



A U.S. Marine who was serving his country on the island of Saipan, during World War II, found a tiny baby who was in desperately bad shape.

W. Eugene Smith took a picture of Johnny Popham holding the child he had found.

Smith (1918-1978) describes what he saw:

Hands trained for killing, gently worked the sod away from the small lopsided head and extricated the infant.

The eyes were sockets of pus, covered with the clinging flies. The head was obviously mashed to one side in its softness, and the little body was covered with scratches—but it was alive, and though death was almost sure, we used precious time to carry it back to the Jeeps for medical care.

... A sergeant started to hand the baby to one of the Japanese women, but she shrank away so violently that it was taken to another Jeep.

Paul White is the other Marine in the picture:

I am the one [at the bottom of the ravine] with the rifle, and a cigarette in my mouth ... The baby was passed to three others until it got to the top.

Life Magazine included this photo in a series which profiled the fatigue of U.S. Marines, during the battle of Saipan, and the vulnerability of Japanese civilians who also had to endure the impact of the fighting.

Robert Sherrod was the writer of the series which was supported by the photography of W. Eugene Smith and Peter Stackpole.

Known, particularly, for his wartime photos, Smith once expressed how he viewed his job:

Photo is a small voice, at best, but sometimes—just sometimes—one photograph or a group of them can lure our senses into awareness. Much depends on the viewer; in some, photographs can summon enough emotion to be a catalyst to thought. (Smith quote included in *Phototherapy and Therapeutic Photography in a Digital Age*, edited by Del Loewenthal, at [page 48](#).)

Historical records are unclear whether this tiny child survived.

Credits:

Photo by W. Eugene Smith, in June of 1944, on the island of Saipan. "*Dying Infant Found by American Soldiers in Saipan*, June 1944, gelatin silver print, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of Will Michels in honor of Anne Wilkes Tucker. © Estate of W. Eugene Smith / Black Star." Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes. [Online via the Corcoran School of the Arts](#).

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