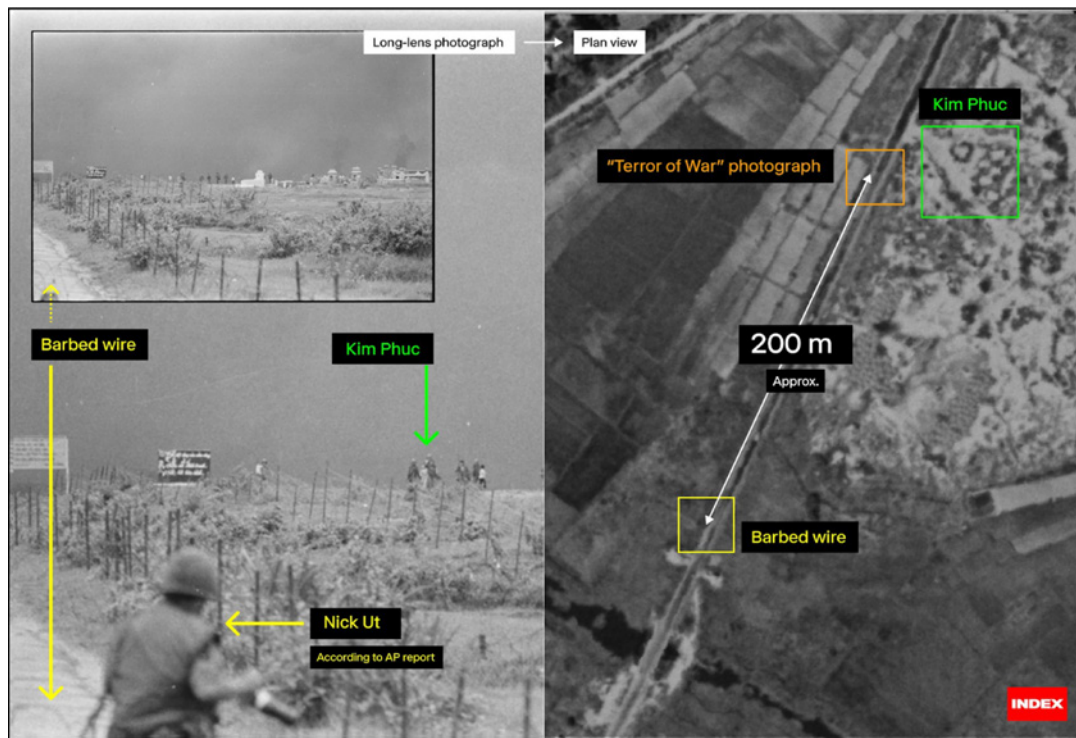
The image on the left shows the original frame from the ITN footage. The image on the right is a cropped version, focused on Kim Phúc. (ITN via Getty Images)

AP, in its updated report, published four previously unseen photos by David Burnett.⁷⁴ The vantage point of these photos is nearly identical to that of the ITN footage, as key visual markers, including lines of fencing and vegetation, align. One image captures an out-of-focus individual, believed to be Út, standing at the barbed wire as the children emerge from the smoke while still in the paddy fields. In response, INDEX placed this photo on a map, concluding that the barbed wire was approximately 200 meters from where the iconic photograph was taken, a measurement this analysis confirms is accurate.⁷⁵

⁷³ [AP updated report](#), p. 21.

⁷⁴ [AP updated report](#), p. 57 and p. 58.

⁷⁵ https://x.com/index_ngo/status/1920866221135646919/photo/2



This composite image by INDEX measures the distance between two key locations. The left panel uses a David Burnett photograph, published in the AP report, to show an individual identified as Nick Ut positioned at the barbed wire line. The right panel uses a satellite plan view to plot this position relative to where The Terror of War photograph was taken. According to INDEX's measurement, the distance between these two points is approximately 200 meters, an estimation this analysis deems correct.

A separate still photograph of nearly this same moment was published in the Bút Thép newspaper on 12 June 1972, and was shared with World Press Photo by the VII Foundation. In addition, two short clips from NBC footage show Kim Phúc and the others getting closer to the road. Consistent visual markers across these visuals — including recognizable vegetation, a specific tree, and a black sign with a white inscription — allow for a comparison of the journalists' positions. This analysis indicates that the photographer for the Bút Thép newspaper and the NBC film crew were both positioned farther up the road, closer to the temple and closer to where the iconic photograph was taken, than the vantage point of Burnett and the ITN crew. The uncredited photograph from Bút Thép could plausibly have been taken by either Nguyễn Thành Nghệ or Huỳnh Công Phúc, as both reportedly sold their work to various media outlets.



A photo that was published alongside a newspaper article in *Bút Thép*, dated 12 June 1972, and shared with World Press Photo by the VII Foundation.



Two frames of the NBC footage, showing Kim Phúc and the others arriving closer to the road. (NBC)

First View of Kim Phúc — on Highway 1

The following photo, credited to Bettmann and attributed to an unknown photographer via Getty Images, marks the first time Kim Phúc is seen on Highway 1. Also visible on the tarmac are her younger brother, Phan Thanh Tâm, on the far left, and her youngest brother, Phan Thanh Phước, who is being guided by a South Vietnamese soldier. Her cousin, Hồ Thị Ting, is also present, while another cousin, Hồ Văn Bon, is still on the grass in the ditch, running toward the road, followed by at least five South Vietnamese soldiers.



First time Kim Phúc is seen on Highway 1 together with her younger brother, Phan Thanh Tâm, on the far left, and her youngest brother, Phan Thanh Phước, who is being guided by a South Vietnamese soldier. Her cousin, Hồ Thị Ting, is also present, while another cousin, Hồ Văn Bon, is still on the grass in the ditch, running toward the road, followed by at least five South Vietnamese soldiers. (Bettmann Archive via Getty Images)

According to the VII Foundation's Terri Lichstein, documentary filmmakers interviewed Hoàng Văn Danh, who stated that he took the first photo of Kim Phúc stepping onto the road. Though he does not appear in the documentary, as they made contact late in the production process, he identified himself and explained the sequence of events. Lichstein noted in an email:

“His is the first photo of the children stepping on the road. He runs out [of] film and he’s rewinding his film in the famous shot. When asked if he saw Nick Út anywhere near him, ‘no, he was in the back.’ He didn’t want to go on camera as he’s suffering [with] cancer.”

It is likely that Hoàng Văn Danh took this photo above, as we know from the ITN and NBC footage that he ran forward, alongside his likely UPI colleague. This movement would have placed him in a position to capture the moment before running out of film — which is indeed visible in the next photo — the iconic photo.



Kim Phúc is in the middle of Highway 1, and Hồ Văn Bon is on the road too, holding Hồ Thị Tịnh's hand. Hoàng Văn Danh, with UPI visible on his helmet, is seen looking at his camera on the right side. (AP)

By now, Kim Phúc is in the middle of Highway 1, and Hồ Văn Bon is on the road too, holding Hồ Thị Tịnh's hand. Hoàng Văn Danh, with UPI visible on his helmet, is seen looking at his camera on the right side. Note the lack of taller bush vegetation on the left side. Based on the other available visuals, it is not possible to locate Út at this moment.

The contact sheet of the iconic photo only contains two frames, 7A and 8A. That means the next photo followed after in time. Based on the two frames — the only ones, 7A and 8A, on this contact sheet — we know the next photo below comes immediately after.



The contact sheet of the famous photo containing two frames (Provided by AP)

Below is the published photo of 8A by AP, ID number 358580258877. The image has been slightly cropped, as in the contact sheet version, Hoàng Văn Danh is still visible on the far right side. In the photo, Kim Phúc continues walking in the middle of the road. Note, again, the lack of taller bush vegetation on the left side.



