



# The Photographer

## Didier Lefèvre



Qantiwa Anjuman Püštük 1986

Haftassia Ghazni 1988

Kaboul 1992

Kaboul 1994

Bagram Kaboul Charikar 1996

Mashad Dogarun Iran 2000

Saadat Bamiyan Sariangaran 2002

*The Photographer* is a work of stunning originality and power. It seamlessly blends personal storytelling, photography, and illustration to reveal the essential work of Doctors Without Borders and the independent humanitarian medicine its staff practiced at the height of the Soviet-Afghan conflict. Few journalists understood the importance of Afghanistan back in the day - perhaps few still do - and it is to Didier Lefèvre's immense credit that he risked his life to bring that story to light. This amazing work gives us a window into the suffering and perseverance of the Afghan people. Above all else, it is a truly inspiring piece of work.

Sebastian Junger,  
Author of *The Perfect Storm*

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# The Photographer in Afghanistan

In 1986,

during the war between the invading Soviet forces and the Afghan Resistance, Doctors Without Borders asked photojournalist Didier Lefèvre to accompany a medical team to Afghanistan.

After crossing the country with a caravan of Mujahideen, the doctors and nurses set up camp in the Badakhshan region. For three months, Didier covered their activities and photographed the daily lives of Afghan mountain dwellers during the conflict, before risking his life on a journey to return to France.

Years later, he told his story to his friend Emmanuel Guibert, who decided to make a graphic novel of it. In 2003, Dupuis published the first of the three volumes of *The Photographer*, which was a tremendous success in France. In May 2009, First Second Books will publish the American edition.

Didier Lefèvre died on January 29, 2007; he last traveled to Afghanistan in 2006. For a period of twenty years, he returned again and again to the country that had made such an impression on him during his first trip. He saw it all, from 1986 to 2006: the Soviet occupation, struggles between rival clans, the arrival of the Taliban...

After their fall, he lived with the Hazaras in Bamyan, at the foot of their “cursed cliff” where the Taliban destroyed statues of the Buddha.

As Guibert says: “If Didier hadn’t died, he’d probably be roaming the byways of Afghanistan right now, or raring to go.”

“When Doctors Without Borders asked me to go to Afghanistan in 1986, I didn’t hesitate. In hindsight, that journey now seems to have been one of initiation. Since then, I have returned to that country many times...”

Didier Lefèvre



NO, DON'T WORRY, THAT'S AN EFFECT OF THE ANESTHETIC. KEYAMINE CAUSES A DEEP SLEEP, BUT IT DOESN'T PARALYZE MUSCLES AND IT ALLOWS SOME REFLEX MOTIONS.

NO, HE CAN'T SEE A THING.

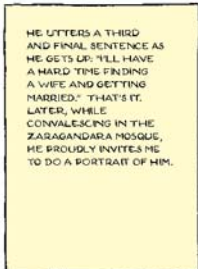
HE REALLY SEEMS TO BE WATCHING US.



ON THE OTHER HAND, WITH HIS EYE OPEN LIKE THAT IT COULD DRY OUT AND CAUSE CORNEAL DAMAGE. THAT'S WHY I'M REGULARLY GIVING HIM SALINE SOLUTION.



AND THE SECOND THING HE ASKS FOR, WHEN HE HAS AWAKENED A BIT MORE, IS TO HAVE HIS RIFLE BROUGHT TO HIM. HE WANTS TO CHECK THAT HE CAN AIM WITH HIS LEFT EYE.



HE UTTERS A THIRD AND FINAL SENTENCE AS HE GETS UP: "I'LL HAVE A HARD TIME FINDING A WIFE AND GETTING MARRIED." THAT'S IT. LATER, WHILE CONVALESCING IN THE ZASAGANDARA MOSQUE, HE PROUDLY INVITES ME TO DO A PORTRAIT OF HIM.



IT TAKES ME A WHILE BEFORE I CAN HANDLE SEEING THIS EYE MOVE AROUND WHILE JOHN, UNFAZED, CONTINUES TO EMPTY OUT THE SOCKET NEXT TO IT.

