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Newsreels

AMERICAN NEWSREELS IN WORLD WAR II: ENTERTAINMENT, NEWS AND PRO-BRITISH PROPAGANDA IN 1941-42

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The most visible and best recalled media of the Second World War, regardless of nationality, are the newsreels. These very same newsreels, while essential for our visual recollection of that war, have been largely ignored by historians, except for mining them for documentary television. Interestingly, much of the early interest in history and film centred upon the newsreels as historical sources and, as late as 1975, feature films had yet to be probed for their own significant contribution.

Overall the historical literature on American newsreels has made little progress since Raymond Fielding's pioneering studies, **The American Newsreel, 1911-1967** (1972) and **The March of Time, 1935-1951** (1978). German newsreels of the Nazi years, on the other hand, have been illuminated by detailed and well-informed studies initiated by Professor K. F. Reimers in 1971 and published by the Institut für Wissenschaftlichen und Film (IWF), Göttingen. A unique effort to address the importance of the newsreels for the Second World War was IAMHIST's Göttingen Congress of 1985. From amongst a wide range of papers, this conference produced **Hitler's Fall: The Newsreel Witness** (1988) edited by Stephan Dolezel and myself. Another important contribution, still largely untapped, is my 1985 edition of **World War II through the American newsreels, 1942-1945**, a 229 fiche microfiche edition of the newsreel analysis carried out during the war years for the Office of War Information. Happily, the

material is still available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Casting the historical net a bit further, let me recommend to you, in the context of this conference, an outstanding article by Sheelagh Ellwood on Spanish newsreels' image of the Franco regime in *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol.7, No.3). Additionally, there are some seminal studies, including Peter Gerdes on the Swiss WWII newsreels, to lead the scholar forward, even if not very far¹.

There is no doubt in my mind that it is time for historical research to focus more sharply upon the organisation, economics, and impact of the world's newsreels during their heyday of the 1930s and 1940s. From the American perspective, such in-depth study would include the five major biweekly newsreels, *The March of Time* (monthly), as well as those newsreel 'shorts' featuring leading radio news commentators which played in newsreel cinemas in the United States. Any comprehensive study of the 'newsreels' as part of the American government's use of film to inform and motivate would include the newsreel produced for black Americans called *All American News*. Additionally, there was the *Good Neighbour News* (released by Embassy Newsreel Theatres) produced by the State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs, as well as the British Division (Films Division) of the Office of War Information Overseas Branch's which produced the twice-weekly *United Newsreel* (1943-5) and *Free World Newsreel* for exhibition in liberated Europe. This paper is a contribution, howbeit small, to that much needed historiography looking, as it does, in the period of 1941-1942, at the contribution the American newsreel's to American intervention, as well as supporting pro-British attitudes in wartime cinema audiences. But first, allow me to provide some essential background on the American newsreels.

The impact of the newsreels upon an entire generation of Americans was enormous according to Lowell Thomas, the best selling author of *With Lawrence in Arabia*, who doubled as a network radio news commentator and the voice of *Fox Movietone Newsreel*. Thomas wrote:

Today [1976] it is hard to believe there are millions of young Americans who have never seen history's great events flashing larger than life across the big movie screen of their local movie palace. Before the age of television, the newsreel, more than any other medium of communication, enabled people to see and hence understand the twists and turnings of our times. During the half-century heyday of the newsreel, five hundred staff cameramen and thousands of stringers regularly turned in miles of raw film from which the big companies culled the thousand feet, maybe ten minutes' worth, to provide sixteen thousand theatres from coast to coast, twice a week, with the biggest news stories of the day².

In addition to *Fox Movietone*, there were four other major New York-based newsreel companies, *RKO Pathe News*, *News of the Day*, *Paramount News*, and *Universal Newsreels*. Four of the five companies were subsidiaries of major film corporations.

Exceptionally, *News of the Day*, although released by MGM, was owned principally by the Hearst Corporation (Hearst Metrotone News), a national force in newspapers and syndicated news. In 1941 the United States had 16,951 theatres with 10,471,842 seats and an average admission price of 25 cents. Each of the five newsreels produced, on average, 725 prints of an issue to ensure timely exhibition, although some small rural theatres might be as much as two weeks behind in the news. The average life of a newsreel was not in excess of 40 days; immediately thereafter the newsreels, *Universal Newsreels* for example, destroyed all prints. With the exception of Pathe, all of the newsreels were copyrighted. Newsreels were also an international business, particularly with American subsidiaries in Great Britain, France and Germany³.

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the primary and immediate sources for seeing the news were photo-journalism magazines such as *Life* and *Look*. Newsreels, however, uniquely offered the allure of seeing it happen, even if it was 'cold' news, having been covered in the newspapers and on the radio some days before. Newsreels were not intended primarily to be a public information service. They must be seen as an important part of the entertainment package which preceded the main feature (or features, in one of the many double feature theatres) and which would normally include cartoons and travelogues. Rounding out the programme were trailers of 'coming attractions' advertising the studio's new releases. Although the newsreels maintained current event coverage through their twice weekly releases (Tuesday and Thursday, except the *News of the Day*, which was Wednesday and Friday), political reporting used in its widest sense seldom had constituted more than 1.5 to 2 minutes of the 8-10 minute newsreel. This was not unexpected for audiences were assumed, not unreasonably, to be more interested in sporting events (led by baseball, horse racing, and major college football games), bathing beauties, especially the annual Miss American contest, major tragedies, and finally animals and babies, preferably together. Newsreel current event coverage was similar to that of the photo-journalism magazines, which also frequently featured pretty girls and athletes on their covers. Furthermore, audiences could assume that bad news would normally not come at the end of the newsreel, lest it sour an audience's appreciation of the featured film.