Cropped photo of the frame right after the famous photo, as published by AP. (AP)

A 3-second clip from NBC captures the next stage in the sequence.⁷⁶ Kim Phúc has moved slightly left on the road, no longer centered, with her cousin, Hồ Thị Ting, now slightly ahead. The positioning of the road signs, the start of the taller vegetation on the left side besides the road, and tarmac patterns confirms that this was filmed only a few meters from the previous scene — and given that the children are running, only seconds later in time.

Crucially, both Hoàng Văn Danh and Huỳnh Công Phúc are now visible on the right side of the frame.⁷⁷ The latter's position aligns very closely with the vantage point from which the iconic photo was taken, raising the possibility that he — not Út or Nghệ — may have been the photographer.



This rarely seen frame of the NBC footage shows the group of children including Kim Phúc running towards the ITN and NBC film crews. They have already passed Hoàng Văn Danh, visible on the far right, as well as Huỳnh Công Phúc. (NBC)

The latter part of the 3-second clip aligns with where the next available ITN footage starts.



The image on the left is a frame from the NBC footage, while the image on the right captures the same moment from the ITN footage. In the ITN shot, the NBC sound person is visible. (Left: NBC. Right: ITN via Getty Images)

⁷⁶ NBC footage.

⁷⁷ Key identifying details include the white object attached to the left side of Hoàng Văn Danh's helmet and Huỳnh Công Phúc's large pouch bag and helmet, which are clearly visible. The others appear to be AVRN soldiers.

Kim Phúc Passes Group of Reporters

The ITN footage then continues and matches up with the NBC footage.



The image on the left is a frame from the NBC footage, and the image on the right shows the same moment in the ITN footage. (Left: NBC via Reuters. Right: ITN via Getty Images)

The ITN footage continues, panning as Kim Phúc and the other children run past the group of journalists. At this point, Christopher Wain becomes visible, standing beside the individual previously referred to as *Unidentified A*. In the background, a distant figure can also be seen — someone whom both the VII Foundation and INDEX have suggested may be Út. According to AP's updated report, they asked Út about this figure, and he acknowledged that it could be him; he did not deny the possibility.



Footage showing the running children from behind with next on the street Christopher Wain and Unidentified A, and further down the street a figure appearing that has been suggested to be Nick Út (ITN via Getty Images)

From the opposite perspective, *Unidentified A* captures the next photograph, showing a group of journalists standing together: Alan Downes, Tom Philips, *Unidentified B*, Trần Văn Thân (Uncle Thân), NBC cameraman Lê Phúc Định, then a small gap, and then Nghệ and Alexander Shimkin, walking the other way.



Photograph by *Unidentified A* showing the running children and the group of journalists (Bettmann via Getty Images)

The NBC footage then shows the children continuing to run toward Wain and *Unidentified A*, who subsequently puts down his camera.



Footage showing children running towards Wain and *Unidentified A* (NBC)

Kim Phúc Gets Water

The ITN footage cuts, and the next photo, via the Bettmann Archive, but credited to UPI,⁷⁸ shows Wain, the ITN correspondent, alongside the ITN soundman Philips. Wain is still wearing his helmet, helping in placing this in the timeline. The two cousins start to appear to break away from the group here.



Photo showing Wain and Philips attending to Kim Phúc, and the other children (Bettmann via Getty Images)

The next photo in the sequence is a black-and-white image taken by David Burnett. World Press Photo does not hold the rights to publish this image, but it has been published in the AP report.⁷⁹ AP states that the photo “was taken on a long lens, shortly after [Burnett] changed his film roll in another camera.”⁸⁰ It captures a calmer moment following the iconic image. In the center, ITN correspondent Christopher Wain and an unidentified man (*Unidentified A*), identifiable by, amongst other visual characteristics, his stills camera and a watch on his left wrist, are seen attending to Kim Phúc, the latter appearing to take out a water bottle. The children, including Kim Phúc and her brothers, are no longer in motion. Lê Phúc Định, the NBC cameraman, and Alexander Shimkin are seen walking away from the group, his camera gear still visible. In the background, several soldiers can be seen approaching along the road. Burnett took this photo while walking toward the group from the checkpoint side of the road, capturing the scene facing the temple direction.

⁷⁸ Specifically in the *Dayton Daily News* newspaper on 8 June 1972.

⁷⁹ [AP updated report](#), p. 60 and p. 70.

⁸⁰ [AP updated report](#), p. 60 and p. 70.

The next cut of the ITN footage shows Kim Phúc getting water, it appears to be *Unidentified A* who is giving the water to her. Note the stills camera around his neck and the watch with the black band on his left wrist.



Footage showing what appears to be Unidentified A to give water to Kim Phúc (ITN via Getty Images)

The footage is continuous, and shows the distant figure, who can now be confidently identified as Út, seen appearing to take a photo.



Footage showing the other children from behind and Nick Út approaching them from the other side (ITN via Getty Images)

This almost exact moment is visible in one of the photos on one of the contact sheets provided by AP. Wain has now taken his helmet off. Note that this image, as well as the next one, have three notches on the side, which will be discussed later.



Negative showing nearly the same moment from the other side (Provided by AP)

The ITN footage shows Wain with a person who is likely *Unidentified A* pouring water over the back of Kim Phúc.



Wain and likely Unidentified A pouring water over Kim Phúc (ITN via Getty Images)

The next four visuals in the sequence are black-and-white photographs taken by David Burnett as he approached the group of children, journalists, and soldiers. As the World Press Photo Foundation does not hold the rights to these images, they are described here only; links to public versions are included in the footnotes. The first three images show Burnett getting closer to the group in each photo; the fourth is a close-up of one of the children, with an angle to the side.

- In the first image,⁸¹ Út is visible on the far left of the frame, identifiable by his helmet and clothing, walking toward the group from the same direction as Burnett — from the checkpoint and barbed wire. Alan Downes is kneeling and filming Kim Phúc, while the individual referred to as Unidentified B appears to be filming Hồ Văn Bon and Hồ Thị Ting, Kim Phúc's cousins. A military figure and NBC cameraman Lê Phúc Dinh are both seen approaching the group from the opposite direction as Burnett.
- In the second image of this sequence,⁸² most likely taken seconds later, Burnett is closer to the group. Út is no longer in frame but is likely still to the left. The soldier and Lê Phúc Dinh are now nearer to the group. Hồ Văn Bon is looking in the direction where Út likely stands. Downes is captured mid-motion, rising to his feet, while *Unidentified B* continues to film in the same direction.
- In the third image of this sequence,⁸³ again most likely taken seconds later, shows Downes now fully upright. *Unidentified B* is still filming, and Christopher Wain continues to attend to Kim Phúc. *Unidentified A* is visible, standing behind Downes.
- For the fourth and final photo in this sequence,⁸⁴ Burnett has turned slightly leftward, capturing a crying Hồ Thị Ting. Út is visible beside her, seemingly taking a photo, likely of the group including Kim Phúc, who are out of frame (see next paragraph). The tree line in the background matches earlier images and video footage. When compared to two stitched frames from Reuters footage, this image helps pinpoint the precise location on the road where this scene occurred.

⁸¹ The photo is visible in a presentation Burnett gave, that was uploaded to YouTube in 2013 by the B&H Photo Video Pro Audio channel: <https://youtu.be/9RRhDd8YWtk?si=-AqisoM4SND1Qz5T&t=253>. The photo has also been published in the [updated AP report](#), p. 74.

⁸² The photo is visible in the same presentation given by Burnett: <https://youtu.be/9RRhDd8YWtk?si=v3Nlg921Hnnleu8k&t=288>.

