

# 1981

**Written to be the Introduction to a book in the Wisconsin/Warner Bros Screenplay Series, General Editor Tino Balio, published by the University of Wisconsin Press. These volumes reproduced classic Warner Bros scripts from the Warner Bros Archive at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research with scholarly apparatus. Between the commissioning of this volume and its completion the series was cancelled. The script itself and associated stills cannot be reproduced without copyright permission. Since the piece was written, Warner Bros post-production files have been acquired by the Cinema Studies Library of the University of Southern California. It is likely that they close some of the questions here raised about the final form of the film.**

## INTRODUCTION

### The Politics of the War Film

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1. The Evolution of the Screenplay
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Objective Burma has both intrinsic and extrinsic interest to students of the motion picture. Intrinsically, it is a fine example of sustained and unrelieved treatment of combat within the restrictions of the war film genre. There is much to be learned from studying how the final screenplay emerged from the work of three writers and their producer, and from the further changes made by the director, technical advisor, and film editor during production and post-production. Initial confusion of aims is resolved as the option of a clean and unencumbered line of action is chosen. This enables the writers to clear sub-plots out of the excessively long draft screenplay and encourages further honing down during shooting and editing.

Extrinsically this film is interesting because of its politics. Two of the writers (Alvah Bessie and Lester Cole) had Communist sympathies, and the action was set in what was part of the late British Empire. Although Britain was an ally, American policy was not in favor of the continuation of the British Empire. Having American troops (albeit led by Errol Flynn - an Australian actor with a British accent) apparently spearhead the liberation of Burma, when in truth few Americans were involved in that combat, was politically risky. Not perhaps domestically, where aggrandization of the American role in the war was possibly congenial, and where anti-colonial and hence subtly anti-British sentiments were hardly unknown. Abroad was another matter. When shown in London Objective Burma brought to a boil a long-simmering sense of dissatisfaction that the British press had been expressing about American war films. The complaint was that American war films slighted the British role in the war and sometimes even appropriated credit to America for British achievements. In this Introduction it will be argued that these wider, seemingly extrinsic, political matters subtly permeate the production process as well as the post-release fate of the film.

## 1. The Evolution of the Screenplay

J. Douglas Gomery has argued<sup>1</sup> that control of production at Warner Bros was highly centralized during the nineteen-thirties and -forties, flowing mainly from the office of Jack L. Warner himself. Warner's associate Hal B. Wallis was the person most producers dealt with.<sup>2</sup> However, Jerry Wald, the producer of Objective Burma, seems to have been an exception to every rule and to have by-passed Wallis to deal directly with Warner. This is indicated by Wald's letter of January 26, 1945 (at Appendix B) written after the release of Objective Burma, which thanks Warner for his support and encouragement of the project. Wallis seems to have played no role in it at all.

Jerry Wald was brought to Hollywood in 1933 together with his writing partner Paul F. Moss. He was only 22. His Warner Bros employment records show that by the following year he was earning \$300 per week. While his employment was intermittent, his salary rose steadily during the 'thirties until he was promoted to supervisor in 1941, at \$1,000 per week. He made producer in 1943, at \$1,250 per week.<sup>3</sup> The difference between "supervisor" and "producer" seems to have turned on whether an individual was in charge of only one or of several projects at a time. Wald stayed at Warner Bros until 1950, by which time his salary was \$2,700 per week. After a successful decade as an interesting and adventurous independent producer,<sup>4</sup> he died suddenly in 1962.

Production number 629, Objective Burma, appears to have been Wald's idea:

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<sup>1</sup> See his "Introduction" to the High Sierra volume of the Wisconsin/Warner Bros Screenplay Series (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Confirmed by the account in Hal Wallis and Charles Higham, Starmaker, The Autobiography of Hal Wallis, New York: MacMillan, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> His other films around this time include Action in the North Atlantic (1943), Destination Tokyo (1943), Background to Danger (1943), The Very Thought of You (1944), In Our Time (1944), Pride of the Marines (1945) and Mildred Pierce (1945) - the latter also in the Wisconsin/Warner Series, edited by Albert J. LaValley.

<sup>4</sup> Leslie Halliwell, in The Filmgoer's Companion, London: Granada 1977, alleges that Wald was the original for the portrait of Sammy Glick in Budd Schulberg's What Makes Sammy Run? (1941). Notable Wald productions after he left Warner Bros were Clash By Night (1952); Queen Bee (1955); Peyton Place (1957); The Sound and the Fury (1958); Sons and Lovers (1960).

...Wald called me in and said, "I was talking to some guys at my house last night, and they told me what a wonderful job the paratroops are doing in Burma."

My job was to go back to my office and work up an original story for Errol Flynn. So you call up the research department and ask them to send over everything they have on the war in Burma.

And it does not take more than an hour's reading to discover that the war in Burma is strictly a British operation, so you call up your producer and say, "Look, Jerry, there are no American troops in Burma," and he says, "So what? It's only a moving picture."

You protest that an American invasion of Burma will get you laughed off the screen, and he says, "So, look, put in some British liaison officers and stop worrying."

So I put in some British liaison officers (and I also put in a Jewish lieutenant named Jacobs), and this story was written in relatively record time -- nineteen days -- and it was a good action story, if you don't mind the fact that Burma was a British show and was not commanded by Errol Flynn. (A lot of people did mind, including an entire theatre full of people in London, who threw things at the screen and tore up the seats until the film was withdrawn from distribution.)

This is the story as Alvah Bessie recalls it in his memoirs.<sup>5</sup> To expand and correct his account let us work our way through the files on the screenplay at Wisconsin.

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<sup>5</sup> Alvah Bessie, Inquisition in Eden, New York: Macmillan 1965, pp. 79-80.

**OBJECTIVE BURMA:  
THE EVOLUTION OF THE SCREENPLAY**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Author/s and Title</b>
7 January 1944	Bessie's First Treatment 18pp
8 January 1944	Wald's Story Outline 5pp
12 January 1944	Bessie's Original Story 51pp
4 February 1944- 21 March 1944	McDougall's Temporary 215pp
8 March 1944	Story Outline from Conference Notes 10pp
4-14 April 1944	McDougall and Cole's Revised Temporary 155pp
15 April 1944	McDougall and Cole's Final 164pp
22 April 1944 - 12 September 1944	McDougall and Cole's Revised Final 159pp <sup>6</sup>

Bessie's First Treatment. The Wisconsin materials begin with an eighteen page Treatment by Bessie, dated January 7, 1944 and entitled Burma Objective.<sup>7</sup>

Rolling titles describe the picture as about a small group of unsung heroes, "American paratroops who are struggling with the Japanese enemy in the steaming jungles of the Orient." What we are about to see they consider "all in a day's work." An air view of the Burmese jungle is followed by a lone airplane landing at an advanced base. The wise-cracking Gabby, the Chinese liaison, Major Li (who has never Jumped), and Captain Nelson, "who fought in Spain" are introduced.<sup>8</sup> At a briefing it is disclosed that they will parachute behind enemy

<sup>6</sup> In fact the final numbered page is 159A, and there is an unnumbered Additional Scene page. The compression of several pages into one, and the use of supplementary letters after numbers makes the final count of pages 181.

<sup>7</sup> Prior to testifying before the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities, being jailed for contempt of Congress and subsequently being blacklisted, Bessie had published two novels, and been credited for work on the screenplays of Northern Pursuit (1943), The Very Thought of You (1944), Objective Burma (1945), Hotel Berlin (1945) and Smart Woman (1948).

<sup>8</sup> Alvah Bessie had been Company Adjutant, 2nd Company, Abraham Lincoln Battalion, XV International Brigade, according to a photograph caption between pp. 128-9 in Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, The Inquisition in Hollywood, New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1980. In

lines, blow up an ammunition dump and then be evacuated by plane. As in all subsequent drafts, no plausible explanation is given as to why the demolition cannot be accomplished by bombing.

Bessie envisaged his paratroop unit is an ethnic cross-section of America: “Gabby Gordon, the clown; Curry the ex-truckdriver; Mangione, the kid who wanted to be a pilot and is nuts about planes; Adams, who used to be a Boy Scout; Wishniak, the walkie-talkie operator, who is a swing addict; Fish the first-aid man (who is scared stiff); Hooper, the demolition expert, who hoped to build things, not destroy them.”

During the march towards the objective Bessie includes a peculiar incident: encountering a Japanese patrol of four, the group kills two and captures two. They then debate and vote about what to do, decide on killing them, which Major Li volunteers to undertake, first explaining himself to the Japanese. “The men are awed by what has happened -- and Fish, the first-aid man is revolted” and promptly (in the jungle 100 miles behind the lines!) deserts. His first action is to mark the grave of a fallen comrade with a cross; Nelson had refused to do so in case it gave their presence away. The cross does give them away.

After successfully blowing up the dump Nelson is discovered to be wounded and insists that he be left behind. Here again the men vote to refuse his demand. Fish, the deserter, finds the mutilated corpse of a paratrooper and has a change of heart.

In a flurry of action they reach their rendezvous with the plane, realize the Japanese have spotted them, warn off the pilot, are rejoined by the deserter, and hastily retreat into the jungle. There they find a shot down P-38 pilot, starving and thirsty, “Lt. Rocky Shore -- one time famous football quarterback from Notre Dame, and a national hero.” They begin a march towards the border and have to learn to live off the jungle while carrying both Nelson and Shore. There is a shootout with the Japanese at a temple, during which Major Li sacrifices himself. They construct a raft and cross a swift river during which Fish, shielding Nelson with his body, is killed. Burying him, Nelson says:

NELSON:

I’m no good at prayers. Never believed in them...

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Casablanca (Warner Bros 1942, writer Howard Koch), Rick, the character played by Humphrey Bogart, is identified as having run arms for the Spanish loyalists.

The men are spotted by an American observation plane and, on the final trek to base are carried on the backs of “native head hunters.” When Nelson offers them a money reward their chief replies:

INTERPRETER:

He says once we were his masters; now we are  
his allies. He says a slave can accept money, but  
one man who is equal to another cannot accept  
money for a favor.

Asked for his report, Nelson describes the mission as “routine.” Another group of paratroopers is preparing to leave on a similar mission.