Much has been made of the newsreels' similarity, despite the fact that they sought to establish clear and separate identities which was reflected in the layout of their individual issue sheets. Issue sheets went out twice weekly to the newsreel exhibitors and carried the forthcoming newsreel's contents with brief explanation. The idea was that the exhibitor would be able to entice potential customers with the promise of their being able to see important current events on the screen. The reverse side of the issue sheet carried promotional material for the studio's feature films (Appendix A). As in the newspapers of the day, newsreels, particularly *Universal*, sought the ever elusive 'scoop', or sole coverage of a story. This was not the only thing shared with the newspapers for *News of the Day* adopted a newspaper format with *The Front Page* (John B. Kennedy

- Commentator), *The Woman's Page* (edited by Adelaide Hawley) and *The Sporting Page* with the famous Bill Stern as commentator. *Fox-Movietone*, heralding itself as «The Newreel of the Twentieth Century!», was organised under *World Events*, *Hollywood Spotlight*, and *Sports*, while adding individual stories, such as one on the Miss Florida beauty contest on 3 March 1942.

A useful insight on the perceived distinctiveness of newsreels was provided by a «high [newsreel] executive» who was quoted as saying that the newsreels «... all get about the same 'copy.' We merely edit out or prepare the story in keeping with the pattern of the reel, just as a newspaper fits its news to the publications's mould. Hearst [*News of the Day*] is inclined towards sensationalism. *Twentieth-Fox* has a policy of never showing a dead person in the reel. *Paramount* likes to stress the human angle even if it brings in a bit of pathos»⁴. Newsreel editors were concerned with New York's newspaper headlines and leading stories, as indicated by the clippings in newsreel production files, such as those of *Universal Newsreels*. The newspaper stories could not be recycled in a newsreel, but they provided a key source for the developing events and stories to which newsreel cameramen would be assigned. *Universal's* wartime production files also contain government and business press releases, military reports, as well as the «dope sheets» or «cameraman's caption sheet» (Appendix B) prepared by the cameramen and accompanied their exposed film providing essential information about the footage. All of the exposed film was developed and estimates suggest that only 10% of that film found its way into the newsreel. All of the footage, used and unused, then went into the library, the vast majority of which was formed of the unused 'offcuts'. This 35mm nitrate film library material was accessed through extensive and elaborately cross indexed cardfiles, such as the one at *Fox-Movietone*. Newsreels also had an important point of contact with radio through their use of columnists or commentators whose voices and reputations were well known such as *Fox-Movietone's* Lowell Thomas who broadcast on the Blue Network's WJZ in Newark, New Jersey (6.45 EST, Monday through Friday), *News of the Day's* John B. Kennedy on New York's WNEW and *Universal Newsreels* Graham McNamee who broadcast for NBC.

Fox-Movietone's production team had faces which, according to chief commentator Lowell Thomas, became as familiar as 'Gable's, Garbo's and Mickey Mouse's'. Ed Thorgersen did the sports along with Paul Douglas and Mel Allen, while Louise Vance covered fashion and 'Cork Man' Lew Lehr did comedy pieces. Prosper Buranelli, who help Thomas write his radio network news commentary show, also collaborated with Thomas on the newsreel script. Thomas provides an personal insight into how the newsreels were created:

Twice each week, around 10 or 11 P.M, we repaired to the *Movietone* studios on Tenth Avenue and Fifty-fourth Street [460 West 54th]. There we would screen the film [in the third-floor screen room] that had already come in, cut it, and begin preparing the script. As the night wore on, the pressure intensified,

especially if there was a late-breaking story due. We cut and spliced, wrote and rewrote, recorded and re-recorded. Toward dawn, when everyone was ready for a hot bath and warm bed, we had to pull it all together and do the final version. I think the only fear that we would sound the way we felt perked us up... It was a pressure-cooker business, continuously charged with the high drama of human events.

Typical of the headline stories or a 'scoop' that would blow the lid off altogether was *Fox-Movietone's* cameramen recording both Charles Lindbergh's takeoff from Roosevelt Field on 20 May 1927 and the Lone Eagle's triumphant return; the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia and the French premier Jean Louis Barthou in Marseilles in October 1934. Three years later, in 1937, *Fox* cameraman Al Gold was at the Lakehurst Naval Air Station in New Jersey and filmed the *Hindenburg* disaster. Eric Mayell of *Fox* and Norman Alley of *Universal* filming of the Japanese air attack on the US gunboat *Panay* from aboard that ship which sank in China's Yangtze River. Nor could Thomas forget the appalling image of the weeping Chinese child alone in the ruins of Shanghai's railway station after Japanese bombing⁵.

Then came 1938. The foreign news coverage of America's newspapers, radio, and movie newsreels, throughout the summer and fall of that year was dominated by the events leading to the Munich Conference in which France and Great Britain heroically sacrificed Czechoslovakia territorial integrity to German ambition in the interest of European peace. Americans, although no longer committed to guaranteeing world peace in their time, nevertheless were gripped by understandable anxiety as they waited eagerly for the next newspaper edition or live radio news reports warning of war or promising peace. Television in the United States, still in its experimental infancy, was unable to provide viewers with pictures of these momentous events unlike England's small band of television-set owners who were able to watch BBC's pioneering coverage of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain ill-fated shuttle diplomacy that fall⁶.