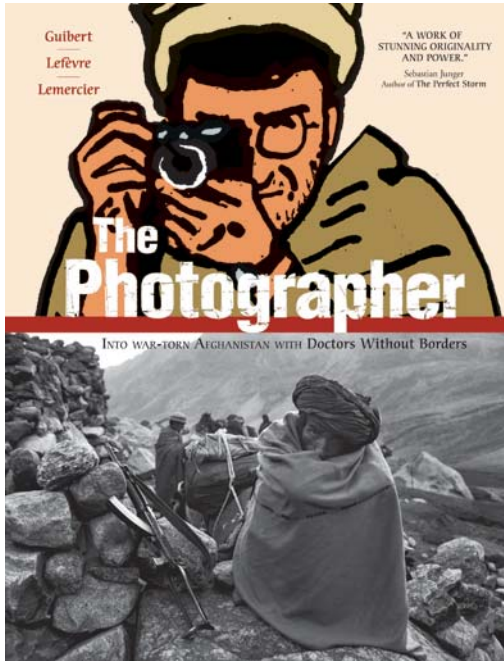


THE OPERATION IS COMPLETED. THE PATIENT'S WOUND IS DRESSED, AND HIS HEAD WRAPPED IN A BANDAGE AGAIN. IN THE MORNING HE EMERGES. HE IS ZOOF, AS THE AFGHANS SAY, GROGGY.

THE FIRST PERSON HE SEES IS HIS FATHER, WHO HAS NOT LEFT HIS BEDSIDE FOR A MINUTE. IN A BLURRED VOICE, THE MAN ASKS REGS, "DID YOU GIVE MY FATHER SOME TEA?"



THE MOSQUE IS USED AS AN ANNEX TO THE HOSPITAL FOR RECOVERING PATIENTS OR THOSE AWAITING TREATMENT. IT COULDN'T BE MORE BASIC: A DOOR, A CENTRAL WOODEN PILLAR, A FEW RECESSES IN THE WALLS, SOME CALLIGRAPHIES, AND STRAW AND CARPETS ON THE FLOOR. IT SERVES AS THE VILAGE HALL.



# The Photographer in the U.S.

In May 2009,

First Second Books will publish *The Photographer* in the U.S.

*The Photographer* recounts the real-life odyssey of a Doctors Without Borders team in the Soviet-occupied Afghanistan of 1986, as documented by Didier Lefèvre, an eminent French photojournalist. Didier is the book's narrator, and Emmanuel Guibert (author of *Alan's War*) the writer and artist. Graphic designer Frédéric Lemercier is responsible for colors and design.

*The Photographer* uses a groundbreaking combination of photo-essay and graphic novel narrative to tell a tale rich in reportage and human feeling. Didier Lefèvre's photos and account have attracted a great deal of attention from the media and general public. An incredible success since its initial publication in 2003, the book has sold 260,000 copies in France and been translated into eleven languages.

In concert with *The Photographer's* U.S. launch, we wish to organize an exhibit showcasing 20 years of Didier Lefèvre's work in Afghanistan. To this end, we have partnered with Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières, and actively seek other partners.

In this press kit, you will find all the information you need to organize an exhibit.

We would be delighted to respond to any questions or proposals at the follow address:  
c/o Jean-François Berville  
jf.berville@free.fr  
+33 1 42 60 86 35  
Paris, France