Bessie had laid out a basic behind-the-lines caper plot, using characters “typical” of America. Little concern with the techniques of paratrooping or the credibility of the action is displayed. But themes of human brotherhood, the world-wide struggle against fascism, and democratic decision-making are present.

The quality of mind revealed in Bessie’s Treatment needs comment. On one hand the utter banality of the characterizations: not only the stereotyped slice through a few American ethnic groups, but also the sentimental projection of self into Nelson; on the other, earnest attempts to justify the war as part of the global anti-fascist struggle (this was the Communist line on the war after Hitler’s violation of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact) and heavy-handed emphasis on the unit, i.e., our side, being run by democratic procedures. Faced with Wald’s charge, Bessie has tried to insert his preoccupations as a left-wing radical into what he conceives to be the formulas of the war film. By 1944 several of these formulas have been laid out: the last ditch stand (Bataan [1943], Wake Island [1942]); the set-piece battle (Guadalcanal Diary [1943], They Were Expendable [1945]); glorifying a branch of the service (Gung Ho [1943], Air Force [1943]); adventures on furlough (Swing Shift Maisie [1943], This is the Army [1943] Hollywood Canteen [1944]); moulding civilians into soldiers (Gung Ho [1943]; Corvette K-225 [1943]). Burma Objective loads the behind-the-lines-caper formula with incidents intended to make didactic points. The Chinese, Captain Li, is a philosophical poet, but invokes the legitimacy of China’s long struggle against Japan as his excuse for being able to kill (our allies may have more just anger than us). Fear can be

overcome when the cause is just. (The deserter has a change of heart.) Hard decisions are best taken by the group (votes). Former colonial subjects will join in the struggle against the common enemy, not for money but for justice.

Bessie, then, strives to do serious work in popular cinematic form, but his imagination is not up to it. The men are stereotypes, not characters; the story has no shape, development, or resolution. The messages are inserted awkwardly and in a preachy way. What will become a central preoccupation of the finished film, the techniques of drop and supply of paratroopers, is not present at all.

In telling Bessie what a great job “our” paratroopers in Burma were doing Wald may have been mixing up hearsay on several topics. Behind the lines operations in Burma had been begun by the British Chindits under Orde Wingate. They walked into battle but were supplied by air. At the Quadrant Conference in Quebec in 1943 the American Chiefs of Staff were so impressed by Wingate’s Long Range Penetration Group “that they decided to provide American jungle trained troops to form part of his organisation. Before the end of the conference, they had called for volunteers for this purpose... . Some 3,000 men were formed into the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional), which later became known as Merrill’s Marauders.”<sup>9</sup> In the 11 months of its operations, this group flew in gliders and was also supplied by air. OSS also had a secret unit operating continuously behind enemy lines, organising Kachin guerillas, usually parachuted in and supplied by air. Little information on these groups was released to the general public but one wonders whether Bessie ever thought about what jobs paratroops are used for and the implausibility of the mission he had imagined for them.

Wald’s Story Outline 8 January 1944. One day later, on January 8th, Jerry Wald himself files a five-page story outline entitled “Objective--Burma.” As a motto it has:

In 1941, General Stilwell retreated from Burma.

He said, “We took a hell of a beating, but we’ll be back.”

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<sup>9</sup> S. Woodburn Kirby, The War Against Japan, volume II, India's Most Dangerous Hour (History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Military Series), London: HMSO, 1958, p. 421.

This is the story of the men who went  
back.

Again led by Nelson--"a giant of a man, with tremendous energy, courage and resourcefulness, appears almost as a demi-god to the raw youth from America and Britain." Under Mountbatten's orders, the group is to sabotage, destroy and sow confusion among the Japanese forces. Stressing the hardships of the jungle as much as the danger of the enemy, the outline has the men wiping out ammunition dumps, outposts, airfields and hangars, meanwhile gathering information for bombing raids that "probably staved off an invasion of India."

Achieving surprise at their main objective, the ammunition dump, the men head for the rendezvous with the plane but the supply drop is aborted by Japanese ambush. Nelson teaches them to live off the jungle. They finally elude the Japanese by building rafts to float down the Irrawaddy river.

It is quite possible that this Wald document was the first filing, and that Bessie was busy expanding on it, because although Bessie's treatment is dated January 7th, in the top corner it is marked "recd 1/10/44." Yet Wald's is on a grand scale, an epic march with much incident, far more obviously based on the exploits of Merrill's Marauders than Bessie's story of a routine paratroop operation. Wald wants his group to be making a difference in the war, Bessie wants the men plugging away at their job. A paragraph in Wald points ahead to something that will be extensively developed, that this war is fought with two principal weapons, the radio and the airplane.

Logically, the fundamental problem of any script is its point of view, the angle from which the story is viewed. Wald and Bessie have produced conflicting outlines, one looking at the war as a matter of professionalism and survival, the other viewing it as an heroic crusade. For both, the ammunition dump/radar station, or whatever it is the paratroopers seek to destroy, is what Hitchcock calls the MacGuffin.<sup>10</sup> This is the plot pretext about which the characters care, but the film maker should not. War, which is a series of related events on a massive scale, needs humanising and miniaturising if it is to be dramatised. The small unit pursuing the MacGuffin does both jobs. But then, how to enter the story, from what angle of

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<sup>10</sup> See François Truffaut, Hitchcock, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967, pp. 98-100.

view to show it? Bessie's Nelson and the other characters have to make speeches, to inform the audience of the point of view they should take; they, in a way, address us.<sup>11</sup> In Wald's more technically oriented story it is sufficient for us to look over the shoulders of the paratroopers as they go about their business. We the audience are invisible, not a presence to be addressed. In saying these two points of view conflict I do not make the strong assertion that they are contradictory and cannot be combined, merely that they do not sit naturally together.

The politics of the war enter this war film. War films have usually favored the ubiquitous, all-seeing point of view as they try to situate the story -- the audience is made aware of heroes, base, and enemy all at once, and perhaps even of the global significance of events. Only a handful of first-person "diary" films are exceptions: such as Guadalcanal Diary, The Story of G.I. Joe and A Walk in the Sun. Warner Bros had developed something of a style in these matters. Casablanca, for example, opens on a spinning globe while a stern-voiced narrator (they all seemed to want to sound like Westbrook Van Voorhis) fills us in on the place of Casablanca in global politics. Even a single point of view film like Air Force (the plane and its crew are the center of attention) carefully plants the date of its action in our minds, and suddenly inserts an animated map to help us track their trans-Pacific journey.

Wald's story is just that, a story. The point of view problem is not addressed. Whereas Bessie's Treatment already starts with rolling titles and an air-base opening scene that will survive to the finished film. Later, the rolling titles will be supplemented by a narrator and by a map to again "place" and give wider significance to the small-scale events we shall follow.

Bessie's Original Story. Less than a week later the files yield a fifty-one page Original Story by Bessie, dated January 12, 1944, the last recorded work he does on the

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<sup>11</sup> Raoul Walsh's name as director first appears on the Temporary screenplay by Randal MacDougall, February 4-March 21, 1944, so it could well have been Bessie's Treatment that evoked this comment: "There aren't many writers left in Hollywood who understand the technique of silent action," Walsh declared. "When I got the first script of 'Burma' it was riddled with dialogue. The actors were supposed to stop every few minutes and play 'Hamlet'." See Otis L. Guernsey Jr., "The Playbill: Motion Pictures are Rare, But Here is One", New York Herald Tribune, undated clipping.

project. Circulated with a memo by Wald drawing attention to it being along the lines of Desperate Journey, it is described as an exploration of possibilities, Nelson to be played by Errol Flynn and the character “needs a tremendous amount of developing” because the Original is the result of a week’s work and is “hasty and hazy.” Opening much as before on the airfield and the briefing, this version adds a “neatly trimmed Van Dyke beard” to Nelson, who delivers a one-and-one-half-page speech at the briefing. Again the Chinese Captain Li plays the role of first-jumper. It is a very “talky” contribution.

Coming across the body of a mutilated flyer in the jungle Nelson shines a torch on it.  
Then:

CURRY:

(to the others-violent)

All I wanted to say was I seen this sort of thing before. With Vinegar Joe Stilwell. That’s what the Japs are like. They ain’t human; they’re animals.

NELSON:

There’s nothing especially Japanese about this Curry. You’ll find it wherever you find fascists. There are even people who call themselves Americans who’d do it, too. But there are lots of people all over the world who haven’t been turned into beasts-and you’ll find them in Japan and Germany as well.

Planning the assault, Nelson asks his men for suggestions. Then holds a discussion about killing the two Japanese prisoners. And about marking Mangione’s grave there is dispute, with Gabby defying Nelson by putting a cross there and the Japanese discovering it. Also in this version Burney, as the first aid man is now called, deserts. After the ammunition dump is blown a wounded man is carried rather than left behind as he should have been according to announced policy.

Rather than using a clearing, the men clear a landing strip and the plane gives them supplies while retrieving the wounded man.

Their next objective is to blow up the railway line. After that they make camp and Bessie sets a scene around a fire! The men reveal their pre-war occupations, Nelson a steel worker, Curry a truck driver, Adams a CPA, Capt. Li a poet. Here, as in the first treatment, Bessie retains a favorite scene, Capt. Li reciting and translating a Chinese poem whose last line “drunk with love” entrances Gabby.

At the next rendezvous with the plane Japanese fighters prevent it landing and strafe the patrol, and the deserter Burney rejoins them. A drum-head court-martial is held and the men vote 7 to 11 not to shoot him. Thenceforth this version follows the same line as they retreat to the river, picking up the downed American pilot. But in the action in the temple there is again a debate about whether to leave behind the pilot:

GABBY:

I don (to all) I don't know what the hell we're fighting this war for anyhow! I know I'm not fighting it to leave our own men behind to be cut up for sukiyaki! And it won't make any difference to me even if the Major himself says to leave him.

(he faces Nelson defiantly)

You say democracy and majority rules and I agree with you. That's the way I understand this war. That's what I want. Me - I'm a Jew. A minority. People like me have been pushed around for years by people who'd like to get everybody fighting everybody else, so they can knock 'em off one by one. Tell the Christians the Jews are their enemies, tell the whites the blacks are out to knife them, tell the Americans

the British or the Russians or the Eskimos hate  
their guts . . .