The news and information potential of that single reel of ten minute movie programming, however, was not lost on some who were convinced that the newsreels had an unfulfilled responsibility to prewar America's weekly audiences which stood in excess of 85 million attendance in the nation's 17,000 movie theatres. Although prior to World War II, the newsreels were not prepared to reject entertainment and heed that higher calling, Time Incorporated founder Henry Luce, publisher of *Life*, *Fortune*, and *Time*, was prepared to provide Louis de Rochemont with a cinematic vehicle to examine major contemporary issues in depth, not unlike the stories that regularly appeared in *Time*, and to a lesser degree *Life*. De Rochemont's monthly twenty-minute *The March of Time* (*TMOT*) made its unique contribution to creating an informed America between 1 February 1935 - August 1951. When distributed in Great Britain, *TMOT* could arouse sufficient controversy over its reporting as to be periodically censored, if not banned altogether. Much of America's prewar visual experience of Nazi militarism was derived

from *The March of Time* and its stable-mate *Life*. Not content with the twenty minutes available in the monthly MOT issues, de Rochemont made a ninety-nine minute feature length film to promote American war-preparedness, using both newsreel footage and dramatic re-enactments. *From the Ramparts We Watch* (1940) made no reference to the fact that the title was derived from the National Anthem's celebration of Old Glory's surviving of an English naval bombardment at Baltimore's Fort McHenry, a prelude to the British burning of Washington in the War of 1812. Furthermore, de Rochemont's analysis of America's involvement in the First World War carefully excluded current views on the major impact of British propaganda in drawing America into that conflict. What was clear was that as late as July 1940, polls were showing that 79% of Americans said they would vote to stay out of war with Germany and Italy; and that was after the fall of France. Overall it is fair to say the American public opinion was characterised by indifference and distrust towards its World War I allies, Great Britain and France. Donald Dunlop felt that de Rochemont had taken on a «task of extraordinary difficulty to have to revise attitudes towards World War I in order to propagandise for entry into a second World War.” Henry Luce was convinced as a result of his trip to Europe in the spring of 1940 that the United States, in its own interests, would have to come to the support of Great Britain, although his advocacy would not become public until the end of that year.

Paramount Newsreels, taking a lead from *The March of Time*, released *The World In Flames*, ‘a photographic history’, compiled from its library footage going back to 1929. Bosley Crowther (*New York Times*, 24 October 1940) noted that «the newsreels when seen from week to week, are seldom more than dramatic illustrations, isolated and without context. But when edited and strung in sequence, as they have been in the present case, they assume a meaningful pattern.» Crowther was also relieved that Paramount's editors «wisely» made no effort ... to probe for historical significance: no message has been emphasised, aside from a cool observation at the end that this country must prepared its defences.»

The March of Time continued to focus on the developing world crisis and theatre managers began to receive and pass on to Hollywood's distributors complaints from audiences about de Rochemont's presentation of world events. Luce finally went public with his interventionism in his unprecedented five page *Life* editorial of 19 February 1941 (Vol.10, No.7, pp.61-5) entitled ‘The American Century». Having tried the message out in public speeches as widely separated as Pasadena, California, Tulsa, Oklahoma and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Luce now sent his message to twelve million readers of *Life*. He also promoted his controversial views by taking out full-page newspaper advertisements across the nation and mailing copies of the editorial to hundreds of opinion-makers. Disheartened by the recently reelected Roosevelt's isolationist» performance, Luce demanded that his fellow citizens accept responsibility for living in the Twentieth Century which «must be to a significant degree an American

Century». American national security demanded that she support Great Britain and cooperate in the defeat of Hitler. So much for the «moral and practical bankruptcy of isolationism», as Luce put it.

Luce's position had also been telegraphed by *The March of Time* issue of the previous month, January 1941 (Vol.7, No.6) «Uncle Sam - The Non-Belligerent (British release title: *America Speaks Her Mind*). The issue began with CBS radio correspondent Edward R. Murrow speaking from Blitz-battered London and immediately cut back to the United States which was preparing to defend her traditional freedoms by building a powerful «citizen's army», along with girding for war and inevitable air-raids and blackouts. At the same time «Bundles for Britain» were being prepared. (In addition to his live short-wave contributions to CBS's News Roundups, in early 1942 Murrow's fifteen minute show 'From London' was heard Sunday nights at 6pm EST on New York's WABC and nationally on the CBS network):

And side by side (said the commentary) with their own national defence effort, thousands of US citizens are working to help in the defence of Great Britain, for the vast majority of Americans believe that a British victory is essential to the safety of their own country.

To indicate how far Americans were prepared to go in order to support of the British, *TMOT* commissioned a Gallup Poll survey which found that 60% of Americans were convinced that «we've got to see that [Britain] wins regardless». *TMOT* then cut to isolationist Senator Burton Wheeler's contention that there was no threat unless Hitler invaded America; de Rochemont then cut to President Roosevelt, who was used to declare Wheeler wrong. The main title for this section proclaimed:

Today, most Americans accept as fact that in her battle for survival, Britain is also fighting for the freedom of men everywhere (backed by stirring music).

The next section of the film documented the ongoing Battle of Britain fought by the RAF against the Luftwaffe over the nation's cities, followed by shots of Piccadilly Circus underground station, and then on to Nazi-occupied Europe with its slave camps as an indication of what would happen to the British if they surrendered. German newsreel footage of Paris provide the backdrop for the *TMOT*'s characterisation of the French as «liberty loving people [who] were the first to establish democracy on the continent of Europe.» Shots of Hitler and Luftwaffe chief Goering loading it over the French was contrasted with food lines in Paris. Audiences were assured that the French would resist, avenge their humiliation and live again. German U-boats and bombers were next shown in their almost successful North Atlantic campaign to starve out the besieged British by cutting the Atlantic lifeline of convoys carrying essential materials.

(Commentary): By the winter of 1941, Adolph Hitler well knew that all his conquests would be in vain unless he could quickly and finally smash democracy's last European stronghold, the British Isles.

There was no discounting the fact that German success against North Atlantic convoys or the British government's heightened anxiety. In a typical *TMOT* reconstruction

'a man from the [British] ministry' said that Great Britain «desperately» required cargo ships and destroyers to protect the convoys carrying essential supplies. The following title said:

With their nation hard pressed by sea and air, Britain's leaders see no hope of victory until full effective aid arrives from the USA.