For all questions concerning the American edition of *The Photographer*, please contact:  
Gina Gagliano  
First Second Books  
646.307.5388  
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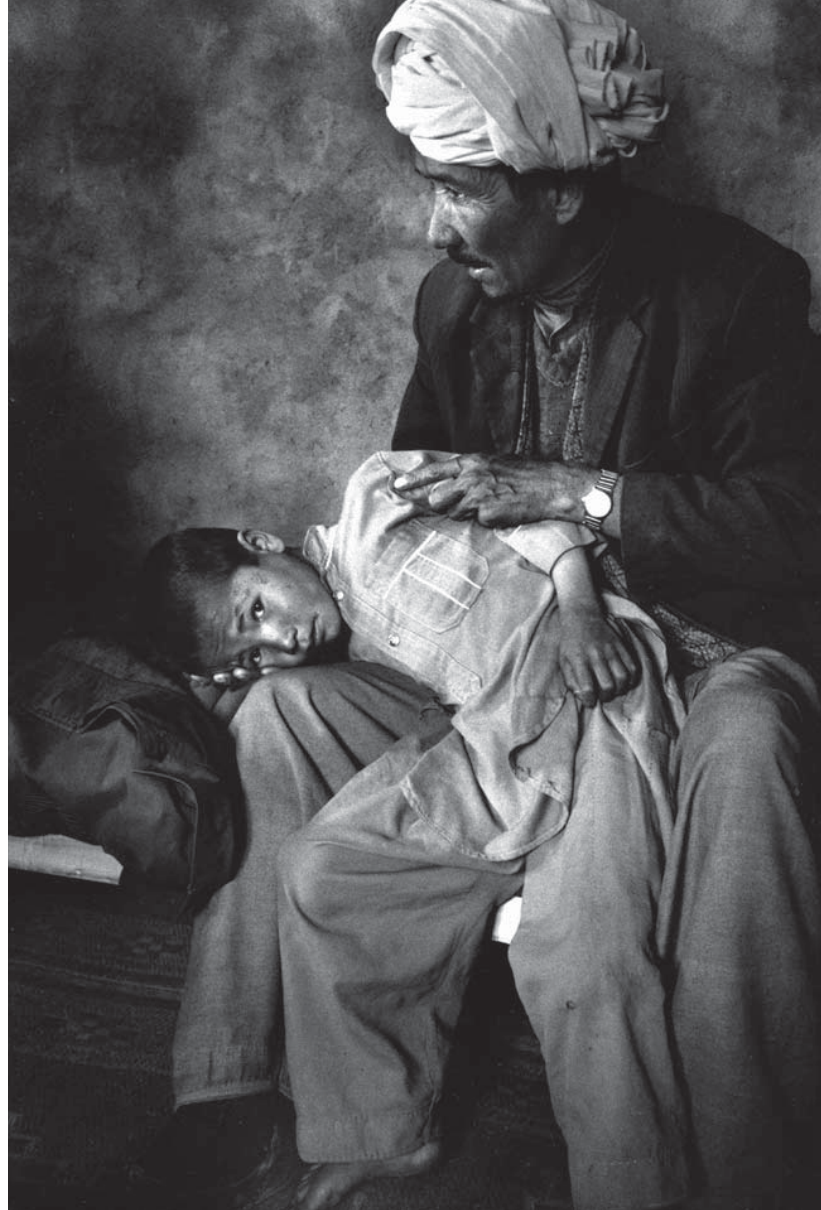


# Photographs by Didier Lefèvre



**Kabul, 1994.** Kabul is divided by the frontline between two enemies, fundamentalist Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Massoud, who has failed to establish peace in the city since 1992. Stray bullets go whistling by nonstop. Children roam the ruins searching for food. Nothing is wasted, everything reused. This boy has found a portrait of Hekmatyar.

**Haftassia, 1988.** Afghan men, including those who look the most brutal, behave like mothers toward their children. They demonstrate their love in a very physical and tender way, checking that their children aren't cold, straightening their hats, and so on.





**Kabul, 1996.** Downtown Kabul was completely destroyed in 1994, during the struggle between pro- and anti-Massoud factions.

**Kabul, 1996.** In front of the Pul-e Khishti mosque, the Taliban “encourage” passersby to Friday prayer by hitting them with sticks and threatening punishment.

**Kabul, 1992.** General Dostum’s militia. He changed sides a few days before the Najibullah’s defeat (President of Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation). His men have a reputation for cruelty.





**Mashad, Iran, 2000.** Hazaran refugees. Faced with the influx of refugees from Afghanistan, Iran decides to close its borders and send as many back as possible. Those who return to war and famine do so “voluntarily”: the only choice they have left, given worsening living conditions in Iran (police pressure, xenophobia, social and economic marginalization). At the same time, illegal immigrants are on the rise, fleeing the Taliban’s repressive measures, which look very much like the beginnings of genocide.

**Bamiyan, 2002.** Taliban prisoners at the foot of the Buddha statues they destroyed several months earlier. In local legend, the two giant Buddhas represented the first Hazarans. Their destruction is a confession...





JE MARCHE RAECUÏMENT,  
L'ESPAIR PLOMBÉ ET JE NE  
PRENDS AUCUNE PHOTO.



# The Photographer: The Book

I had a hundred reasons to like Didier Lefèvre. One of them was that he was a good photographer. Another was that he was a good storyteller. Ever since the very first time I heard him tell me one of his stories, using his contact sheets to illustrate his tale, I wanted us to do a book together, with the help of Frédéric Lemerrier.

I had a hunch that a story that made use of contact sheets and allowed readers to linger over them, savoring all their capacity for expression, would be as interesting for them as those afternoons I spent working on the book had been for me.

I came up with this graphic novel to make Didier's voice heard, to fill in the gaps between the photos with story, and let him tell about events that he was unable to photograph for one reason or another.