(a pause)

Well we're onto that trick by now. We fought  
through this together and we were lucky enough  
to find the lieutenant here, and he's one of our  
men and he's precious to me . . .

(to Shore)

Does that sound sentimental to you, you dope!  
Then you know what you can do - you can go  
roll a hoop!

(to Nelson)

Put it to a vote--do we take the lieutenant  
with us or do we stay and fight it out?

Nelson promptly complies with this demand, they vote to take Shore, who then conveniently shoots himself.

One may well wonder whether Bessie has become mixed up about which army he is writing about. There is something comical in one image of the super-humanly strong (he is said never to need sleep), ex-steelworker with the Van Dyke beard who both delivers and listens to lengthy speeches in the middle of action, argues about grave markers, who then lets his men build fires and smoke cigarettes! One also wonders at the disingenuousness behind suggestions that leftist and fellow-travelling writers made no attempt to get their ideas over in their hackwork films. In reply to Gabby's inquiry as to how he got into the war, we get:

NELSON:

No, Gabby, I hate it. But I can do it. I can do it well, I think. But I make a speciality of picking my wars. ~~[I fought in Spain, for the Republic— that was the opening battle in this war—and]~~ I fought in China, and I enlisted at Pearl Harbor.

I'd never fight in an unjust war; and I'd never  
refuse to fight in a just one.

GABBY:

That's a pretty good answer, Major. But tell me  
- what makes a just war?

NELSON:

The people who're fighting it, Gabby. Figure it  
out. Ask yourself what they want and what they  
stand to gain from it - the majority of the people,  
that is; then take your stand with the majority.

GABBY:

Check.

Comment on this would be redundant.

The final scenes are the same, except that the deserter becomes the rearguard and Gabby is killed shielding Nelson. Back at base Nelson calls the roll in a scene described as a parallel to the opening roll-call, only with many names not answering. Nelson makes a long speech about their sacrifice for liberty after which the men encounter replacements.

Bessie's account of being taken off the project continues:

Primed by me, Wald then told Warner that while he and Daves wanted me to do "a little polish job" on The Very Thought, he would also like to hold Objective Burma (the "original" story) for me to write the screenplay.

"No," said Warner. "Bessie can't write all the pictures in this studio. He's done enough with these two wonderful jobs. Put two other writers on it."

Then he added, "I like the idea of having a Jewish officer - what's his name, Jacobs? - in Burma." He pointed one finger at Jerry and said, "See that you get a good clean-cut American type for Jacobs."

So Ranald MacDougall and Lester Cole wrote the screenplay, and Lieutenant Jacobs was played by Willian Prince, a good-looking, clean-cut American type goy, whose dog tag - when his platoon was found, by Errol Flynn, dead

after torture by the Japanese - was clean of any religious designation, such as the C's or P's that were stamped on the other dog tags in Flynn's hand in the inset.<sup>12</sup>

Memory plays its little tricks. The Jewish officer makes his first appearance, not in Bessie's story, but in MacDougall's Temporary of February 4-March 21st, where he is called Weintraub, as he remains until the Revised Final. Still, Bessie had, as we saw, made Gabby come out of the closet as a Jew. Furthermore, MacDougall seems to have worked through January and February alone, since Cole's name does not appear on the files until the Treatment of March 11th. So Warner cannot quite have said it as Bessie reports.

But the basic point about Bessie's account is the lack of analysis of what was going on. In constructing a screenplay about paratroops and Burma Wald wanted something of a tribute and a portrayal of conditions of combat. Bessie lays more emphasis on the nature of the cause and the democratic rather than the fascist way of doing things. Both want to romanticise the war, Wald stressing technique, Bessie stressing atrocities and hardships bringing men of good will together.

MacDougall's Temporary of 4 February 1944-21 March 1944. Working urgently, Wald assigned the scripting to Ranald MacDougall<sup>13</sup> whose 215-page Temporary screenplay was written between February 4 and March 21st, 1944. All the elements needed for the final film are in this version, but it is too rich, with the raiders stealing some trucks, a character collecting a necklace of Japanese ears, and an explicit torture sequence. At this point also the script balloons to 215 pages plus five unnumbered pages of character sketches of the individuals and the minor parts. Could this be a response to Wald's demand for "development?" The names used in the final screenplay, such as Nebraska, Miggiori, Treacy first turn up here, as does the Jewish lieutenant, a newspaperman (called "Arthur Dennis") and a "Pfc. Irving Goldfarb," a scholarly Jew, "secure in his faith." Improbably, he is credited with being able to "read the Christian burial service

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<sup>12</sup> Bessie, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

<sup>13</sup> (1915-1973). This was MacDougall's first assignment at Warner Bros. He was prolific, writing among others Possessed (1947), The Unsuspected (1947), June Bride

from memory, as well as the Jewish ceremony.” Confusion and haste show here in that when the burial scene comes it is Nelson who reads both services. Walsh is listed as director on the cover page of this script.

Continuing problems with point of view are apparent in the introduction of a newsman. Not content with point of view devices like rolling titles, framing scenes set at the base camp, and an ethnically balanced set of characters, the newsman serves further functions. He can take the point of view of a chorus, or a puzzled and/or hostile representative from back home needing to be filled-in (think of the device as used in The Green Berets more than twenty years later), or a vox populi, or a sardonic and worldly commentator, or a participant observer. At this stage of script development he starts out as a hostile character who then comes to sympathise with and even to die alongside the paratroops. The theme of hostility is removed later in script drafts, and the newsman is used to represent the point of view of people back home, who know nothing of war conditions; and through him the men focus several nostalgic exchanges about stateside. Ingeniously, his age will be stressed to show that the rigor of conditions is such that only the very young, very healthy, and highly trained can survive what these soldiers have been asked to do.

This Temporary opens in the same way as Bessie’s Original Story, but fills out the by-play between the men. At the briefing, the C.O. says “On you men will probably depend the entire course of the war in this theater. Remember that.” MacDougall thus moves away from the “routine mission” angle. Nelson is portrayed as a tough guy who, although he has never jumped before, will lead these hand-picked volunteers on a dangerous mission. At the briefing he produces a mutilated Ghurka to show the men what the Japanese do. He then lists a whole lot of other demolitions they will carry out after the radar station, all this taking months, and with no certain plan of how to get back.

The newspaperman, Dennis, is portrayed as reluctant to go on the mission, cynical and, according to Nelson, “the foremost labor baiter in America.” Much footage is given to the details of paratroop equipment. Yet Nelson, Capt. Li and Dennis are all

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(1948), The Hasty Heart (1949), Bright Leaf (1950), The Naked Jungle (1954). He

said not to have jumped before. Had this improbability survived to the final version one can imagine the apoplexy it would have evinced from the military advisers! Much stress is laid on the fear of jumping, with Sergeant Treacy comforting Nelson, and Gabby taking the dialogue later given to Nelson (pp. 000 of the screenplay).

A crucial new incident in this treatment is Miggiori's freezing in the jump door, being pushed out by Gabby, who then lands in a tree and sprains his ankle while extricating himself. This injury, his endurance, and the anger between him and Miggiori is a thread running through the script that is retained through to the shooting of the film, then edited out in post-production, as we shall see.

Gabby's turned ankle is utilised to show his grit on the forced march to the rendezvous with the supply plane. When Gabby is unable to continue, Nelson galvanizes him by the unlikely device of offering to let Gabby punch his jaw when they get back to the base. This is enough to give Gabby something to live for.

The first action shown in this Temporary is Hogan downing a Japanese sentry with a clean knife throw: in the dark and in total silence. Assured by a reliable source that four years after its release this film was shown to Israeli paratroops in training, I am also assured that in all versions the treatment of action and of killing is Hollywood hokum. It is also notable that the men are loaded down with equipment yet creep through the jungle silently. They surround the Japanese radar and yet talk a lot while doing so. By the time Walsh shoots these scenes they take place in almost total silence. MacDougall introduces into the story the conceit of a sneak attack so successful that all Japanese are instantly killed and no American so much as scratched.

This treatment is quite bloodthirsty. The men boast of their machine-gun cutting a Japanese in half, and they joke when the newspaperman Dennis vomits at the sight. Captain Li gloats at the pleasures of hunting Japanese, and the Ghurka collects Japanese ears in a necklace.

After a successful supply drop, with emphasis on the use of the radio, and the techniques of dropping, the party splits to carry out separate tasks.

Having cased a Japanese base, Nelson's party set off at a forced pace for the rendezvous with Weintraub's group. Only a remnant of two arrive to meet them, bearing a tale of ambush and massacre by bayonet. We then move to a scene at Japanese HQ where Negulesco is tortured to death over the question of how many men there were in his party. Meanwhile, the Japanese are also examining Weintraub's captured map and comparing it to a transcription record of Nelson's radio conversation with the supply plane. Thus the Japanese deduce where the rendezvous will be.

Nelson's group comes across a village and temple, dispose of two guards, then encounter some Burmese. At first the Americans are suspicious of the Burmese as collaborators. The Burmese explain that the Japanese did not liberate them but enslaved them, so now they are hated. This appetising political titbit also does not survive long in the revisions. The Burmese lead the Americans to the tortured remnants of Weintraub's party, with Weintraub still alive. He babbles out what happened and begs to be killed. Nelson shoots him. When the men are buried, Weintraub's grave has a star of David instead of a cross, and Nelson manages to read both a Christian prayer and the Kaddish. So much for Bessie's Nelson who hadn't much use for prayers. Nelson makes a long speech (the jungle is crawling with the enemy):

NELSON:

These men were our friends, and our brothers. They have died far from home, and they will lie here in this jungle and never again know the soil of our own land.

(pause)

You will never read their names in history books, and the jungle will soon grow over their graves and they will be lost to the world as they are to us.

(pause )

But they will not be forgotten. They have families who will remember them. Their mothers will remember then ... how they were when they walked for the first time, and how they spilled their oatmeal when they ate.