⁸³ This photo is visible in a number of sources, including in an article written by Burnett in the *Washington Post* (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-apps/imrs.php?src=https://arc-anglerfish-washpost-prod-washpost.s3.amazonaws.com/public/MCECHEVKMAI6DMG2CGQXRGZ4Y&w=1600&h=900>), as well as in a blogpost by Burnett on *Documentary Photography Links*: <https://doculinks.wordpress.com/2012/07/06/david-burnett-napalm-girl>.

⁸⁴ Available in an article by Burnett on *The Digital Journalist*: <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0905/we-re-just-sayin-closing-the-circle.html>, and other places, i.e.: https://blogger.googleusercontent.com/img/b/R29vZ2xl/AVvXsEjHrRXsvgZpinani44LQU3ygUfKDujqkNnlHkJ-vawYJD8QhzWEollfPAyXX7Y8mt7pijFCdmui9pMbv32-ci-cFGTr2vKsfrXtcYa01RQJQQ_qoXosznCh23oyOwR5hXYH0eSg/s1600/3SisterCriesBUR720506_28_05a.jpg.



Reuters, stitched panorama made by World Press Photo.

The following photograph appears to be the last photo of Kim Phúc that is attributed to Út by the AP. Wain is visible without helmet, Philips is visible as soundman, *Unidentified A*, appearing to take a photo, and Burnett is visible, as well as the NBC cameraman, and several apparent South Vietnamese soldiers.



Last photo attributed to Út by the AP, showing Wain, Philips, Kim Phúc, *Unidentified A*, Burnett, NBC cameraman and several South Vietnamese soldiers (Provided by AP)

It's important to note that the photo above was definitely taken by Út, as he can be seen in this position — approaching Kim Phúc — in the sequence of Burnett photos discussed earlier. This corroboration raises an important question: if Út was indeed photographing the scene from this vantage point, where are the rest of the images he reportedly captured? Út has stated that he “took almost a roll of Tri-X film of her,” yet only a limited number of frames have been accounted for publicly.⁸⁵ In its updated report, AP has stated that not all of Út's frames from that day have survived or are accounted for, and that they may have been lost.⁸⁶

A photo of almost the same moment is available via the Bettmann Archive, and appears to have been taken by *Unidentified A*. It shows Út from the front, and Kim Phúc from the side, next to Wain, without a helmet. This is another key photo that determines that the above photo, and therefore the other negative attached to it, were taken by Út.



Photo that appears to have been taken by Unidentified A of Kim Phúc next to Wain and Nick Út behind her. (Bettmann via Getty Images)

According to Burnett, all of this only lasted a few seconds. Reflecting on the scene, he wrote:⁸⁷

The little girl in the picture, who had torn off her burning clothes, was having a canteen of water poured on her burns in an attempt to cool them off. Then a few seconds later, the children began running again, up the road to where the press vehicles were parked.

⁸⁵ <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/leica-gallery-los-angeles-debuts-from-hell-to-hollywood-by-pulitzer-prize-winning-photographer-nick-ut-300830666.html>.

⁸⁶ AP initial report, p. 16.

⁸⁷ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0905/we-re-just-sayin-closing-the-circle.html>.

Guided by Soldier, Kim Phúc Runs toward Checkpoint

Burnett recalled that “very quickly, it’s like, ‘Let’s get the kids out of here,’ and they started running up the road”.⁸⁸ This moment is also captured in a sequence of three black-and-white photographs taken by Burnett, which appear on his website.⁸⁹ These images show Kim Phúc and the other children running toward the military checkpoint, accompanied by a South Vietnamese soldier. As World Press Photo does not hold the rights to these photos, they are only described here and linked in the footnotes.

- In the first image, Kim Phúc and another child pass a soldier who gestures with his arm, pointing toward the checkpoint.
- The second image⁹⁰ shows the children running away from the camera, with a soldier reaching out his hand.
- The third photo is a closer view from behind, the soldier still reaching out his hand, and clearly showing Kim Phúc’s back injuries.

A very similar photo of the children running towards the barbed wire and the checkpoint, along with the soldier, is available on Getty Images via Bettman.⁹¹



The children running towards the barbed wire and the checkpoint, guarded by a soldier. (Bettman via Getty Images)

⁸⁸ https://youtu.be/9RRhDd8YWtk?si=_F0EKc-IMSS7ftQy&t=287.

⁸⁹ <https://www.davidburnett.com/photos/Too%20Close%20UMFA/8/#/>
<https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0905/we-re-just-sayin-closing-the-circle.html>

⁹⁰ The second of these three photos was also included in the updated AP report with the caption, “Kim Phuc, apparently running, is led away from the area by a soldier toward the barbed wire and parked civilian areas.” [AP updated report](#), p. 78.

⁹¹ <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/trang-bang-south-vietnam-original-caption-reads-vietnamese-news-photo/515401834?adppopup=true>.

Grandmother, and Others, Appear on Highway 1

The remainder of Út's outtakes are all of the man laying on the side of the road, Kim Phúc's grandmother with the toddler, and her aunt with the baby, both in color and black and white, all visible below. Below those outtakes, the report will discuss the sequencing of these photos.

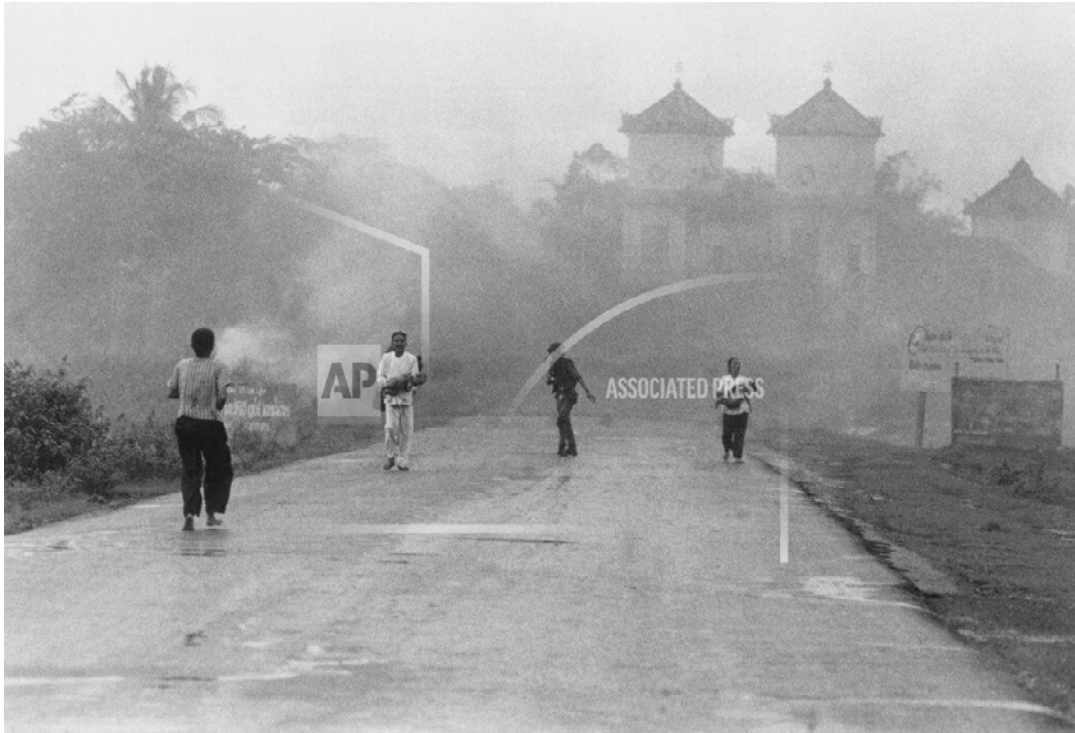
From the direction of the temple, a man and Kim Phúc's grandmother holding Danh, walk down Highway 1. The photo is from the Bettmann Archive, and likely taken by one of the UPI photographers.⁹²



A man and Kim Phúc's grandmother holding Danh, walk down Highway 1 (Bettmann via Getty Images)

⁹² [515575400](#), and it is credited as UPI in the Bennington Banner on 9 June 1972.