After this title, the story progressed to the documentation of the Lend-Lease deal between Washington and London in which the United States sent fifty World War I long-range destroyers to the Royal Navy in exchange for American bases on British North Atlantic possession, such as those in the Caribbean (at the end of the war, the ships bells were returned to the American cities after which the ships had been names). The transfer of fifty Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers to the RAF was also reported, along with the fact that they were «equipped with the deadly accurate [sic.] US [Norden] bombsight». Subsequent film sequences documented RAF bombers in action against Nazi targets with enormous effect. This was pro- British propaganda at its most effective.

Then came «thousands» of American citizens demanding official US government aid be given to Britain, played by a string of *TMOT* actors playing out various authoritative roles, such as a Christian minister: the church demanded aid for Britain because it was «the plain duty of every Christian to give aid to the British. Only a British victory can save Europe's millions from starvation and servitude.» An American «sailor» wanted his government to give him and others a leave of absence so that they could go and fight for England. Lest Time Inc be convicted, rather than accused, of blatant bias, the *TMOT* also provided an opportunity for the opposition which was only a «small bloc» of voters, at least according to the commentary. New York's Vito Marc Antonio was seen calling the conflict «a war, not for democracy, but imperialism.» Such opposition was painted by implication with the brush of «Nazi sympathisers and appeasers». President Roosevelt was given the last word in an extract from his State of the Union message before the 77th Congress the previous month; he promised to «send in ever increasing number ships, planes, tanks, guns» to Britain.

Cutting back to London once again for the conclusion, *TMOT* raised an optimistic note set against film shots indicating that with America's help the tide of battle was turning in favour of democracy:

As the Battle of Britain continues into its second year, everywhere throughout the world in 1941, the hopes of free men are rising. For against the assaults of tyranny, England still resists and day by day grows stronger on land, at sea, and in the air.

Up from a score of British harbors are rising huge air battleships; the Royal Air Force Sunderlands. Their's is the important task of scouting, searching channels and approaches for floating mines, or attacking submarines and bombing surface raiders. Far at sea they meet the arriving convoys and with the Royal Navy, shepherd them into port.

Today, Britain is still mistress of her seas but she knows that her war may yet be lost on the Atlantic highways. And though totally dependent on convoys from the New World for food and munitions of war, England places her highest hopes upon the solemn pledge that in the defence of freedom and free men, the people of America cannot and will not stand idly by.

TIME MARCHES ON

Luce was hammered from all sides for his views; conservative Republican allies attacked him for rejecting isolationism, while the Democrats assailed Luce's «imperialism». Vice President Henry A. Wallace countered with «The Century of a Common Man» and Max Learner offered «The People's Century». Perennial Socialist presidential candidate Norman Thomas attacked Luce's «nakedness of imperial ambition.» Imperialism, or anything remotely resembling it, was very much out of fashion and only columnist Dorothy Thompson took Luce's side. Luce, however, did speak for internationalists like Hollywood independent film producer Walter Wanger. In order to bring more firepower to the front, Luce had restarted *The March of Time* on the radio in October. Produced by Frank Norris, the 30 minute programme aired on Friday evenings on NBC Blue Network. Wanger wrote to «Harry» on the 11th of October congratulating him saying: «You have really done a wonderful job with your «March of Time» film, the radio and your papers.» Wanger concluded by saying: «You are my number one candidate for Minister of Enlightenment in the United States.» Luce's obviously pleased reply of two days later said that if Walter had «...any regard for [him] for God's sake forget about that candidacy»⁸.

Wartime arrangements between the United States military and the newsreel companies involved each company contributing two cameramen for pooled overseas coverage in the European and Pacific theatres of operations. *Fox Movietone*, *The March of Time* and *News of the Day* also trained military combat cameramen. Film material shot by the military and pool cameramen was priority airlifted along with the dope sheets or log books identifying the events photographed to the processing and censorship divisions of the Army and the Navy. The material was then edited, commentary or script provided, and then distributed to the newsreel companies for their use. The film material was only released for use after apparently overzealous military intelligence had determined that it contained no information of possible use to the enemy. Pool cameramen maintained their corporate identity and their dope sheets were distributed on the letterhead of their company. The United States' National Archives' *Universal Newsreel* Production Files contains the source material for each newsreel issue, including the dope sheets from *Paramount* and *News of the Day* cameramen, as well as those of *Universal's* own cameramen. Official U.S. Army Signal Corps releases normally were sent to the newsreel companies with full scripts to accompany the

released footage. The Navy Department was more inclined to provide informative notes, assuming, it would seem, that the newsreel editors would rewrite the material anyway. Newsreel companies also received material from the National Film Board of Canada / Canadian Army Film & Photo Unit and the British Library of Information, the New York distributor for London's Ministry of Information. Sensitive geographic locations and military units mentioned in the 'Confidential Prints' from the Army Pictorial Service Laboratories were cut out by hand before being released to the newsreel companies. Commercial newsreel editors and commentary writers also made use of government and business press releases, as well as the front pages of New York's major newspapers in deciding what was news worthy for the silver screen. The War (Army) and Navy Departments released their material directly to the newsreel companies with *News of the Day* passing the material on down an established line and after the 36 hour limit for circulation, the material reach the New York offices of the Office of War Information, *The March of Time* and finally ended up NBC Television; WNBT in New York. Individual newsreel releases were never submitted to formal censorship, rather the control of the film material was initially dealt with by military pre-censorship.

Criticism of the newsreels surfaced early in the war and was highlighted by a *Variety* story of 11 March 1942 entitled «More Criticism on 'Pollyanna' War Newsreels». The unsigned article began:

Public protest against the anaemic and Pollyanna slant on World War happenings and American military and industrial participations, as pictured in the newsreel releases of the major companies, supplemented by the shorts distributed by the War Activities Committee, is finding expression through letter columns in daily newspapers.