Things like that. Mothers remember these things. And their fathers will remember the first time their sons went fishing with them, and the first cigarettes they had together, or the first drink. (pause)

And you and I will remember these men. How they lived ... and how they died. That will not be forgotten.

(he looks at them bleakly)

Not one of us will forget. And while we live and can fight, these men still live ... and through us they shall avenge themselves. Amen.

This is a nice speech, but hardly appropriate in the midst of the action of an action movie - an interlude immediately broken off when the Japanese reappear. They are cut down, but, in the mopping up, one of them bayonets Hogan and in the process is captured. Nelson opposes killing the Japanese but, while he is arguing with his men, the newspaperman Dennis kills the prisoner. Cut back to American HQ where the supply plane is readied and Col. Carter suggests everything is going all right. The scene returns to the jungle, where the patrol is attacked by a couple of Japanese in the dark. Goldfarb is killed and, upon receiving his dog tag, Nelson comments:

NELSON:

So much for Mrs. Goldfarb's nine months of pain, and twenty years of hoping. So long, Private Goldfarb.

These lines are transposed to the last stand scene in the final film. As the group moves on, there is an odd scene where a lone Japanese desecrates Goldfarb's grave. He trails the Americans, kills Brophy and smashes the walkie-talkie, yelling, "more blood for the emperor."

The supply plane makes the rendezvous when it spots their heliograph, but the drop is ambushed, leaving Nelson to lead the men home without supplies. Col. Carter is seen asking where Nelson is and studying a reconnaissance photograph of the supply drop and the bodies of the men killed in the ambush. These scenes are intact in the final film.

Further confusion in the writing is evident here because the down-grading of the mission from a month's long-range penetration, to a hasty retreat from a shambles is not discussed or ordered. The shapelessness of the original plan for the story is forcing the writer to abort and wind up the action. This Treatment stresses the men's filthy and bearded condition, and Dennis getting Malaria. In the film he just seems tired.

They reach a river and Nelson takes a vote on whether to try a crossing. Despite their condition, Nelson is able to make a long speech about the precious packet of information he carries and how it must get through. They cross the river on rafts and lose several men. Dennis dies and Nelson makes a speech over him that, shortened, is in the Revised Final and the film (scene OO, p. OOO). The party sets out to try to reach a British observation post. It is destroyed so they continue, running out of water and collapsing. But a patrol finds them, the roll is called and Nelson tells Carter "Mission accomplished, sir." An odd summary, given their opening intentions.

Revisions and Changes, 8th and 11th March 1944. On the 8th of March 1944 the files disclose "Story Outline from Conference Notes" with the name "R. NacDougal" hand-printed underneath. These ten pages are a plot summary, showing considerable tightening and pinpointing of the significance of each scene. At the briefing General Stilwell is present. The newsman becomes "Mark Williams." The mission is to be a "picnic" up to the supply drop scene and the wait for Weintraub's party to rendezvous. The taking of the village, the discovery and killing of Weintraub, the ambush of the Japanese, and Williams killing the prisoner are intact. As are the two burial services and the rest of the Temporary.

Lester Cole's name appears at this point, on a revised story outline dated March 11th 1944.<sup>14</sup> This is a 32-page document not set out in script form but rather treatment form, stressing the "sets and scenes." The briefing scene is elaborate, with Nelson claiming the reconnaissance planes can't find the radar station, and that they are going also to find out about Japanese preparations to resist the coming allied invasion. No

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<sup>14</sup> Lester Cole, who, like Alvah Bessie, was one of the Hollywood Ten, had been President of the Screen Writer's Guild and would hold on to his belief in Communism. He had screen credits for None Shall Escape (1944), Blood on the Sun (1945), Fiesta (1947), Romance of Rosy Ridge (1947), Objective Burma (1945), High Wall (1947).

routine mission. This version gives Nelson a wry respect for Williams, plus both a roommate and a little Hindoo boy for Nelson to say goodbye to. Much of this outline simply says “as script” or “follow script.” The descriptions seem more to suggest atmosphere and mood scene-to-scene than to alter story line. Particularly emphasized are the harsh conditions, illness, heat, reptiles, and dense and dangerous jungle.

The first airdrop is expanded, to give us the men excitedly reacting to their mail. The scene where Gabby wants to quit and Nelson goads him to continue is strengthened with Nelson giving Gabby a crack on the jaw and the offer of a return bout man-to-man at base. (Such a scene, of an officer striking an enlisted man, would not of course survive the script review process.) During the final march, the men live off roots, bamboo shoots and swamp water. The heroic speeches at the end are not mentioned, and all of the sub-plot concerning the deserter and marking the grave is removed.

One sees in the results of these conferences the pressure of what William Goldman calls getting on -- even more intense in an action movie.<sup>15</sup> Scenes don't need neat beginnings, middles and ends, fragments will do. If the writers don't prune enough, the director and the editor will do more.<sup>16</sup>

It may or may not be significant that as these two writers settle back toward a final screenplay the legal file contains an affidavit by Bessie, dated March 21st, attesting that he is the sole author of the original story. This presumably ensured his credit even though the writing was now in the hands of MacDougall and Cole. MacDougall and Cole's Revised Temporary, 4-14 April 1944. With the starting date of May 1st getting closer, the two writers now modified the script in accord with their outline of sets and scenes. Tightening is indicated by its length coming down from over 200 to 155 pages. Opening as do all the versions on a reconaissance plane landing, officers looking at the photographs and giving Nelson his mission, this version drops

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<sup>15</sup> “You always attack a movie scene as late as you possibly can. You always come into a scene at the last possible moment... You truncate... as much as you can... Get on, get on. The camera is relentless. Makes you keep running.” William Goldman in John Brady, The Craft of the Screenwriter: Interviews With Six Celebrated Screenwriters, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981.

<sup>16</sup> Ralph Rosenblum's When the Shooting Stops, New York: Viking 1979 is highly instructive here.

the preposterous idea that Nelson is a novice, as though paratroopers would be commanded by a non-jumper. The mission becomes a reconnaissance patrol in force, to last three weeks, to map Japanese preparations after blowing up the radar station. It is obvious at this stage what material will be the target for further simplification and tightening: the length of the mission and the diversity of its tasks. The radar station raid is now explained as being to prevent the Japanese tracking the supply planes during the mission, so its destruction is a tactical rather than a strategic matter. Later, as it becomes the sole task, it is changed to a strategic demolition, a prelude to the invasion of Burma.

The Revised Temporary retains a scene of the news correspondents drawing lots, and of the men being woken and issued parachutes, but at least the mutilated Ghurka was eliminated. Nelson, now portrayed as an experienced jumper, moves around the plane comforting those afraid of freezing in the door. The sub-plot of Miggiori freezing in the door, causing Gabby to land in the trees and turn his ankle and thus accuse Migg of cowardice is fully developed and will stay in the film until final editing. As the men set up for the assault on the radar station there is much badinage. Walsh eventually shoots it in total silence. In this Revised Temporary the writers forget to have the radar buildings demolished, they seem to think a few anti-personnel grenades are sufficient. Nelson keeps Gabby going not by slapping him but by pep talk and threatening to carry him. In a simplification, the Japanese are not shown intercepting the conversation between Nelson and the plane, but to be looking frantically for the Nelson party. After scouting a huge Japanese supply area and killing a lone Japanese guard this script dissolves to the next supply drop with the men already burying the 'chutes and reading the mail. And the scene of Weintraub's (Jacobs') death is simplified by having him die rather than needing to be shot. The funeral is also eliminated. Get on, get on.

At the next supply drop when the Japanese ambush the surviving remnant the radio man is machine-gunned, thus dispensing with the need for scenes of the Japanese infiltrating their line at night. But the night infiltration is used in the famous 8-minute last stand scene on the hilltop at the end of the finished film, as is an exchange between

Williams and Treacy about the quality of the dirt (soil), with Treacy's lines transferred to Nelson.

In this version the Americans, boxed in by the Japanese, retreat to a hilltop for a last stand where Nelson proceeds to shave! (Not in the final film. This scene reminds one of Peter Van Eyck's shave in Le Salaire de la Peur.) Gabby engages in a bitter exchange about what they are fighting and dying for, mentioning three-piece suits and his father selling apples on street corners. Supplies are dropped to them and then the Japanese make a daylight assault. The copy of this Revised Temporary at Wisconsin breaks off at this point, although it is quite possible that MacDougall and Cole stopped work on that version and went on immediately to:

MacDougall and Cole's Final, 15 April 1944. This uses the device of the announcement "Briefing in an hour" by Treacy as a means of introducing the men to us. Stilwell is still in the briefing scene. Gabby's question about how they will get back is answered by "We'll walk back." Williams' introduction is tightened down to more or less as it appears in the Revised Final and the film, but a brief establishing scene of the Colonel's office after the take-off does not survive.

This version removes the vengeful vows of the men after discovering Weintraub and the others tortured, and also the return of the Japanese to the village to be ambushed. Instead, they return to see the graves, one with a star of David over it. The Japanese desecrate these. In the Revised Final printed in this volume the battle with the Japanese is restored, only this time as a fighting retreat, not a vengeful ambush and slaughter.

Otherwise this version follows the previous one, except that the final fight is set in darkness, as it was to be in the film, and the ending on scenes of invasion in force is in the print at Wisconsin.

Production was planned on the basis of this Final screenplay, which is 164 pages long and has 439 numbered scenes. Yet wholesale reworking commenced scarcely a week before shooting was to begin (there are more changes between the Final and the Revised Final than there are between the Revised Temporary and the Final), with blue pages coming through from April 22nd until, incredibly, August 14th, with an

additional scene on September 12th. The production manager complained bitterly about this uncertainty, and laid the blame squarely on Wald, who seems to have taken over the rewriting himself. These revisions are not enough for Walsh or, in the event, for Wald and the editor George Amy, since the final film differs in many small ways from the screenplay, and some of the material shot is not included.<sup>17</sup>

The need for these revisions clearly stems from the attempt to reconcile the Wald action-and-technique approach with the Bessie explain-the-war approach. The conflicts we have noticed are between the mission as a long one and the mission as a short one, between the mission as a success and the mission as a failure, between the mission as strategic and the mission as tactical (“routine”). No doubt a case could be made that action is more commercial than ideas and that this explains why the leftist Bessie was replaced by MacDougall. But then how would the addition of the leftist Cole to assist MacDougall be explained? Instead, what it seems to me happened is that the imperatives of “get on, get on” shape this original story from a routine mission illustrating all sorts of issues into a single line of development in which the mission becomes an epic test of stamina and endurance, a kind of long march. So finally a solution has been found: Wald’s epic march by professionals takes on a non-ideological heroism.