The next moment shows the same two people holding the young children, and this is a photo credited to Út that is not part of the contact sheets above, but available via AP,⁹³ that shows Nguyễn Thị Xí from the back, judging from her shirt and trousers, walking towards the temple, and the grandmother, as well as a man with a toddler in his hands, moving away from the temple. It may be that the man is handing the toddler to Nguyễn Thị Xí moments later. In the middle is Hoàng Văn Danh.



From the left, Nguyễn Thị Xí, a man with a toddler in his hands, Hoàng Văn Danh, the grandmother. (Nick Út, AP)

The next images in the sequence are color images taken by Út, showing Nguyễn Thị Xí now holding Cuong, suggesting she received the toddler from the man in the white clothes, who is now seen returning in the direction of the temple. One image before this is the man lying on the side of the road, suggesting he took a photo of him and then moved to photograph the grandmother who was walking towards him. He switches cameras, between color and black and white. These images have not been sequenced as they just show the grandmother and Danh walking from the temple towards the checkpoint.

⁹³ [504720550742](#).

The NBC footage also captures this man lying on the side of the road, and Tào, the grandmother of Kim Phúc, walking towards the checkpoint. In the report, NBC correspondent Arthur Lord says that this man said that “more than fifty men had been wiped out.”



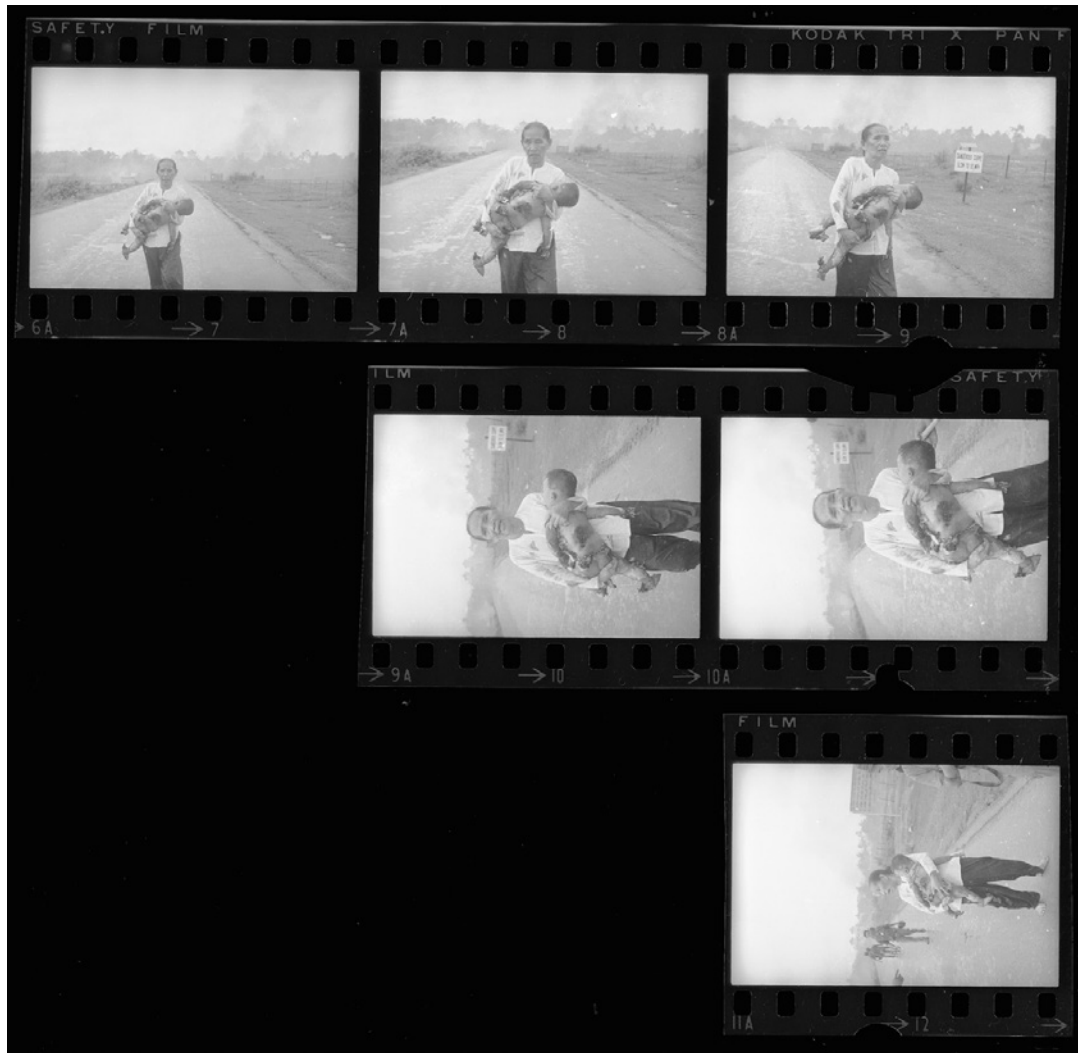
Negative of a man lying on the side of the road. (Nick Út, provided by AP)



From the left, negative of Nguyễn Thị Xí carrying a toddler, and two negatives of the grandmother carrying Danh. (Nick Út, provided by AP)



Several negatives of the grandmother carrying Danh and the man lying on the road. (Nick Út, provided by AP)



Negatives of the grandmother carrying Danh. (Nick Út, provided by AP)

Burnett captured an image of Út taking a photo of Tào, the grandmother of Kim Phúc, as well, showing the perspective of the photos above. World Press Photo does not hold the rights to this photo, but it is available online.⁹⁴ At least two more photos taken by Burnett of the grandmother are available, at least one of which is available online as well.⁹⁵

Burnett wrote online that: “Within another minute or so, out of the distant smoky mist came a man carrying a woman on his back, and a minute after that, an auntie carrying the lifeless body of a burned baby.”⁹⁶

Út captured them in reverse, suggesting Burnett may have been a bit further up the road than Út.

The black and white images end with a man with a girl on his back walking towards the checkpoint, and the unidentified Vietnamese media men with Bolex cameras are filming them too.



Negatives of the grandmother carrying Danh. (Nick Út, provided by AP)

⁹⁴ On the website of Contact Press Images, filename BUR7206_24_08a.jpg, <https://contact.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/David-Burnett-Vietnam-War/G0000q85UwEBhhq8/I0000zvTJNGu3cz8/19>.

⁹⁵ <https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/objects/fatally-burned-child-in-mothers-arms-after-load-of-napalm-canisters-meant-for>.

⁹⁶ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0905/we-re-just-sayin-closing-the-circle.html>.

The ITN footage from Wain's cameraman, shows Tào as she has passed the reporters, walking towards the checkpoint at the bridge where the South Vietnamese soldiers, alongside villagers, gathered at the checkpoint, in that crowd, a small, seemingly naked figure, strongly resembling Kim Phúc, is visible in that crowd, and so are at least two persons strongly resembling — by stature and clothes — one of her younger brothers and her cousin, Hồ Thị Ting.



Film footage showing the grandmother from behind and in the distance as annotated what appears to be Kim Phúc on the left and her younger brother and cousin on the right. (ITN via Getty Images, annotated by World Press Photo)



Zoomed in to the above ITN frame, showing what appears to be Kim Phúc on the left and her younger brother and cousin on the right. (ITN via Getty Images, annotated by World Press Photo)

Út's Movements Based on Visual Timeline

Pre-arrival: Early Morning (approx. 5:00–7:30 a.m.)