A letter to the editor of *The New York Times* (10 March 1942) by Lyman Beecher Stowe was then reprinted as evidence of the failings of the newsreels to properly inform the nation's audiences. *Variety* quoted a movie industry executive, who had 'long been intimate with the newsreel situation', that the newsreels were not to blame for lack of 'authoritative and documentary war film'. It was the Army and Navy censors refusal to allow material on scenes of military action or preparation: «With the biggest story in the world's history blasting and bursting on a thousand battle fronts, American newsreels are being permitted, he said, to show only a fraction of available footage.» Clearly the military had the right to handle matters of military necessity, as well as depriving the enemy of information. However the censors had extended «...regulation to the highly controversial field of [civilian] morale» that «... stifled editorial selection and treatment of news by the newsreel editors.» The Army and Navy withholding the material on the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, until February 27, 1942 was cited as a clear illustration of this misguided effort, inasmuch as the extent of the damage already was evident in the newspaper and magazine coverage. *Variety* used the Stowe letter, which complained of the content and tone of a War Activities

Committee short entitled *The Arsenal of Democracy* as the opportunity to attack the prevailing censorship. Stowe, who stopped in at a Broadway newsreel theatre 'to kill an hour or so of time between appointments' said that the implication of the film was that 'all was well in this best of all possible worlds'; a view he considered inexcusably dangerous and misleading at this time.⁹

It has been estimated that newsreel cameramen photographed only 20% of the total combat footage of WW II¹⁰. Be that as it may, it would be interesting to calculate what percentage was actually used in the newsreels themselves. The domination of the released material by military cameramen led to complaints against over-zealous military censors. Walton Ament, editor of *RKO Pathe* and the WAC's Newsreel Division chairman, wrote to Elmer Davis, chief of the OWI on 14 July 1942, asking for his help in unfreezing military censorship. Ament claimed that 'the bulk of our war coverage remains British - in the Far East, the North of Ireland, Egypt, and Libya, and any other area from which half-way decent pictures have come.' This was coupled with the complaint that the commercial pool's cameramen were kept behind the lines, while the military cameramen were supposed to be shooting the real war; which, according to Ament, they dismally failed to do¹¹. Over the next twelve months, OWI's Intelligence Bureau fed a steady stream of information to the Newsreel Section of the OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures looking for a way to support the newsreels' needs for material which was being throttled by overzealous military censorship. Public opinion was considered an appropriate tool to mobilise to produce a 'different conception of the news'. A memorandum of 13 July 1942 suggested; «In dealing with the Army and Navy, proof that the public wants news and information on certain topics might help in effecting a change in policy.» Military news censorship remained a fact of wartime life; newsreel footage of the disaster at Pearl Harbor was not released for a year after the event, although the public knew in general terms the extent of the damage. Total censorship was enforced concerning Japanese atrocities against American and Filipino troops captured in the fall of the Philippines. It was not until the very end of January 1944 that the press, radio and newsreels were allowed to disclose the horrors of the Bataan Death March.

Later content control was combined with the Office of War Information's (OWI) 'guidance', howbeit advisory, ensured the needed security to the nation's information and morale demands. The OWI was founded on 13 June 1942 by Executive Order, incorporating several government agencies such as the Office of Facts and Figures and Office of Government Reports. For the next year, until Congress refused to reappropriate funds for it in the Spring of 1943, OWI's Domestic Branch worked with the motion picture industry's War Activity Committee (WAC), which had succeeded the Motion Picture Committee Co-operating for National Defence after Pearl Harbor. OWI liaised with the Newsreel Division of the WAC. While the OWI sought to shape the contents and commentary of the newsreels, the newsreel companies were also aware

that the newsreels were being closely monitored by the Library of Congress Film Project.

The LC Film Project was the brain child of Archibald McLeish the Librarian of Congress and an associate director of OWI. The Library of Congress which possessed a statutory right to copies of motion pictures, received a three year grant in 1942 from the Rockefeller Foundation to enable the Library to view and recommend films, feature, documentary and newsreels, for eventual preservation. Additionally, the LC team sent detailed content reports to the Bureau of Intelligence of the OWI. Had any newsreel deviated from the standards of approved reporting there is no doubt that formal censorship would have been imposed, for not even in peacetime did the First Amendment's heralded freedom of speech apply to the movies or their newsreels¹².

The newsreels of the week of February 10, 1942 carried featured the major story of that month, the landing of American troops in Northern Ireland, dressed up with World War I tunes like «Over There» recalling the Yanks first landing in Europe twenty-five years before. According to the Library of Congress analysis, the entire story of that significant moment in American history was badly mismanaged by the military. The Army had refused to allow the commercial newsreels to cover the departure of the ship from its US port and then forgot to cover it itself, although the film could have been embargoed until the ship was safely across the Atlantic. The Army then refused to allow the two pool newsreel cameramen on the troop ship permission to shoot any film about the voyage. The ship's arrival in Belfast was covered by all of the newsreel companies, but when the film finally arrived by ship two weeks later in New York it was confiscated by the Army, insisting that it be subjected to censorship, despite the fact that it had already appeared in the British newsreels! The footage was released to newsreels on a make-up day at 6.30 PM, but the Army censorship office had closed thirty minutes before. «After enough row was kicked up a censor was finally gotten down and the film censored with much hard feeling.» Only *Paramount News* offered a personal perspective by using shots of a Minnesota boy eating an English steak pie. The other stories for the week of 10 February, included the siege of Singapore with some «good bombing film secured from the Australian government», «Bundles for Congressmen» which concerned collecting junk for the war effort, a mudslide in San Francisco, West Coast defences, the Millrose games with a record breaking pole vault effort, a German submarine sunk off Panama, and the burning of the French liner *Normandie* in New York harbor. The other big story concerned the progress of the war in Libya, with British supplied film. The Ministry of Information also supplied a gag line with referring to the capture of a German general which was happily used by all of the newsreels: «He is lucky he will never be a Field Marshall and fall prey to sudden illness that is overtaking so many German Field Marshalls»¹³.