Two quite new thematic lines appear in the Revised Final and the finished film. One is that the Americans are ordered to retreat to the final hilltop, even though that takes them away from base. They are puzzled at this order and bridle at obeying it. But Nelson insists that there is a reason, until they get there and find nothing. The men reluctantly prepare for a last stand and then, in the final moments, all is revealed. The other new theme is the use of the taking of dog tags from men killed as a closure to each life, and Nelson’s growing collection as an index of the cost of the mission. Whereas in the Revised Temporary he entrusts his reconnaissance maps to Treacy when he fears he will be killed, in the finished film it is the dog tag collection he entrusts. And one of the closing shots of the film (see still number 00) is of him passing a handful of the tags to Colonel Carter (see note 76 to the screenplay).

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<sup>17</sup> The dubbing transcript shows this very well. See also footnotes to the script, below.

These two themes - endurance and the cost of endurance - are used to give a tone to the finished film that is utterly missing from all the screenplay drafts. That tone is rueful and anti-heroic with little fuss and clean action lines. Its final imposition undoubtedly owes something to Walsh, whose simplification and elision of script scenes while shooting so enrages Wald that he twice orders pick-ups. But perhaps when he viewed the first cut, with Walsh and Amy, its vigor or perhaps even just its length, may have convinced Wald to go in the direction the screenplay drafts had been groping and Walsh had now imposed.

## 2. Summary of the Story as Filmed

As I have emphasised in my running comments on the evolution of the screenplay, the final film differs still further from the Revised Final printed in this volume. Details of these differences are given in the notes to the screenplay, but it may be helpful to summarise the action of the finished film in order to show how it differs in overall tone and pace from what was written.

The film follows three parallel lines of action: the American paratroops, their home base, and their Japanese pursuers. In addition there are impersonal framing devices, to situate and legitimate the action. After rolling titles, a narrator tells us, over an aerial stock shot, that Burma is the worst battlefield in the world, and introduces stock shots of Stilwell, Mountbatten, Wingate, and Cochran. A map with an airplane circling it is a transition to a reconnaissance plane landing, its cameras being unloaded, the film developed and the pictures brought to “the general” (a Stilwell look-alike not identified as such) who announces that “The Red Robin operation is on.” On three later occasions in the film we cut back to this base HQ, lending authenticity and legitimacy to the action scenes. Swiftly, the film sketches-in the main speaking characters as the men prepare for a briefing. Especially prominent are Capt. Nelson (Errol Flynn) the expedition leader, and Mark Williams (Henry Hull), a newspaperman in his forties. That accomplished, the film picks up pace as briefing is succeeded by the flight, the jump, and re-grouping on the ground.

Throughout the film we are given glimpses of paratrooper technique: how to jump, how to land, the gathering and quick burial of chutes, elimination of all traces of conferences, use of the walkie-talkie radio, supply drops, rear guard, setting grenade traps, posting lookouts, the collection of “dog” tags from the dead, and so on. Few of these are in the script. Most represent on-the-set embroidery that contribute to the sense of authenticity and professionalism. It would be usual to attribute such “touches” to the director, Walsh, but that strikes me as unwarranted. Walsh, fifty-seven years old, was

scarcely familiar with the details of paratroop operations. The touches could as easily be the responsibility of the military advisers, especially Major Galbreath.

Marching swiftly through the jungle, the paratroopers follow a field telephone line that leads them right to the Japanese radar base. Catching the Japanese at “chow,” the platoon swiftly dispose of three sentries (here detail of hand-to-hand killing techniques are blurred, whether due to restraint, Breen office pressure, or military censorship is not known) and surround the camp. They rake the Japanese with machine-gun and small arms fire, killing instantly every last man. One’s credulity is stretched here for the first time (or perhaps the second -- one doubts whether aging war correspondents would be briefed on, still less allowed to accompany, top secret long range penetration missions). Not one Japanese escapes, not one fails to die instantly. In reality, there are very few bullet wounds indeed (only those to the brain, heart, or major artery) where a person collapses stone dead. Real death is mostly a slow and agonising process, and one would have expected a great deal of mopping up would have been required after such an ambush.

Setting demolition charges, the platoon retreats on the run, heading towards the abandoned air strip where they hope to be picked up. Here we cut to the third line of action, some Japanese officers studying a map then sending out a large body of men to search for the “paratroopers.” Nelson’s group is overflown by a Japanese reconnaissance plane, but they hide from it and reach the landing field without incident. The script provides for shots detailing the approach of the Japanese to ambush the landing and to engage in a fire-fight with the Americans. But as edited, these shots are brief, the men rest and chat, take atabrine, start talking the plane down then suddenly are warned by the Ghurka that the Japanese are lying in ambush. So in a flurry of shots the planes are waved off and a new rendezvous set, and they once more beat a hasty retreat into the jungle. Urgent music is overlaid on all these running retreat scenes, alternating with a military march theme tune. When a cut is made to a stock aerial shot of Burmese terrain it is usually accompanied by a sinister-oriental chord on strings.

It is now sometime later and, while the men rest, Nelson and his second-in-command Jacobs decide to split the group to double the chances of reaching the new

rendezvous. After brief farewells, the two groups set off in a high shot overlain with martial theme music. We wipe to the airbase, where the supply plane loads and sets off. Back to the Flynn group, anxiously trying to raise Jacobs' party by walkie-talkie. Hearing nothing, they continue to sprawl around in exhaustion. Although they have been in the jungle for days now, only a little dirt on their faces and stains on their uniforms betrays this. Cut back to stock shots of the supply plane over mountainous jungle, their contact with Nelson, dropping supplies and relaying the news that they will have to walk out.

As they are eating, Hollis and Sweeny stagger into view (Walsh using a long tracking shot of the men watching the approach from cover) and report the decimation of Jacob's group. Walking away in turmoil, Nelson decides to set off, carrying Hollis on a stretcher. They walk along a shallow stream, giving Hollis plasma on the move, the music slowing to match their wading pace. A touch not in the script at all is when they are walking along the river bed the plasma carrier dislodges a branch and this floats downstream until an alert Japanese spots it and urges pursuit. They come to a village and have just decided to skirt it when they are met by some Burmese who inform them that there are others like them in the village. So by coincidence they have come across the village where the remnants of Jacobs' group are to be found.

The village sequence which follows is carried out almost without dialogue. Two sentries busy cooking a meal have to be disposed of, then the Americans come across the mutilated bodies of their comrades, climaxing in Jacobs' begging Nelson to kill him, and, after his death, Williams making his impassioned plea to wipe the Japanese off the face of the earth (see Appendix A and note 39 to the screenplay). When the "dog" tags of the men who died are collected, as Alvah Bessie noted, in close-up Jacobs' tag does not have the star of David on it. Now, because of the tree branch in the river device, when the Japanese enter the village in force we can see how they picked up the trail.

Unsentimentally moving things forward, the script has the Japanese return in force, giving Nelson and his men time only for a fighting retreat across the river (not in boats as the screenplay demands). A cut takes us once more to base, where the pilot Barker hears that Wingate and Cochran have been in an all-night conference and, as a

result, Nelson and his men are to be told to march away from their base to a new rendezvous. The orders are relayed in the next scene, but when the supplies are dropped a concealed Japanese machine gun opens up on the group, and they retreat almost in panic. Back at Headquarters Col. Carter indicates that Nelson's party cannot be found. An air reconnaissance photograph in close-up shows the supply bundles and three bodies lying in the clearing. In the course of the previous engagement we have seen the radio blown to pieces by a grenade, so that when we cut back to Barker overflying and Nelson's party walking, we are aware of the difficulty of their making contact. Out of supplies and in the jungle for a couple of weeks by this time, it is surprising to see that almost none of the men has significant beard shadow. Also in this scene Williams collapses for the first time, giving us the only vivid indication of the extremity of the conditions. Much of the script's badinage between the men has been left out. There follows an incident where the men spot a plane but it does not spot them, causing one soldier to break down and weep. Treacy rails at him but Nelson says compassionately that he should be left alone. This is then declared to be the third time it has happened and, after a break, Nelson tells them he knows they are all-in, but there has to be a reason for their being ordered North, so the sooner they make the rendezvous the better. When they resume walking, Williams is so feverish he sets off in the wrong direction.

Exhausted though they are, the march picks up a rhythm again, slow but steady, as they cut through jungle, cross a deep river and a shallow one, and scramble up the final hill -- unfortunately, a typically dry and scrubby Southern California one (the vista from the summit was shot from Mulholland Drive). Reaching the top and finding nothing there, their despair makes them momentarily ignore Nelson's order to dig in, but only momentarily. Soon after, Williams is found dead and, as his burial is concluding, the supply plane finally spots them. From a neighboring hillside a Japanese scout spots the supply parachutes and reports to his main force. As the eerie sounds of night begin, the film enters its most sustained and admired sequence, the night attack by the Japanese. This lasts about 8½ minutes, almost without dialogue. Some mistakes are made in it, as the men are suddenly bearded, and one of the extras playing a

Japanese soldier who, earlier, had a close-up as a sentry who was disposed of now has more close-ups as he tries to sneak up on the Americans in the dark. Finally, when a Very Light is fired, the Americans are able to pour fire into the Japanese and hurl grenades after them without once more taking any return fire or casualties. This view of how easy it is to kill the enemy, even with machine guns, detracts from the attempt at authenticity.

The sequence ends at dawn with the announcement “the monkeys have pulled out, Sir” -- and apparently no groaning wounded left lying around. Without further ado, planes dropping vast numbers of American paratroopers fill the sky, gliders land (although we appear to be in a steeply hilled area in some shots) and Nelson and his party walk into Carter’s field headquarters, to be congratulated, hand over a bunch of dog tags as “the price,” and be flown out by glider.