At approximately 5:00 a.m. on 8 June 1972, Nick Út left The Associated Press office in Saigon. He packed his camera gear, flak jacket, steel helmet, and field survival kit into an AP minibus — nicknamed “command modules” by correspondents — and set out alone toward Trảng Bàng. Wearing a Vietnamese Marines-style uniform with his name and the word “Press” (Bao Chi) stitched on, Út was tasked with photographing the South Vietnamese units engaged in clearing Highway 1, which had been blocked by North Vietnamese troops. On the road, Út began photographing scenes of civilians and military movement. The first eight frames of his color contact sheet (*Ut_CContact01.jpg*) depict people fleeing the area, ox carts laden with belongings, and a military truck heading in the same direction as him.

Arrival at Trảng Bàng Checkpoint: ~7:30 a.m.

Út reached the checkpoint at a bridge outside of Trảng Bàng at approximately 7:30 a.m., according to Horst Faas's later account. At that point, traffic was at a standstill, with a line of vehicles backed up near the village due to the fighting ahead. Út's photographs depict Highway 1, showing South Vietnamese soldiers and the Cao Đài temple in the distance, as well as a blue and white gravestone from where Kim Phúc would appear later in the day. These early photos mark the transition from documenting displaced civilians to capturing the tense military standoff.

Civilians Fleeing the Fighting

Images attributed to Út show civilians fleeing the fighting near Trảng Bàng — most notably a group that includes four children, two dogs, and several adults carrying belongings. The same group appears in NBC footage just moments earlier. Út's vantage point in these images is near the military checkpoint, positioned behind a line of halted vehicles. The absence of barbed wire in the frame indicates that he was as close to the Cao Đài temple as he would get that day — roughly the same location from which he later photographed Kim Phúc receiving water after the napalm strike.

In the Field Near the Temple (between 7:30 a.m. and noon)

At some point shortly after arriving, Út left his vehicle, introduced himself to a battalion commander, and proceeded into the fields with advancing troops. The following frames in his contact sheet — and in matching Reuters footage — show soldiers moving into paddy fields, framed by a consistent treeline, confirming Út's new vantage point alongside combat personnel.

After entering the paddy fields with the South Vietnamese soldiers, Út remained in the field north of Highway 1 for a period of time, capturing a significant sequence of events. Among the photos he took during this interval were images of the soldiers moving across the fields, the Cao Đài temple in the distance, and notably, the first plumes of smoke rising, likely from combat-related activity. These photographs line up with Reuters footage showing smoke in the distance, suggesting initial artillery or air support was already underway. In one black and white photo, Út captures four bombs midair — a separate photo than the one discussed below. The treelines and positions of structures visible in both his photographs and Reuters footage allow researchers to pinpoint his relative position north of the road. His photos from this period, including several showing thick smoke rising southwest of the temple, reveal he remained slightly further back than some other correspondents, documenting the scene from a rear position in the field.

Bombing Runs (after noon)

Around noon, the airstrikes began. As described by Faas and corroborated by video footage, two Skyraiders of the South Vietnamese Air Force bombed areas near Trảng Bàng using a devastating sequence: first explosive bombs, then incendiaries including napalm, followed by strafing runs. Út has returned to Highway 1, positioned near the checkpoint with civilians and reporters, and captured multiple bombing runs in both black and white and color. One photo shows four bombs falling down, which match footage from both NBC and ITN. This particular strike, which hit southeast of the Cao Đài temple, would prove to be the one that injured Kim Phúc and the other children. Throughout this period, Út alternated cameras and rolls, capturing not only the bomb drops but also soldiers and civilians reacting in real time.

Aftermath of the Final Napalm Strike (after noon)

Immediately after the final napalm bombing, Út did not take any photos of Kim Phúc as she and the other children first emerged from the smoke. Instead, ITN and NBC film crews captured these initial moments, showing Kim Phúc running along the road, visibly burned and screaming. Based on the newly uncovered photo of Burnett, Út ran forward from the bridge to the line of barbed wire. It is believed that Hoàng Văn Danh took the very first still image of the children on the road, including Kim Phúc's first visible appearance on the tarmac. While initially, all visuals did not show Út at the barbed wire around the last bombing run, a new Burnett photo obtained by AP does show an individual most likely to be him there.

Kim Phúc Receives Water and Help

As Kim Phúc reaches a group of reporters, she receives water from Christopher Wain and another Vietnamese journalist (labeled as *Unidentified A*). Út captures a small sequence of images showing journalists and soldiers helping her. In the same moment, he is also seen in photographs taken by David Burnett, confirming his position moving towards the cluster of journalists tending to the injured Kim Phúc. Út appears to photograph from several angles, capturing Kim Phúc from behind and from the side. He reportedly used nearly a full roll of Tri-X black-and-white film during this phase, though at most four images attributed to him of Kim Phúc are currently known to still exist. Burnett later recalled that this entire scene, from Kim Phuc's appearance to her getting help and the continuing to run, unfolded in just seconds.

Children Run Toward Checkpoint (~12:20 PM onward)

Following their brief care, Kim Phúc and the other children — joined by South Vietnamese soldiers — continue running down Highway 1 toward the checkpoint where vehicles and other civilians are gathered. Út does not appear to capture this particular sequence, though it is visible in Burnett's images and NBC footage. The children are seen making out at parked vehicles and soldiers at the far end of the scene.

Aftermath

The final images attributed to Út depict various scenes of the immediate aftermath. These include photos of a man lying injured on the side of the road, an elderly woman (Kim Phúc's grandmother) carrying a child, and an aunt holding the burned body of a baby. These photos appear in both black and white and color, suggesting Út alternated between cameras. Based on Burnett's own recollections, these images were taken shortly after the children passed the journalists, in the moments before the press began departing. In one of Burnett's photos, Út is seen crouched, photographing the grandmother — further confirming the sequence and perspective of the shots attributed to him.

The Camera

For over half a century, every caption and catalogue note repeated the same line: *The Terror of War* was taken on a Leica M2. Nghệ, in contrast, says he used a Pentax. This section sets out the cameras each man says he carried, what the negatives and their notches can and cannot prove, and how the IP's own tests and analysts tip the technical balance from Leica toward Pentax.

Út's Cameras and Lenses on 8 June 1972

In multiple interviews, Út says that he carried four cameras that day that he had received from the AP:

"I had four cameras: two Nikons F, with a 200mm, a 300mm, and a wide-angle lens,⁹⁷ and two Leicas, a M2 and M3."⁹⁸

While Út had previously used different cameras too, including a Nikon M and a Rolleiflex from his later brother, he only carried the four above-mentioned cameras with him on 8 June 1972.⁹⁹

Multiple photos of Út taken in the 1970s show him with a Leica M2 with a self-timer. The Leica M2 and M3 have subtle but notable differences in their body and design,¹⁰⁰ and both cameras below appear to be Leica M2s with a self-timer. The camera underneath the Leica, in both photos, appears to be a Nikon F.

⁹⁷ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng4.htm>.

⁹⁸ <https://www.vietnamwarsummit.org/attend/participants/nickut.html>; <https://lucies.org/jury/nick-ut>; <https://newyork.fotografiska.com/en/events/napalm-girl>; <https://petapixel.com/nick-ut-napalm-girl-photojournalist>. The AP initial report, on p. 6, also stated Út carried four cameras.

⁹⁹ <https://petapixel.com/nick-ut-napalm-girl-photojournalist>.

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance: <https://mrleica.com/leica-m3-vs-leica-m2>; https://www.reddit.com/r/Leica/comments/120dyvy/lets_discuss_m2_or_m3_and_why; https://www.reddit.com/r/Leica/comments/18zoavr/m3_or_m2_which_one_are_you_grabbing_and_why/.