One important but overlooked aspect of the wartime newsreel business was the popularity of the chains of newsreel theatres, such as the Embassy News and TransLux

theatres, which flourished in major cities. People flocked into these non-stop newsreel theatres which carried the major newsreels, in addition to newsreel shorts. Such shorts were produced by Embassy itself and featured leading radio news commentators like H.V. Kaltenborn, Fulton Lewis Jr., Arthur Hale, Tex McCrary and Carey Longmire. These 10 minute films usually took the form of library or stock newsreel material, rather than specially shot current material, illustrating a commentary on a current issue by the broadcaster. Tex McCrary (husband of show business personality Jinx Falkenberg), had a series in 1942 called **Your Ringside Seat with Tex McCrary** which contained several issues devoted to Great Britain¹⁴. The release of May 29, 1942 was entitled **Testing Time for Churchill**. McCrary started off with the statement that «The democratic system in England is far more sensitive to the will of the people than the American system», pointing out that, while the American president had a guaranteed four year term in the White House, his British equivalent, the prime minister, could be out of a job anytime he lost the confidence of the House of Commons. Chamberlain had gone but Churchill was now, said McCrary, «...fighting with his back to the wall. But like England, Mr. Churchill fights best when his back is to the wall». The British after absorbing a series of reversals finally had struck back on the warfronts and Churchill, facing domestic dissatisfaction with his conservatism, had restructured his cabinet by incorporating the «brilliant Socialist lawyer, Sir Stafford Cripps» as Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House Commons. Lord Beaverbrook's **The Evening Standard** joked that Churchill had hired the «best lawyer in England as his defence counsel». McCrary admired the political shrewdness of Churchill, equating him with President Roosevelt, but he also expressed great admiration for the British people:

I find the people of England today cheerful, eager, and optimistic. Their hearts are very sound, and I believe this is because they have faith in their leadership. The people of England know they have got a great man. They are determined to keep him and to deserve him.

McCrary combined his primary interest in military matters with that of Great Britain in the June 12, 1942 release called **Victory Through Air Power**. The film centred on Seversky's famous book by the same name, but combined the aspirations of the early controversial proponent of American air power, General Billy Mitchell, with the achievements of the RAF and General Jimmy Doolittle's bombing raid on Tokyo. On the other hand when McCrary turned to **Too Little Too Late — and Second Rate** (9 July 1942), he highlighted the British and American defeats: «At Dunkirk, and in Libya, the British did not understand *tank* warfare. The secret of tank victory is firepower. We must design our tanks for quality as well as quantity.» McCrary concluded:

We lost a battle — but we haven't lost the war in the Middle East...because British and Yankee airpower plus the magnificent courage of Scotch and Irish and English and Anzac and Indian and American fighting men...held on and still fought back against the crushing weight of Rommel's panzer divisions.

McCrary's release of the 10 September (II, No.17) was entitled **What Every Englishman Tries to Learn About Americans** and was based on the recent release of two pamphlets, one for members of the RAF coming to the United States to train and the second, titled **Short Guide to Great Britain** (part of a series and written anonymously by Eric Knight, author of **This Above All and Lassie Come Home**). McCrary told his audience that the American boys flying in the RAF's Eagle Squadrons have 'already taught the British to like and respect this generation of American fighting men.' He was however aware that nerves were frayed because of the strain of all out war and the 'stinging bitterness of defeats'. The RAF primer prepared its readers for unbounded hospitality for which they needed to feel and show appreciation. America was not Hollywood and they should learn about America from Americans. Isolationism was fighting its last stand in the Middle West but, contrasting negative with positive, it was not only the homeland of «Colonel—now Mr. Lindbergh...but also Mr. Wendell Wilkie, too.» McCrary explained that American sports owed, according to the British booklet (tongue-in-cheek?), much to the American Indian for the frontier fighters beat the Indian at his own game and «used the same methods to outwit our British troops in the war of Independence [visual footage of Lacrosse action]. There is the same preliminary war dance, the same war cries [College cheer leaders], the same love of violent action...and violent speech....and the same concentration on the scalp as the object of the expedition...and the idea is to WIN, not just to have a game [football action].» Finally, after warning the RAF cadets not to criticize the quality of American planes and equipment or the slowness with which America came into the war, the pamphlet continued «... Beware of even thinking that the United States owes help to Britain as a duty...we're each of us fighting for our freedom...and for our LIVES [Visuals of King and Queen in blitzed areas and FDR in Congress reading Declaration of War].» McCrary then concluded: «That is the common urgent cause that must curb and crush every poison whisper that festers into disunity. Britain and America must stand...and fight...and survive: TOGETHER.»

McCrary returned once again to the theme of Anglo-American unity on October 1, 1942 in his discussion of **Discord Over That Second Front?** concluded with his usual theme: «The people of Russia and China...and India...and the people of Britain and America must resist discord on every front...must stand and fight together...divided, we must expect defeat...united we cannot fail!» On November 12th, McCrary produced **Stalin, Leader** based on the writings of Winston Churchill, but McCrary's major effort of that year to cement relations between the two nations came a week later (19 November) with **Back-Biting the British Helps Hitler Divide Us**. McCrary warned his audience that with the first bitter winter of the war with growing casualty lists that Hitler «...will try every trick to divide the United Nations against each other. And the deadliest poison he will peddle among us to stir up anti-British feeling — is this damnable lie: The whispered lie that Winston Churchill and the British are making their Allies fight

England's share of this war.» McCrary listed the insignificant differences like uniforms, accents, girls, famous families, and the royals. Noting the common ancestral stock that bound the two nations together, he suggested that the Churchills and the King's family were not so different from the Roosevelts, noting wryly that the Duke of Windsor and Randolph Churchill could 'match headlines with any of our President's sons.» The British love their tea and their horses, but Americans flocked to Belmont Park with the same enthusiasm that their British counterparts went to the Derby. McCrary concluded:

And when someone plants the poison lie in your ear that the British are shirking their share of this war...just remind the poisoners that the people of England....the men of England fought Hitler ALONE for a year after Dunkirk....the English Channel was our front line.[Dunkirk visuals]. And remember, the People of Britain held that line for a year after Dunkirk....They held it along....They held it for us. Remember...¹⁵.