### 3. Production and Exploitation

Shooting began on May 1st, 1944 and did not wrap until August 31st, when the picture was 40 days over schedule. Even then, additional shots were made on 15 September and 13 November. Much of the film was shot outdoors on California locations doubling for India and Burma, including the Baldwin estate at Santa Anita,<sup>18</sup> on the Rio Hondo in Whittier Park, at Palm Springs airport, and on Warner Bros property at Calabasas and Providencia in the San Fernando Valley. The usual and chronic Warner Bros problem of going into production with an incomplete or unsatisfactory screenplay was compounded by atrocious luck with inclement weather and persistent nuisance from overhead aircraft noise. Nearly one-quarter of a million feet of film was exposed, at a total cost of \$1,548,721.<sup>19</sup>

Besides the weather and the constant arrival of pink pages (last minute changes), the Unit Manager Frank Mattison’s daily reports to T. C. Wright record a strike by extras on 8 May, Errol Flynn ill with sinus problems and hemorrhoids, complaining

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<sup>18</sup> Now the State and County Arboretum.

<sup>19</sup> This is very high for the time. It is pencilled on a T.C. Wright memo of 24 April 1945 in the Wald file at USC.

about lack of continuity (17 May) and just “walking through the picture” (19 June). He refuses to report for work. Although the cinemaphotographer James Wong Howe is working faster than ever in his life (17 May), he and Walsh quarrel badly (16 June). Jerry Wald twice demands that Walsh pick up shots he has skipped (21 July, 17 August).

Although the research file at USC records seventeen books being combed for background, and innumerable queries about details like what sorts of telegraph Japanese troops used, there were also technical military advisers on the set. On 17 July the Unit Manager loses patience and writes that the technical adviser held up a parachute shot and some stills work because the boots being worn were wrong: “I wish they would send the major home; we would get this picture done quicker and better. He knows nothing about how the stuff has to be cut and at times interferes with the work.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite the troubles, studio reports indicate enthusiasm for the quality of Walsh’s work, and his transformation of the script into a swiftmoving and businesslike action piece. Details like parachute burial, trail-covering, and the planting of TNT charges are seen to give an air of authenticity. Unfortunately, no files exist which document the process of editing and scoring the film.<sup>21</sup> It is unclear therefore who is responsible for some of the touches we have noticed: the eerie jungle sounds, the collection of dead men’s “dog tags,” or the curious device of an aeroplane circling over a map of the China-Burma-India theater of war. The editor George Amy and the sound man C. A. Riggs may have worked on their own, but it seems far more likely that Walsh himself and/or, especially, the energetic Wald supervised the post-production work. This is one of those films in which there is a great deal in the texture of the film that is not in the text of the screenplay. One is thus constantly searching for clues as to what exactly happened during the creative process.

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<sup>20</sup> The technical advisers were Major Charles Galbreath, U.S. Army Parachute Troops and Major M. H. Whyte, British Indian Army 8 (FF) Battalion, Burma Rifles.

<sup>21</sup> Since this was written Warner Bros post-production files for the period have been acquired by USC and they may contain information on these processes.

Because this was a war film requiring assistance from the military, there exists a file on it at the National Archives.<sup>22</sup> At each revision the script was reviewed for technical errors and for conformity with War Department policy. For example, strenuous objection was taken by the military to the portrayal of General Stilwell as such; to the scene where the men rebel against Nelson's hard-driving attitude; to discussion of whether to kill Japanese prisoners; and to the drum-head courtmartial of the deserter in which enlisted men participate. Elimination of such material from the draft scripts was insisted on as a price of cooperation. And a great deal of cooperation was requested by W. C. Guthrie, Warner Bros liaison man for military affairs. In addition to technical advisers, Warner Bros wanted uniforms, weapons, permission to film paratroop drops, planes, and stock shots from military documentaries. The final letter of approval for the film which I reproduce at Appendix C, conceals a flurry of activity after the War Department Bureau of Public Relations screened a first print of the film on or about December 22nd. In an internal memorandum of that date, Col. Mitchell presents a lengthy list of objections to it, while reminding himself constantly that it is a fiction. He notes that the Japanese had no viable radar, no air superiority, and that paratroopers were never used in Burma. But this mattered less than the problem of portraying Stilwell, an inaccurate opening map, a rectification of the text of the foreword and epilogue (the originals of neither of which survive in the files available). He also stresses that the allies are inadequately represented in the movie. Attempts are made to contact Stilwell for permission to portray him, but they seem to come to nothing. Mitchell's ingenious solution is simply to have the look-alike referred to as "the General." To deal with the whole situation a Captain Stuart Palmer is sent to Hollywood on December 28th to confer with Wald, Walsh, MacDougall and George Amy about the needed changes. In a December 28th letter to Stilwell, Major General A. D. Surles explains:

It is our policy to make certain that no audience assumes that it is an accurate record of the campaign itself, but instead portrays a

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<sup>22</sup> To be found in the Records of the Army Bureau of Public Relations, Record Group 165, Stack Area 15W3, Row 16, Compartment 22, Shelf F, Box 28, Modern Military Branch, National Archives.

small group of men whose heroism is typical of all the forces engaged in jungle fighting.

Wald in a memorandum to Jack L. Warner of January 2nd reports that they will try to show some British troops in gliders to take care of Mitchell's points, and he undertakes to revise the prologue and epilogue. But with the picture shot and horribly over budget one is not surprised that the attempt to impose War Department policy failed. However, as I have indicated, the very structuring of the film by means of the opening framing devices conveys an impression that this is indeed an accurate record. The public is not offered any other framework in which it can place the film as mere fiction. In view of the furor the film caused in Britain, which I describe in section 6, it is ironical that it turns out there were small, highly secret American units behind the lines in Burma. They too, however, bore not the slightest resemblance to anything in this film.<sup>23</sup>

Exploitation of the film, despite its cost, seems to have been routine. The press book materials emphasise that it is an action story about paratroopers and stars Errol Flynn in his 27th movie. No attempt to suggest sex and violence. Faked background stories include anecdotes about the supporting cast and the supposedly rigorous conditions under which it was shot. Two very amusing product tie-ins were tried: one for Motorola walkie-talkie radios, and the other, quite incredibly, has Errol Flynn modelling a Resistol Self-Conforming hat. I have found no figures for how well it did at the box office but am puzzled by the delay in its British release. American runs were finished by the Spring, yet it was not shown in London until September. Hints in the British trade press suggest it was trade-shown soon after its American release and that some people had advised against releasing it at all. If that is true, there is no evidence that in the interim Warner Bros carefully orchestrated a "receptive" atmosphere, as we shall see in section 6.

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<sup>23</sup> See Richard Dunlop, Behind Japanese Lines, New York; Rand McNally 1979.

#### 4. Reception and Appraisal

American critics received the film well. It was highly praised in the trades and in the New York newspapers, as Wald's letter (Appendix B) reveals. The tone was quickly set by Thomas M. Pryor in the New York Times (27.1.45):

This is without question one of the best war films made in Hollywood...the whole picture has a strong documentary quality, even in the writing...These troopers appear to be a composite of the famous groups known as Merrill's Marauders and Wingate's Raiders...The hostility of the jungle leaps out overpoweringly from the screen...directed exceedingly well by Raoul Walsh from a first-class script...a stirring tribute to the sterling fighting man who helped to reopen Burma after the initial Japanese onslaught in the Pacific.

Pryor is echoed by Otis L. Guernsey in the New York Herald Tribune (27.1.45):

The film has considerable movement, particularly in the early reels, and the tactics of the paratroopers are authentic in their painstaking detail...Raoul Walsh's direction is topflight and so is the cameraing [sic] of James Wong Howe.

A day or so later Guernsey devoted a whole article to Walsh and the use of action and movement in films.

Nearly all the critics complain of the length, but of little else. Hollywood Reporter (26.1.45):

This is one of the most powerful and completely honest pictures of ground action in this war which Hollywood yet has made...wholly uncompromising...impact is tremendous ... documentary flavour...Via one of the characters, the picture virtually comes out flat footed for Jap extermination, a sentiment to which few will be unwilling to subscribe after seeing "Objective Burma"...Raoul Walsh rose to the heights

with his direction of this picture...giving its every facet brilliant treatment.

Film Daily (29.1.45):

...gives an amazingly clear idea of the fighting...authenticity...vivid realism...unremitting action...starkest of drama...extraordinarily tense...powerful direction,...Flynn is properly subdued.

Showman's Trade Review (27. 1.45):

The direction, camerawork, production, sound effects and unusual background are all of a high order. Military men who should know state without equivocation that there is not one technical flaw in the military aspects of "Objective Burma."

Harrison's Reports (27. 1.45):

Very good! It ranks with the best of the war melodramas yet produced...fraught with suspense...highly exciting...jungle scenes...so realistic that one feels as if he were in Burma.

James Agee, as one might expect, is quicker to get a perspective, but still is strongly favourable in Time (22.2.45):

The story is used not as an excuse for histrionic heroics but as a basis for a good deal of dogged, specific detail about men at war...may be credited in part to the script...But still more to the veteran director, Raoul Walsh. Objective Burma! gets pretty long, and you can seldom forget that its soldiers are really just actors; but within the limits possible to fictional war movies, it is about as good as they come.<sup>24</sup>

Let me leave aside the overseas and especially British reaction until section 6. In later years the film has been treated respectfully but has aroused little excitement, even among students of the Flynn, Walsh, and Howe oeuvres (I know of no students of

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<sup>24</sup> See also Daily Variety, 1.26.45, Weekly Variety, 1.31.45, Los Angeles Times (Edwin Schallert), 2.17.45, Los Angeles Examiner (Dorothy Manners), 2.17.45, PM (John T. McManus), 1.28.45.

the MacDougall or Cole oeuvres).<sup>25</sup> This is unfair neglect. As I said at the beginning of this Introduction, Objective Burma is a fine example of the sustained combat action film. It does not match A Walk in The Sun partly because, even at his best, Walsh does not match Milestone. More to the point, when genre films transcend their limitations a fortuitous falling together of elements, the happiest of accidents, is usually responsible. But although Objective Burma labors a bit at times, it comes off.