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Photos of Út carrying what appears to be a Leica M2 with a self timer and a Nikon F, taken in the 1970's.

The famous photo, Út has said throughout the decades, was taken with the Leica M2, serial number 1923019, manufactured in 1965,¹⁰³ and a Leitz wide-angle 35mm f/2 Summicron lens with a Kodak 400¹⁰⁴ Tri-X film:¹⁰⁵

“They dropped the napalm around noon. When I first saw the napalm explosion, I didn't think there were any civilians in the village...Then I started to see people come out of the fireball and smoke...As they got closer, I switched to my Leica M2 with a 35mm f/2 lens. First there was a grandmother carrying a baby who died in front of my camera. Then I saw through the viewfinder the naked girl running. I thought, “Oh my god. What happened? The girl has no clothes. I took almost a roll of Tri-x film of her then I saw her skin coming off and I stopped taking pictures.”¹⁰⁶

Leica Camera AG, the German camera manufacturer, has repeated this statement in its own public material, stating that Út used his “beloved Leica to capture ‘Napalm Girl’,”¹⁰⁷ and that “he captured [...] ‘The Terror of War,’ with a Leica M2”.

¹⁰¹ <https://vntravellive.com/em-be-napalm--buc-anh-thay-doi-the-gioi-d30293.html>.

¹⁰² <https://www.watermargin.com/vietret/vietret4.html>.

¹⁰³ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ngtext.htm>.

¹⁰⁴ See the text on display in the London Science Museum, visible in the “Forensic info for analysis” document provided by VII. Also, see: <https://artandglamour.it/en/la-vera-storia-di-napalm-girl>.

¹⁰⁵ <https://digitaljournalist.org/issue0008/ng4.htm>; <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20130726-leica-shoot-to-thrill>; <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/leica-gallery-los-angeles-debuts-from-hell-to-hollywood-by-pulitzer-prize-winning-photographer-nick-ut-300830666.html>; <https://lensmagazine.net/nick-ut-an-exclusive-interview-with-pulitzer-prize-winner>; <https://amateurphotographer.com/latest/photo-news/nick-ut-50-years-on-the-story-of-the-napalm-girl-photo>.

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/leica-gallery-los-angeles-debuts-from-hell-to-hollywood-by-pulitzer-prize-winning-photographer-nick-ut-300830666.html>

¹⁰⁷ <https://leica-camera.blog/2012/09/18/nick-ut-the-amazing-saga-and-the-image-that-helped-end-the-vietnam-war/>

The Notches

A potential clue comes from the three notches visible in two photos definitely taken by Út, which we know were taken by him because we have the opposite perspective that shows he was in this position at that time.



Negatives showing the three notches, marked in red by World Press Photo. (Nick Út, provided by AP)

These notches, often manually added by photographers to the film gate, served as unique identifiers on negatives, helping editors quickly determine which camera was used for a specific photograph. Significantly, the uncropped *The Terror of War* frame and the adjacent frame lack any notches.



The uncropped *The Terror of War* frame and the adjacent frame lacking any notches. (Provided by AP)

Initially, this disparity suggested at least two different cameras were used. Comparing other negatives taken by the two photographers during the same period could help identify which camera was used. However, no other photos on the contact sheets provided by AP show these notches, and no negatives from Nghê are available for comparison.

Nonetheless, if the Leica M2's film gate had exhibited the same triangular notches as those seen on two of Út's other negatives from that day, then the famous image could not have been taken with that Leica. This possibility made the notch clue a meaningful avenue for investigation, at least in the early stages, and was the reason the World Press Photo Foundation attempted to locate Út's Leica M2.

Where Is Út's Camera?

The camera and lens that Út identified as those used to take *The Terror of War* were long on display at the Science Museum in London, having previously been loaned out to the Newseum in Washington, D.C., which closed in 2019. At that time, it was assumed the camera had been returned to the Science Museum. However, a photo posted in 2023 suggested that a Leica M2 was still on display in London — though closer inspection showed it was not the same Leica M2 as the one previously on display. It is now believed that the original camera did not return to the Science Museum, but rather passed into private hands, and that the Leica shown in 2023 was a replacement or placeholder, not the body associated with Út.

	London Science Museum	Newseum
Self-timer	No ¹⁰⁸ 	Yes ¹⁰⁹ 
Lens	No	Yes, 35mm Summicron
Number on top	M2 - 947 279 ¹¹⁰ 	M2 - 1113 835 ¹¹¹ 
Name on back	No ¹¹² 	Yes ¹¹³ 

¹⁰⁸ 2006: https://www.reddit.com/r/Leica/comments/inoaec/leica_m2_london_science_museum_leica_q/#lightbox;

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/81533006@N00/25605223310>.

¹¹⁰ 2006: https://www.reddit.com/r/Leica/comments/inoaec/leica_m2_london_science_museum_leica_q/#lightbox;

2012: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kosalabandara/6904418214>.

¹¹¹ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/81533006@N00/25605223310>; <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rycat/38553184>.

¹¹² https://www.reddit.com/r/Leica/comments/bb7enw/leica_m2_used_by_journalists_to_document_the/#lightbox

¹¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/leica.society/posts/pfbid025WR63M8LFvJHX4K2ULCbYThirckSJ9hoTiA1LUXCBhimHT7ysryHCpUe2mnwBGvul>.

In reply to an email inquiry, the London Science Museum said that they can confirm that the camera used by Út is no longer on display:

“It was loaned to the Science Museum but then recalled some time ago by the owner for display at the Newseum in the US. We are not in contact with the owner and unable to help any further I am afraid.”

The World Press Photo Foundation conducted an online search to find any images of the inside of Út’s Leica M2, hoping to determine whether it had the distinctive notches, without success.

The AP’s Investigation

In response to an emailed inquiry to AP, a spokesperson stated:

“Some of Nick’s camera images bear notches, most do not. This was a practice among some photographers, but we understand that many rejected it as not necessary. These have not, yet, proven to have been helpful in this case.”

This statement indicates that while some of Út’s negatives contain notches, they are not consistently present and may not be a definitive factor in determining the authorship of the photograph.¹¹⁴

In May, in its updated report, AP revealed that they had managed to locate and borrow the Leica M2 purported to have been used, and shot three rolls of film through it. AP concluded that this specific Leica M2 “likely” was not used to have taken the famous photograph. Further testing with additional period cameras, including Nikons and Pentax SLRs, led AP to determine that the frame was likely made by a Pentax, not a Leica.

¹¹⁴ [AP updated report](#), p. 17 and p. 18.

Nghê's Camera and Lens on 8 June 1972

Nghê used a single-reflex Asahi Pentax that day to take the photo, according to Carl Robinson, the former AP employee that was the photo editor on duty that day, and who plays a big role in the documentary.¹¹⁵

The VII Foundation told World Press Photo that this information regarding the camera Nghê was using comes directly from Nghê himself, as told to Gary Knight during the film's research, "a Pentax with 50 mm lens, normal."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ <https://substack.com/inbox/post/156718784>.

¹¹⁶ This was told by the VII Foundation to World Press Photo.

Disputed Memories

Witnesses present at the scene, along with individuals involved in processing the images, have provided contradictory narratives. To clarify these discrepancies, this section will compare their statements with the visual timeline analysis conducted above, aiming to reconstruct a more accurate sequence of events. More than five decades later, memories of that chaotic and traumatic day vary among those who were there, leading to differing recollections of key details.

Who Sprinted Ahead of the Others after the Bombing?

According to David Burnett, Alexander Shimkin and Út sprinted ahead of the others as the children emerged from the smoke.¹¹⁷

Based on the analysis of this report, Shimkin is indeed sprinting ahead of the others. However, he is actually following Hoàng Văn Danh and an unidentified still photographer who, according to the analysis, had a posture and clothing similar to Út's — but was not Út himself.