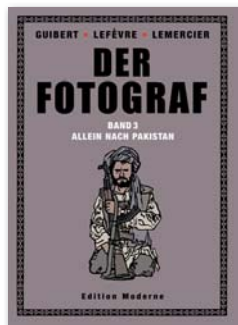
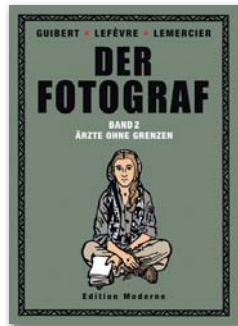
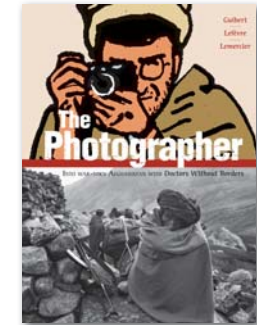
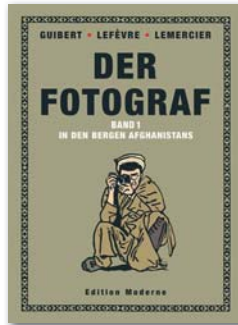
All this toward showing something rarely seen in great detail: reportage in the making, the daily life of a humanitarian mission, the fate of a mountain people caught up in war.

Emmanuel Guibert

## When

a photojournalist goes on assignment into a war zone, he brings back hundreds of photos, and as many anecdotes. Of these hundreds, a few dozen are printed, four or five sold to the press, and the rest, on contact sheets, end up boxed away. If he likes telling stories, the photographer tells a few to his friends and family. Then life goes on; other assignments, other photos, and other anecdotes push earlier ones aside, and memory, too, likes to box things away. This is how stories are put to rest. The number of beautiful stories slumbering away, like princesses in enchanted castles, is infinite. Comics are a way of waking them again.

# The Photographer around the World



The Photographer has appeared in 8 languages: German, French, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish, Portuguese (Brazilian), and Spanish. In 2009, it will appear in English, Korean, and Croatian.

# The Photographer: The Exhibition



The exhibit “Afghanistan, 1986-2002” gathers 37 prints of 40x50cm each on 50x65cm picture mounts. Choice of frame is left to the curator.

The organization of a new exhibit is a possibility.

The prints were made by Alain Bujak of Demi-Teinte Studios in Paris.

The exhibit was first produced in 2007 by the Center for Photography in Lectoure (France).



# The Life of The Photographer

## Didier

Lefèvre was born on July 14, 1957. After getting a degree as a pharmaceutical biologist, he completed his first assignment as a photojournalist for Doctors Without Borders in 1984. He was represented by the VU Agency from 1989 to 1993, and then pursued his career independently.

Didier liked to revisit places he'd been before and spend time there observing the changes and catching up with people he'd known. Over a twenty-year period he revisited Afghanistan, as well as Cambodia and Malawi, where from 2001 he followed the fight against AIDS. In Kosovo, he traced the fate from 1999 onwards of Ljubenic, a village that, despite the tranquil rhythms of rural life, lived with the oppressive memory of massacre. The first Sunday of every April found him shuttling between Paris and Roubaix, along the route of the famous French bike race.

Didier himself financed the most demanding expeditions with his meagre savings, never waiting for proposals from the press. A typical experience: one day he pitched a story on Afghan refugees in Iran only to hear: "Sorry, we just did a story on the Palestinians..."

Didier had nothing to do with that kind of media. He didn't need anyone else's encouragement to be curious about the world around him. Anything could excite him: toreros, Doctors Without Borders, firefighters, marionnettes, natives of Bougainville Island, young farmers of Eastern Europe, Ethiopian world champion runners, volunteers from an NGO who'd withdrawn from French society and learned to work the land.

Didier Lefèvre died of a heart attack on January 29, 2007. He is missed.

To see the photographs of Didier Lefèvre,  
visit here :

<http://www.imagesandco.com/photographe.php?photographe=1>

"I remember what a woman farmer once exclaimed to Didier during a story we were covering together in Burundi: 'You're pretty unique for a reporter; you're more like a normal human being.'"

Florence Aubenas, journalist  
*Le Nouvel Observateur*, January 30, 2007



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“Taking a good photo is a real struggle. It’s a mistake to think that you’ll get good photos just by going to a war.”

Didier Lefèvre