In retrospect it may seem that the American critics exaggerated the merits of the film, although they were writing before such quality war films as A Walk in The Sun, The Story of G.I. Joe, and They Were Expendable had been seen. Undoubtedly the film is long, although Walsh and Amy give a drive and rhythm to the action that keeps interest remarkably alive. One is the more impressed by this knowing the vicissitudes of shooting.

To the student of screenplay problems, the film shows the benefits that can accrue from using an experienced action director. Speeches were shortened, action was proceeded with swiftly and directly, and in general the finished film has more seriousness and weight to it than the screenplay. In efforts to relieve the gloom the writers introduced flippant dialogue exchanges, and patronising ideas like having the gurkhas grin when they are introduced. Walsh eliminated all this. The men are briefed in a very sober and matter-of-fact manner by Nelson all through the film, and many of the tension-relaxing dialogue exchanges were shortened and naturalised.

One of the main weaknesses of the film is in the screenplay: failure to delineate and differentiate the characters. Nelson's character is given hardly any substance at all. From freedom fighter, to martinet, to democrat, to nothing special, his progress through the rewrites is utterly confusing. Most of the supporting players are poorly differentiated. Gabby doesn't gab, Nelson's friend Lieutenant Jacobs and his top sergeant Treacy are bland and unfocussed, and even the war correspondent Williams is fuzzy. What we remember are the idiosyncracies of the particular character actors

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<sup>25</sup> It is mentioned briefly in Roger Manvell's Films and the Second World War (New York: Delta 1976), Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg's Hollywood in the Forties (New York: Barnes, 1968) and the former's Warner Brothers (New York: Scribners, 1975).

George Tobias and Henry Hull. Thus all the interest focusses on the group, its mission and its escape. We are shocked, excited, sickened by events, but not personally moved or touched. Whether intended or not, this is agreeable to the film's detached and professional stance, and its cataloguing of the technical detail of paratroop operations. But elsewhere authenticity is sorely compromised -- Japanese die too cleanly and quickly from bullets or knives, and the Southern California locales never remotely approximate the Burmese jungle. Although they take no shaving kit, only at the very end are any of the men sporting 5 o'clock shadow, and Errol Flynn is ever immaculate. A brisk, interesting and effective war film, then, with no pretensions to profundity, yet by and large a credit to its creators and to the studio system that give it birth.

##### 5. Political Aftermath

The production files on the film show no awareness whatsoever of the crucial issue that was to engulf the film in controversy. To put it simply: there was only a very small American presence in the Burma war: the overwhelming majority of troops fighting there came from Britain, its Dominions and Colonies. The battles were fought in ghastly conditions and at great cost hence the British felt it was an affront to their war effort to have it portrayed through the exploits of an imaginary group of Americans. It seems unlikely that any offense was intended by the studio. Warner Bros was the liberal studio in Hollywood, Democratic in politics, and noted for its serious dramatizations of social themes such as gangsterism, prison reform, juvenile delinquency, lynch-law, the rise of Nazism, and so on.<sup>26</sup> Jerry Wald and Ranald MacDougall were, to judge by their work, thoroughgoing political liberals. Bessie and Cole were extreme leftists.<sup>27</sup> Yet these Americans succeeded in making a film that was

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<sup>26</sup> Jerry Wald, in a memo (26.1.45) to Jack L. Warner, says, "Warners have done more to encourage free expression of new ideas on the screen than any other studio". In his reply (27.1.45) Warner comments, "We certainly can do a lot with the tools we use to help make this world a better one" (See Appendix B).

<sup>27</sup> Lester Cole and Alvah Bessie were among the "Hollywood Ten", jailed for contempt of Congress when they failed to cooperate with the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities investigation. See Gordon Khan, Hollywood on Trial, New York: Boni and

going to be found deeply offensive to America's principal ally, that would provoke a classic editorial denunciation in London's The Times (Appendix E), that would add fuel to the fire of British anti-Americanism, that would make Errol Flynn and his heroic posturing a standing joke in England for many years, and that generally would embarrass Warner Bros to such an extent they did not release the film nationally in Britain until 1952.<sup>28</sup>

However, the suggestion that this giving of offence was unintentional needs modification. Ally though Britain was, there was much American popular sentiment that was anti-British. Rather than suggest that Warner Bros was pandering to this, I wonder whether some of that sentiment may not have affected those working on the film. It was after all to counteract negative views of Britain that the Anglophile studio MGM made such films as Journey for Margaret, Mrs. Miniver and The White Cliffs of Dover. Talbot Jennings commented:

Apparently we've been more pleased with our pictures about our Allies than they have. I've said that 'Mrs. Miniver' is a good war picture, and I will add that in my opinion it is also a tribute to the British which is all the British could ask, but I understand that the British reviewed it dubiously. Either 'Mrs. Miniver' was too British or not British enough. She was just the right British for us, however, and came at just the right time, too -- that crucial time when many people in this country

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Gaer 1948; John Cogley, Report on Blacklisting I: The Movies, New York: Fund for the Republic, 1956; Alvah Bessie, Inquisition in Eden, New York: Macmillan, 1965; Stefan Kanfer, A Journal of the Plague Years, New York: Atheneum, 1973; "Hollywood Blacklisting", Film Culture, nos. 50-51, Fall/Winter 1970; Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, The Inquisition in Hollywood, New York: Anchor/Doubleday 1980; Victor Navasky, Naming Names, New York: Viking, 1980; and innumerable other sources, including the hearings transcripts.

<sup>28</sup> For a fuller account of the history of the controversy surrounding this film see my "Fanning the Flames: Anti-Americanism and Objective Burma", Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, Vol 1, 1981, 117-37. For background see also my "The Burma Campaign on Film: Objective Burma (1945), The Stilwell Road (1945) and Burma Victory (1945)", Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, vol. 8, 1988, pp. 56-73.

were, for one reason or another, indifferent to Great Britain, even hostile.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, the politics of foreign policy are intricate. The Army Bureau of Public Relations files show military reviewers complaining about the casual treatment of the allies, British, Indian, Chinese, Kachin, and Wald promises to try to do something about this. But while liberal and left-wing Americans agreed that Britain was an important ally, they were also agreed in their opposition to colonialism. This sentiment was incorporated in American foreign policy:

Exactly what were the war aims of the United States from 1941 to 1945, beyond a desire to crush régimes which had challenged it, is hard to discern. Certainly, though, American aims did not include the restoration of British imperial power. American philosophy was based upon Abraham Lincoln's phrase of "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" and the weight of American influence was in favour of that method of administration being extended to the British Empire, especially in India. "Quit fighting a war to hold the empire together," demanded Life magazine in 1942.<sup>30</sup>

Hence it may be significant that although some Washington opinion was that the allies ought not to be slighted in the film, that point was not pressed too hard, and so the finished film did give offense.

Summing up the politics of the matter. Neither Warner Bros nor American foreign policy interests were advanced by the hostile reception this film received, but that does not mean it was inadvertent. The complex intersection of American attitudes towards Britain, and especially about the meaning of the fighting in her far-flung

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<sup>29</sup> In Writers' Congress (Proceedings of the Conference held in October 1943 under the Sponsorship of the Hollywood Writers' Mobilization and the University of California), Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1944, p. 57. More detail on The White Cliffs of Dover is to be found in K.R.M. Short, "The White Cliffs of Dover: Promoting the Anglo-American Alliance in World War II", Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, vol.2, 1982, 3-25.

outposts of Empire, shows through in this film. So, as we now look at the reaction to the film in London, we can argue that Objective Burma is not just drawing out a reaction to the Hollywoodization of the war, but also that it is confronting leaders of British public opinion with unpleasant realities of American attitudes to Britain. The film was released in London after the war was over and when differences between the allies were surfacing rapidly and searingly. Churchill and Roosevelt had disagreed about how to treat Stalin and over post-war policy towards India. Political and trade rivalries were resuming and Congress abruptly cut off Lend-Lease. The foundations were being laid for the complex post-war relations between Britain and America and perhaps this work of popular cinema was a useful vehicle for canalizing some of the patriotic emotions aroused by the increasing dominance of the American world-view. It is particularly intriguing that the whole brouhaha was triggered by the indignation of an American officer.

On May 30th, 1945 Reuters carried a story from Advanced Headquarters, Burma, to the effect that the film had been described as a “travesty of the truth” by an American glider officer serving in Burma. Writing in the services newspaper Seac, Lt.-Colonel William H. Taylor, Jr., of the U.S.A.F. said in part:

It is a disturbing thought that this meretricious hodge-podge, which implies that Burma was invaded and liberated by a force of American parachutists, American glider-borne troops, two Gurkha guides and a Chinese officer, will be seen by thousands of men of the 14th Army, who know better.

The thought that it has already been seen by millions of American civilians, whose impression of the Burma campaign must consequently be irreparably and viciously garbled, is enraging. The thought that it may be seen by the mothers, fathers, friends and relatives of the many Allied troops, British, West African and Burmese, who have lost their lives in the slow

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<sup>30</sup> Colin Cross, The Fall of the British Empire, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968, paperback Paladin 1970, p. 241.

and painful struggle to clear Burma of the Japanese invader, is sickening.

Taylor suggests that the film will jeopardise inter-Allied relationships. What he said was immediately picked up by British newspapers, including “quality” dailies like the Daily Telegraph and the Manchester Guardian. The critic of the Daily Telegraph had already written about what he called the “long series of affronts to truth and the Empire’s fighting men” perpetrated by American war films.<sup>31</sup> It had even become the practice, he suggested, for Hollywood to make two versions of its films, one for Britain, shorn of criticism and embellished with references to British achievements, the other for America and the rest of the world, in which British achievements were wholly or almost wholly ignored. So the pot of controversy was already boiling in May, four months before Objective Burma was released in Britain.