Visual evidence shows Hoàng Văn Danh, Huỳnh Công Phúc, and Shimkin were closest to the last napalm bombing. (NBC)

¹¹⁷ [AP initial report](#), p. 9.

Were There Only Two People Capturing the Scene?

In a 1989 letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, Arthur Lord — who was NBC's bureau chief in Saigon at the time — made no mention of Nghê. Instead, Lord explicitly stated that besides Út the only other person making visuals was his cameraman, Lê Phúc Định.

Based on the visual analysis of who is present, and what footage is available, we know for a fact there were other videographers and photographers at the site, including the ITN crew and Hoàng Văn Danh, amongst others. This evidence clearly refutes this statement of Lord who, while being on camera at a different scene likely filmed earlier, is not seen in any of the photos or videos at or near the barbed wire.

Who Came First, the Girl or the Grandmother?

Út has repeatedly said that the grandmother came first.¹¹⁸ Butterfield, the NYT reporter, agrees with this sequence of events:¹¹⁹

*I remember looking through my Leica at the boy [in the grandmother's arms] when he died. As I was shooting, I saw in the corner of the viewfinder a girl running with her arms stretched out to the sides. I thought, "Oh my God," and began running at her and shot all of my pictures.*¹²⁰

However, photographer Burnett, ITN correspondent Wain, and *Chicago Tribune* correspondent Kirk, say that Kim Phúc came down the road first, and only later her grandmother holding the child. Burnett said the children ran out first and only after significant time passed — maybe 15 minutes or half an hour — were people walking, instead of running, out of the village, according to the AP report.¹²¹ And in Wain's words:

There was a blast of heat which felt like someone had opened the door of an oven. Then we saw Kim Phúc and the rest of the children. None of them were making any sound at all – until they saw the adults. Then they started to scream.

¹¹⁸ <https://leicagalleryla.com/gallery-view/nick-ut-from-hell-to-hollywood>.

¹¹⁹ The ITN voiceover says, "Almost the first person we saw was a little girl aged about nine, running up the road. She hadn't got any clothes on."

¹²⁰ <https://petapixel.com/nick-ut-napalm-girl-photojournalist>.

¹²¹ AP initial report p. 11.

And in Kirk's words:¹²²

Then, we saw a naked girl and her little brother, their faces contorted in agony and terror, running toward us — away from the smoke, from the napalm the A1 had dropped on the town. South Vietnamese soldiers were firing toward the North Vietnamese, entrenched among trees on the edge of the town. The girl and her brother had escaped, scarred for life but alive and able to flee. I went into the town with an interpreter. On the way, we ran into a woman clutching her baby, burned by the napalm. "My baby is still talking, save him," she implored. Four of her seven children had been scalded.

Based on the visual analysis above, the grandmother came after Kim Phúc, and in this case the recollection of Burnett, Wain and Kirk is correct, while that of Út and Butterfield is not.

Who Dropped Off Nghệ's Film at the AP?

In the documentary, Nghệ claims he personally delivered the film to AP's "big boss," received \$20, two rolls of film, and a print of the photo the next morning.¹²³

However, Thân, Nghệ's brother-in-law and an NBC sound technician, contends that he accompanied Nghệ to the AP office, where he entered to sell the negatives while Nghệ waited outside. BBC Vietnam, in a review of the documentary, also noted this contradiction.¹²⁴

When the documentary makers were asked about this, they said it was not an inconsistency.

Thân offered to take Nghệ as Thân's office was next to AP and he knew the boss there. Nghệ went with Thân and stood outside the door while Thân delivered the film and later received the \$20 and photos and gave them to Nghệ. Nghệ is describing the scene in general terms and Thân is describing it in specific terms in response to Gary Knight's questioning.

While this may not be an entirely satisfactory answer, it does not directly impact the authorship question of the iconic photograph.

¹²² <https://www.nysun.com/article/the-day-i-saw-a-naked-girl-running-from-the-war-and-into-the-history-of-vietnam>.

¹²³ This is said at 44:43 in the documentary.

¹²⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/articles/c0lz94zkxzno>.

Review of the INDEX Analysis¹²⁵

This review evaluates the methodology and claims of the INDEX analysis, as presented in *The Stringer*.¹²⁶ The analysis uses satellite-based geolocation, 3-D distance estimates, and smoke-density timing to sequence the events of 8 June 1972. While this assessment finds that INDEX did not include some key available material and that its 3-D model contains inaccuracies, these limitations do not substantially undermine the central conclusion: that it was highly unlikely Nick Út took *The Terror of War* photograph.

Overview of INDEX's Analysis

INDEX states that its reconstruction draws on “all available photos and videos taken by reporters” at Trảng Bàng on 8 June 1972. The group says it pinpointed where every visual was taken on a November 1972 satellite image, matching landmarks — specifically the temple, the road, and the checkpoint — to establish each camera’s position and orientation.

The first still in which Kim Phúc is visible, INDEX says, shows her stepping onto the road roughly halfway between those two landmarks; by sequencing subsequent frames and the ITN footage as a temporal anchor, accompanied by soldiers and recurring roadside signs, they argue that she continues past a line of assembled reporters toward the checkpoint.

Distinctive helmets, clothing and camera gear visible in both film footage and the still photographs are used to identify individual reporters. According to INDEX, the same identifiers link a figure in the ITN footage to Út. In the key ITN frame that shows both this photographer and Kim Phúc, the team inserts a 3-D model built with ground distances taken from the satellite map and shorter spans measured between reporters visible in successive pans. On that basis they state that there was an “approximately 60 metres” straight-line separation between Út and Kim Phúc at the instant she passed the press group. Because the footage

¹²⁵ The original draft of this report walked through the INDEX material line-by-line, reproducing every voiceover line and the matching visuals, then marking whether this second opinion’s earlier analysis confirmed or contradicted each point, and any other notes. At *The Stringer*’s request, World Press Photo has removed the verbatim quotations and most of the side-by-side visuals; the result therefore is much more compact. Even so, this section aims to retain all substantive judgements and hopes to give the reader a clear, concise sense of where INDEX’s assertions stand.

¹²⁶ The version of the film seen by the World Press Photo was shared in January and February 2025.

shows him still advancing, they conclude he would have been farther away “in all likelihood seconds earlier” when the celebrated image was taken, making his authorship “highly unlikely.”

Finally, INDEX claims that variations in napalm-smoke density across the still images act as a relative clock: denser smoke corresponds to exposures made closer in time to the blast, thinner smoke to images taken minutes later. This metric, they say, shows that photos of Kim Phúc’s grandmother carrying a baby were taken well after the main sequence and were not the first civilians to emerge from the smoke, as Út has claimed.

Assessment of INDEX’s Analysis

Accuracy of Landmark Mapping

The satellite image indeed appears to be the most recent one to have been taken after the event, and is available via the U.S. Geological Survey.¹²⁷ The mapping of the landmarks is correct, and certain distances mentioned, like the first line of reporters at the barbed wire being “about 500 meters” away from the temple, is correct. The locations mentioned are accurate, per this second opinion, and AP does not disagree in the main locations.

Omitted Footage

First, A three-second NBC clip — available in a French documentary, *La petite fille au napalm : histoire d'une photographie*, but not used by INDEX or *The Stringer* — shows a third photographer at the critical vantage point.¹²⁸

Second, David Burnett’s unpublished stills, provided to AP and published in their updated May 2025 report, reveal Kim Phúc before she steps onto the road and also place a person strongly resembling Út at the barbed wire. These images disprove INDEX’s statement that the “first picture” of Kim Phúc is the still when she is on the road, though they do not alter the distance question. INDEX acknowledged this in a statement, and added that the photos “appear to further support the conclusions presented in our analysis”, which this second opinion agrees with.¹²⁹

Lastly, AP’s scans of Út’s contact sheets, made available to World Press Photo, were likewise unavailable to INDEX.