Turning away from this sample of the pro-British themes found within the newsreel shorts, another obvious contribution to the war effort was the use of the newsreels for selling war bonds through their extensive coverage of the major efforts of Hollywood stars on War Bond Drives, as well as providing time for «Minute Man» spots. The revolutionary war citizen soldier was the symbol of their war savings stamps and war bonds and was popularised in the press and in the movies. The United States Treasury War Savings programme made effective use of the newsreel space to promote the sale of bonds using famous personalities. Embassy Newsreels Theatres took a different approach with their Minute Man. Released on June 12th 1942, the Embassy short featured not a movie star, but John T. Madden, a New York business man, speaking directly to the New York metropolitan audience as a «average New Yorker». Uncle Sam's War Bond Pledge Campaign was set that year to run between June 14th and June 24th when a quarter of a million 'volunteer minute men and women were going to ring every doorbell in Greater New York. The volunteers asked people to sign a pledge indicating how much they were prepared to «invest in liberty» based on the «vital twenty-point War Bond story.» Although the war bond drives of the war years featured coast-to-coast celebrity tours, and mass rallies, the motion picture industry itself, using the newsreels as its primary vehicle, along with theatre collections during intermissions, made a major contribution to funding the war effort and taking the enormous surplus of cash out of an economy which lacked consumer goods upon which to spend it. Patriotic movie theatres, the industry told exhibitors, promoted and sold war bonds and stamps!

Finally, what of the movie industry's own perception in early 1942 of the potential contribution of the newsreels to America's wartime needs. The authors of **Film Facts, 1942: 1922-1942 20 Years of Self Government**, using celebratory quotations and tables of comparative statistics, stressed the economic and entertainment/morale contribution of the industry and, by implication, the necessity of keeping it free from government interference and censorship. Lacking figures on the 1942 War Bond drive,

Hollywood cited its \$2,251,373 contribution to charity, including theatre collections for the United Service Organisation (the USO was responsible for the welfare of servicemen and women) of \$943,684.47. Stress was placed upon the industry's War Activities Committee [WAC] (pp.21-8) which had distributed and arranged for the exhibition of twenty-five trailers and short subjects (mostly federal government produced) «each relating to a particular phase of the nation's all-out war effort, contribute to a better public appreciation and understanding of the activities of a democracy in action.» Not surprisingly, comparatively little emphasis was placed upon the importance of the newsreels. «10 Facts About Motion Pictures' (p.9) made only oblique reference in #2 proclaiming that motion pictures furnished «entertainment, relaxation, information and inspiration to millions every week.'

The section entitled 'Films Show Democracy in Action' (p.20), based on an industry study **Motion Pictures in a Democracy**, focused solely upon feature pictures and short subjects released by Hollywood in the three years, 1939-1941. The 1941 members of the WAC's Newsreels Division were listed, including Louis De Rochemont of TMOT. [WAC's Newsreels Division was E.B. Hatrick, Chairman, Walton C. Ament, Louis De Rochemont, Thomas Mead, Albert J. Richard, Truman H. Talley]. The strategy which was chosen is of interest in that «Who's Who in the Newsreels' (p.46) listed people who, between 1 September 1940 and 31 August 1941, made twenty-five or more appearances in the releases of the five newsreels. The list was President Roosevelt, Mrs Roosevelt, Wendell L. Willkie (Republican candidate for President), the King and Queen of Great Britain, Frank Knox (Secretary of the Navy), British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, US. Vice President Henry A. Wallace, Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia of New York City and the Duke of Windsor. It is interesting to see the British emphasis at this level which is also reflected in the list of those in the ten to twenty-five appearance category. Secretary of State Cordell Hull headed that list, followed by Marshall Pétain of France, British Ambassadors to the United States Lord Halifax and his predecessor Lord Lothian, William S. Knudsen of the Office of Price Management, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, John G. Winant, American Ambassador to Britain, British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, the Duke of Kent, the Duchess of Windsor, FDR's special envoy Harry L. Hopkins. Captain James Roosevelt, FDR's son, who often appeared with his father in a supportive role, was also included on the list. Unexpectedly, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Charles Evans Hughes also made the list. The film industry also pointed strongly to its support of the British cause with a section on 'Films Strengthen British Morale' because, despite Britain's freezing of much of the earnings, Hollywood helped keep Britain's theatres open and its morale up. Lord Halifax was also extensively quoted, in company with Henry L. Stimson, Frank Knox, and Canadian Government Film Commissioner John Grierson. Halifax, however, specifically thanked the American film industry for its «fine attitude toward, and its

important assistance in, the British fight for democracy and freedom. Motion pictures are a vital element in maintenance of the high morale of both our civilian and fighting forces and our appreciation is indeed deep and genuine».

Throughout America's four bitter years of war, the five major newsreels, *The March of Time*, and the newsreel short commentators like H.V. Kaltenborn and Tex McCrary provided audiences with a potent mixture of the images of current events, both tragic and comic, fascinating and trivial, football and tank battles, beauty queens and Army nurses working in the mud. It was an amazing mix of reality, limited by military censorship and the nature of a medium which was suppose to cover domestic and world events in the space of ten minutes twice a week. More time was not given to the newsreels; nor did they receive less time regardless of the material costs. Biweekly newsreels, weekly news shorts and the monthly *TMOT* must be seen as providing a unique news and information service to the American public, one which did not carry the sole responsibility for an informed public; it was a shared responsibility with the newspapers and magazines, and particularly the radio. Entertainment was a crucial element in maintaining morale and stoking the home front fires. All of America's media shared in the task of entertaining and informing, in saving scrap metal, in buying War Bonds, in maintaining production levels by fighting anti-British and anti-United Nations prejudice.