One notes the factors. The film purports to treat of real events; makes use of genuine combat footage; focusses on American personnel (ostensibly for dramatic purposes); mentions real persons like Mountbatten, Wingate, Cochran, and Stilwell (who is impersonated); the British are anyway very touchy about Yankee upstaging, i.e., they suspect the Americans are trying to grab the credit and they are on the lookout for evidence of this. Summing up a strong feeling at the time, Campbell Dixon, the widely respected film critic of The Daily Telegraph, wrote:

This distortion and denigration of the British Empire’s efforts, in all the theatres of war, is arousing natural resentment. There is a feeling that if Washington will not take action it is time London did. No one would welcome it more than serving Americans who know the facts.<sup>32</sup>

At the time, the director of publicity for Warners in London is quoted as having said: “The picture is based on one incident in the Burma campaign... . It is not intended to present a complete picture of the Burma war.”

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<sup>31</sup> Daily Telegraph, 1.10.45.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 31.5.45.

When the film opened, the London critics expressed outrage.<sup>33</sup> They found offensive the film's appropriation, even by suggestion, of a British-dominated theater of war. They sneered at the use of Errol Flynn. They found that the simulated jungle resembled pleasant woodland glades, and that the atrocious fighting conditions were represented by the odd slap at an invisible fly. One or two found the action scenes effective. But interest centered around the felt slight to British efforts. So great was the fuss that memory has exaggerated it. In his memoirs, Errol Flynn says that the Lord Chamberlain (the British theater censor) "yanked" the film after the first showing.<sup>34</sup> As we will see, what really happened is that the film played for a week but then was voluntarily withdrawn by Warners and its general release cancelled. Flynn also manages to claim creative credit for some of the touches in the film and cooks up an imaginary technical adviser, a Britisher, Major Watkins. In fact an American paratroop officer, Major Galbreath was the principal adviser.<sup>35</sup> Reminding us that he was himself an Australian whose education was completed in Britain, Flynn writes:

Actually Objective Burma ended with a shot showing a horde of American planes flying triumphantly over Burma. That might have been good for American morale at the time, but it sure made the English feel bad (p. 253).

Flynn seems to have taken well to his name becoming a standing joke such that whenever there was trouble in the world, people would say not to worry, send for Errol Flynn.

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<sup>33</sup> Reviews appeared in the following: Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Daily Sketch, Evening News, Evening Standard, The Star (all 21.9.45); Daily Herald, Daily Worker, News Chronicle (all 22.9.45); News of the World, The Observer, The People, Reynolds News, Sunday Chronicle, Sunday Dispatch, Sunday Express, Sunday Graphic, Sunday Times (all 23.9.45); Daily Express, Daily Telegraph, Manchester Guardian, The Times (all 24.9.45).

<sup>34</sup> See, My Wicked, Wicked Ways, New York: Putnam 1959, reprint Berkeley Medallion 1974, at pp. 252-3. However, the British writer Clive Hirschorn (The Warner Bros Story, New York: Crown, 1979) gets it right.

<sup>35</sup> See again note 19, above.

Even less reliable are Raoul Walsh's memoirs where he attributes the photography to Sid Hickox, the locations to Orange County, and the ban to "England" after the first showing.<sup>36</sup>

The critic of The Daily Mirror, Britain's largest circulation tabloid paper, suggested Warners withdraw the film. Stories surfaced that the head of the Associated British cinema chain was considering whether to go ahead with the release. Critics of other newspapers reported letters arriving from soldiers and ex-soldiers in the China-Burma-India theater protesting the film.<sup>37</sup> Some writers pointed to Warner Bros liberal track-record as a reason for forgiving them this film.<sup>38</sup>

One suspects that Associated British decided not to risk a general release, and the easiest way to break the contract was for Warners to withdraw the film, which is what they did. Max Milder, Warners managing director in London, issued a 2-page press release that withdrew the film in one sentence and used the remainder of its space to defend the company, the film, entertainment, the purity of intention and the fact that it had "played to bigger audiences than any previous Errol Flynn picture. Probably forty percent of our patrons have been British soldiers -- the largest troop percentage in the theatre's history. Not one word of criticism or protest has been expressed by them. They have enjoyed the film as dramatic entertainment and have disregarded any suggestion of adverse propaganda."<sup>39</sup> Despite this uncompromising defense, he announced that its release was to be suspended.

As a postscript to the incident, the film was finally released in Britain in 1952 when Errol Flynn was there shooting The Master of Ballantrae. Seven years after the furor, London's critics, many of them the same ones, could no longer quite see what all

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<sup>36</sup> Raoul Walsh, Each Man in His Own Time (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974) pp. 317-18. James Wong Howe told Charles Higham (Hollywood Cameramen, London: Thames and Hudson 1970, p. 88) that "'Objective Burma' was shot entirely in the studio, we just stuck tropical plants in the foreground of each shot." This is demonstrably false.

<sup>37</sup> Daily Mirror, 21.9.45. On objections see Daily Graphic 26.9.45; News Chronicle, 19.9.45; News Chronicle, 22.9.45; Daily Telegraph, 1.10.45. To my surprise, the film evoked no letters to The Times.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Sidney Bernstein to the News Chronicle, 1.10.45; Daily Sketch, 21.9.45.

the fuss was about in 1945.<sup>40</sup> True enough the film was American-oriented, but by then that could be seen as part of genre film-making: the all-male action film, derivative of the western, but often set in a theater of war. They could also see that the genre conventions of the American war film were artificial and formulaic, either of the moulding-the-raw-GIs-into-a-fighting-unit formula, or the carrying-out-of-a-dangerous-mission formula. When these films starred Randolph Scott or John Wayne, Gary Cooper or Humphrey Bogart, Robert Taylor or Errol Flynn, their intrinsic connection with Hollywood and its conventions was manifestly stronger than their extrinsic connection to the real war in the real world.

Be that as it may, Objective Burma had brought to a head a growing resentment in Britain and its Empire. Objectively, it was a pretty difficult situation to swallow. The British, rulers of an Empire on which the sun never set, had for a second time to rely upon American men and materiel to help them win a world war. When the ally does not live by aristocratic values, but rather, democratic ones conflict may have been inevitable. Even Errol Flynn could see in retrospect that the rarefied atmosphere of Hollywood was not a good place from which to think clearly about the sensibilities of the foreigners who were going to see American films that portrayed them, caricatured them, slighted them, and so on. So bad was the feeling about Hollywood treatment of Latins, e.g., that Roosevelt made Nelson Rockefeller special co-ordinator of Latin American Affairs who in turn tried among other things to get Hollywood to promote a positive and attractive image of Latin America.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For the full text of this two-page release see appendix D.

<sup>40</sup> See: Evening Standard, News Chronicle, Star 4.9.52; Daily Express, Daily Graphic, Daily Herald, Daily Mail, Evening News 5.9.52; Daily Worker, Manchester Guardian, News Chronicle 6.9.52; News of the World, People, Sunday Chronicle, Sunday Dispatch, Sunday Express 7.9.52.

<sup>41</sup> One remembers as a child being taken to part of the result: two very odd Disney films, Saludos Amigos and The Three Caballeros. Garth Jowett, Film: The Democratic Art, Norton 1976, chapter XII, has something on this. And one needs to look at the following: J. E. Harley, World Wide Influences of the Cinema, Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press 1940; Harry L. Hansen, "Hollywood and International Understanding", Harvard Business Review, vol. 25, 1945, 28-45; Arthur W. Macmahon, Memorandum on the Postwar International

Anti-Americanism was a world-wide phenomenon in the post-war world. What Objective Burma shows us is just how naively an American mass medium, against the intentions of its owners and creators, cooperated with national enemies and embarrassed national allies. Not just Hollywood, but the most liberal and socially conscious studio in Hollywood, spent thousands on research, re-takes, elaborate location work, weapons accuracy and such like,<sup>42</sup> yet made a film that enraged influential and ordinary people alike in the allied nation closest to America in history and culture. It should not be forgotten, I think, that serious intellectual interest in American movies is a relatively recent phenomenon; that in the heyday of Hollywood, intellectuals ignored American films because American popular culture of that time was thought to be parochial, insular, vulgar and crass, and that these flaws were magnified in Hollywood, a community that was itself isolated from the centers of sophisticated and cosmopolitan culture on the Eastern Seaboard.

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News of the whole controversy crossed the Atlantic. In the New York Times magazine there was an exchange between Dudley Carew, film critic of the London Times and Bosley Crowther on the alleged artificiality, bad taste, and self-congratulation of American war films.<sup>43</sup> Variety even hinted that the clamor about American films might be an orchestrated campaign to give the British movie mogul J. Arthur Rank more leverage in planning entry to the American market.<sup>44</sup> But apart from Anglo-American relations in general, it was also pointed out in a magisterial editorial in London's Times (see Appendix E), and by Campbell Dixon,<sup>45</sup> that Objective Burma fostered ignorance. A Gallup poll apparently revealed that many Americans were under the impression that their country fought alone in the S. W. Pacific, Burma, Tunisia, and Italy, making some wonder whether American films might be the sole source of all the

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Information Program of the United States, Washington: USGPO (US Dept. of State, Pub. no. 2433), 1945, Arno Press Reprint 1972.

<sup>42</sup> This is evident from the materials in the USC files.

<sup>43</sup> New York Times Magazine, 23.9.45. See the article the following week by Thomas M. Pryor, 30.9.45, section 2, front page.

<sup>44</sup> Variety 30.10.45, "A British Film Party-Line?"

<sup>45</sup> Daily Telegraph, 24.8.45.

contemporary history a great many Americans ever learn.<sup>46</sup> The basic problem of aligning the implicit as well as explicit propaganda of privately produced and exported mass media products with official foreign policy has yet to be solved. Even if in substance Objective Burma accurately reflected cross-currents of American opinion, it hardly succeeded in presenting them diplomatically.

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<sup>46</sup> In Télérama 15.12.63 there is a two page article on Objective Burma which opens “Pendant la dernière guerre, les troupes américaines ont été chassées de Birmanie par les Japonais. Le temps de la revanche est venu. L’invasion de la Birmanie se prépare.” Do the French also learn history from American movies? Lord Denman mentioned that Objective Burma was by no means the only film that offended in this way (Hansard, House of Lords, vol. CXXXVII, 1945-6, col. 502-3). British wartime ambivalence towards America is nicely hinted at in the 1979 movie Yanks. A more scholarly source is Margaret Mead, “A Case History in Cross-National Communication”, in Lyman Bryson, ed., The Communication of Ideas, New York: Harper 1948, pp. 209-29.