¹²⁷ ID D3C1204-200292A105 on USGS website.

¹²⁸ It’s 00:27:39:20, available at https://www.inamediapro.com/eng/notice/8009149_001.

¹²⁹ https://x.com/index_ngo/status/1920866221135646919/photo/1.

3-D Model Inaccuracies

The 3-D reconstruction contains several inaccuracies that may have enlarged its margin of error. At least three clearly visible people are omitted — and two others go unmarked in a later frame. The road itself is mis-plotted: Hoàng Văn Danh, for instance, who walks on the asphalt in the photograph is presented as standing in the grass in the INDEX model. Roadside vegetation is likewise misplaced; bushes appear to the left of the children and reporters in the 3-D model even though none are present at that spot in the photo — World Press Photo locates those shrubs a bit farther southwest, toward the checkpoint.



On the left is the The Terror of War photograph, and on the right is the corresponding 3-D model created by INDEX and used in their analysis. While the model attempts to reconstruct the positions of individuals, the comparison highlights inaccuracies noted in the critique, including the omission of several visible people who were present in the original photograph, misplacement of the bushes on the right, and one photographer walking on the grass who is actually standing on the road. (Credit left: AP. Credit right: INDEX/The Stringer. Annotations in red on both images by World Press Photo)

The Smoke and Kim Phúc's Grandmother

INDEX's conclusions based on smoke density about Kim Phúc's grandmother coming onto the road later are correct, but with an important caveat: there were multiple bombing runs, and civilians had already been walking from the village towards the checkpoint earlier. So, while the presence of thicker smoke can help indicate timing, it should be used cautiously, as it's not a consistent marker. However, in this case, the smoke is positioned in front of the temple — a detail that didn't occur during every bombing run. Combined with other factors, this supports the conclusion that Kim Phúc's grandmother carrying the baby arrived later.

Evaluation of the Main Claims

Despite the critiques above, the two central arguments of the INDEX analysis largely hold up to scrutiny.

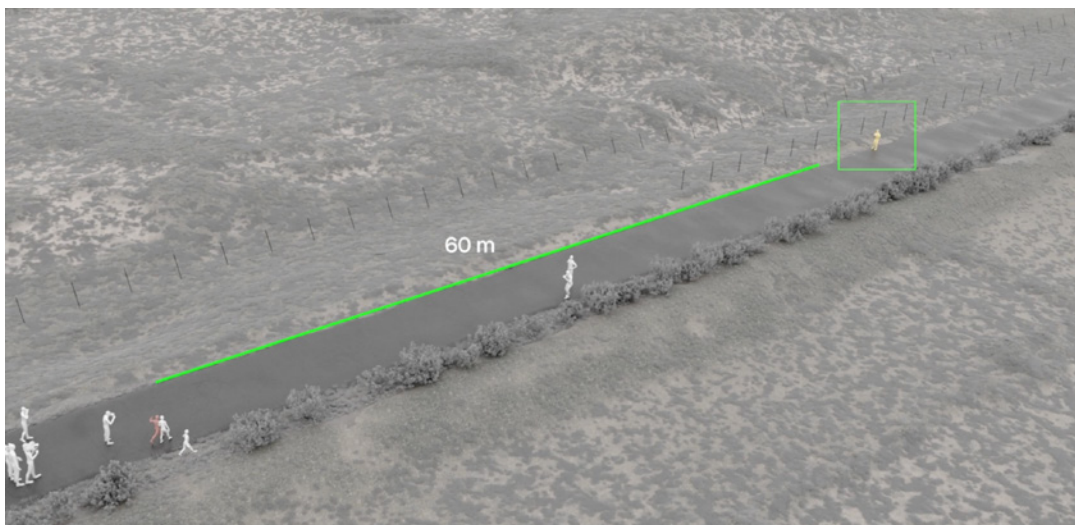
Claim 1: It is highly likely that the photographer who captured *The Terror of War* photograph belongs to the group seen in the photo of the group of reporters.



The INDEX analysis correctly concludes that in the available photo of the group of journalists who were closest at *The Terror of War*'s vantage point, Nghệ is visible, but Út is not. This is a crucial and undisputed observation. However, a degree of uncertainty is introduced by an NBC clip that shows an additional person — Huỳnh Công Phúc — present in the same area. While this proves that not everyone present is visible in the main photo and means Út's presence cannot be definitively ruled out, the primary evidence supports the finding that he was not visibly part of that known group.

Claim 2: The children run past the line of reporters on the road “in all likelihood just seconds” after *The Terror of War* was taken.

A central finding of the INDEX analysis concerns Út's position in ITN news footage filmed after *The Terror of War* was taken. Both INDEX and the subsequent AP report lean towards identifying the distant figure in this footage as Út. The core of the debate, however, is over how far away he was and how much time had elapsed since his famous photograph was captured.



A frame from the INDEX analysis, as visible in *The Stringer*. (Credit: INDEX/*The Stringer*)

The claim from INDEX is that Út was approximately 60 meters away from the fleeing children at the moment he appears in the footage, asserting this occurred “in all likelihood just seconds” after the photo was taken. By contrast, AP, in its updated May 2025 report, challenges the precision of this 60-meter claim. AP argues that a measurement with such specificity cannot be reliably made given the visual limitations of the footage and the unknown focal length of the zoom lens used. AP's own analysis places Út at a distance “between 32.8 and 56 meters, plus a margin of error of 20%.”

While this AP estimate is shorter than the distance suggested in *The Stringer*, it does not alter the main point of the INDEX/*The Stringer* investigation: Út – or as AP says a person that ‘appears to show’ Út – was approaching from the opposite direction, and the available visual evidence places him significantly farther from the scene at the critical moment.

This debate over distance and timing is complicated by a key limitation: a cut in the ITN footage, which creates an unknown gap in the timeline. This makes it difficult to definitively support or refute INDEX's claim that the events were only "just seconds" apart. This uncertainty gives rise to a counter-hypothesis: that Út could have taken the iconic photograph, immediately run back down the road away from the scene, and then been filmed walking calmly back toward the group.

Theoretically, a reasonably fit individual carrying camera equipment could cover 60 meters in 10 to 20 seconds. However, this scenario would require Út to sprint away from the group only to appear composed in the subsequent footage — a sequence of actions considered improbable. While the AP's shorter distance estimate makes this hypothesis slightly more plausible, the possibility remains remote.

Ultimately, while the chance that Út moved back and forth within such a narrow time window cannot be entirely ruled out, it does not alter the main finding. Despite the disagreement on precise measurements, both analyses conclude that Út was most likely approaching from the opposite direction, and the available visual evidence places him significantly farther from the central scene at that moment.

Conclusion

This assessment concludes that the authorship of *The Terror of War* remains unresolved. The traditional attribution to Nick Út is challenged by significant visual evidence that places him farther from the scene than other photographers, and technical evidence, published by AP, suggesting a different camera was used than Út has claimed for decades.

The evidence presents plausible alternatives. The case for Nguyễn Thành Nghệ is strong due to his documented position among the group of frontline reporters and by technical analysis — from both INDEX and, notably, AP — suggesting a Pentax camera was used. However, the question is not a simple binary choice. Another photographer, Huỳnh Công Phúc, is documented in the position closest in time and space to the photo's likely vantage point, making him a credible third possibility.

Ultimately, while there is now substantial and credible reason to question the traditional attribution, the available evidence does not definitively establish a new author. More than 50 years after the event, and with crucial visual records still missing, the identity of the person who captured the iconic image cannot be determined with certainty.

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