The newsreel contribution, however, was unique for it provided Americans their only opportunity to SEE IT HAPPEN in a pre-television world. Quite by chance, the newsreels have also made it possible for us, fifty years later, to share that amazing experience.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

- (1) Recent historical literature on newsreels includes: FIELDING, Raymond, 'Newsfilm as Scholarly Research: opportunities and hazards', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol.7, No. 1, 1987); ELLWOOD, Sheelagh, 'Spanish Newsreels 1943-1975; the image of the Franco regime', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol. 7, No.3, 1987); GERDES, Peter, 'Cine-Journal Suisse and Neutrality, 1940-1945', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol.5, No.1, 1985); D. W. Spring, 'Soviet Newsreels and the Great Patriotic War', PRONAY, N. & SPRING, D. (eds.) *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-45* (London 1982); Karl Stamm, 'German Wartime Newsreels (*Deutsche Wochenschau*): the problem of authenticity', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol.7, No. 3, 1987); also see David Welch, 'Nazi Wartime Newsreel Propaganda', SHORT K.R.M. (ed.) *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II* (London 1983); DUNLOP, Donald, 'The March of Time and The Ramparts We Watch (1940)', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol.5, No. 2, 1985); SHORT, K.R.M. *World War II through the American newsreels, 1942-1945*, including introduction

(University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1985). For an overview of the USA's five major newsreels and the *March of Time* see Raymond Fielding's, *The American Newsreel, 1911-1967* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1972) and *The March of Time, 1935-1951* (New York, 1978). A good example of the critical studies produced by the IWF is Prof. Dr. Rudolf von Thadden's *Die Entwicklung der Wochenschau in Deutschland: 'Die Deutsche Wochenschau' Nr.755/10/1945* (Filmedition G 154 des IWF, Gottingen 1976). Also see COHN, Lawrence, *Movietone Presents the 20th Century* (New York, St. Martins Press, 1976). A seminal study of television news is found in Howard Smith, 'The BBC Television Newsreel and the Korean War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol.8, No. 3, 1988). Of continued interest to scholars is William T. Murphy (National Archives and Records Service), «A National Program for the Preservation of American Newsreels. Prepared for the American Film Institute» (September 1978). In 1978 193 million feet of newsreel material existed in six major archives, of which four were commercial, in addition to the Library of Congress and the National Archives. *The March of Time* ceased production in 1951, *RKO Pathe* in 1956, *Paramount* in 1957, *Fox Movietone* in 1963, *News of the Day* and *Universal* in 1967. *Universal's* issue sheets are available from the National Archive on microfilm. British Newsreels: Issue Sheets 1913-1970 are available in microfiche by Graphic Data UK Ltd., Bedford, UK, n.d.

(2) THOMAS, Lowell, *Good Evening Everybody: From Cripple Creek to Samarkand*, New York: Avon, 1976, p.312.

(3) The statistics are derived from *Facts, 1942: 1922-1942 20 Years of Self Government / Win the War Now! Everything Else is Chores* (Motion Picture Distributors and Producers Association, NY, 1942), p.6. This booklet was apparently released early in 1942 as part of the overall campaign to thwart perceived efforts by Washington to take over the industry for the duration of the war. See in particular p.25. In contrast to the number of prints struck of a newsreel issue, a feature film averaged only 250 exhibition prints. A popular and uncritical survey of the American motion picture industry's contribution to the war effort, including the newsreels, was published by the Editors of *LOOK, Movie Lot to Beachhead: The Motion Picture Goes to War and Prepares for the Future* (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1945).

(4) *Variety* (18 March 1942). By-line Mike Wear: 'Newsreel Execs Pass the Buck back to Gov't for any 'Pollyanna' Hue'.

(5) THOMAS, Op. cit., p. 313 f. Interestingly, Thomas does not recall Truman Talley, listed as producer in early 1942 or Edmund Reek, who succeeded Talley, and was producer through 1943. Talley was also a member of the War Activities Committee's Newsreel section in 1942. Thomas is variously titled in the newsreel as chief narrator and as simply 'announcing'. Whereas one normally refers to the "camerman", the newsreel team also included a "report-contacts" person who collected the facts and got the spelling of the names correct on the stories. This data is reflected on the dope sheets.

(6) SHORT, K.R.M. 'A Note on BBC Television News and the Munich Crisis, 1938', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol.9, No. 2, June 1989).

(7) DUNLOP, Donald, «The March of Time and The Ramparts We Watch (1940)», *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol.5, No. 2, 1985). *The March of Time* is available in sets from Nelson Entertainment, 335 North Maple Drive, Beverly Hills, California, 90210., USA.

(8) Wisconsin State Historical Society: Walter Wanger Papers, Box 11, Folder 16. Correspondence Wanger to Luce, 11 October 1941; Luce to Wanger 13 October 1941. See also SWANBERG, W. A. *Luce and His Empire*, New York, 1972.

(9) Stowe was a direct descendent of the author of the nineteenth century abolitionist classic **Uncle Tom's Cabin**, Harriet Beecher Stowe. Her Presbyterian clergyman father, Lyman Beecher, had been president of Lane Seminary in Cincinnati in the early 1830s.

(10) The U.S. Army Signal Corp's combat cameramens' wartime role is described in the three volume history of the Signal Corps: Dulany Terret, **United States Army in World War II, the Technical Services, The Signal Corps: The Emergency [to December 1941]** (Washington, D. C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army 1956); George Raynor Thompson, Dixie R. Harris, Pauline M. Oakes, and Dulany Terret, **United States Army in World War II, the Technical Services, The Signal Corps: The Test [December 1941 to July 1943]** (Washington, D. C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1957); George Raynor Thompson and Dixie R. Harris, **United States Army in World War II, the Technical Services, The Signal Corps: The Outcome [Mid-1943 Through 1945]** (Washington, D. C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1966).

(11) Washington National Record Center, Office of War Information, RG 208/264.

(12) Newsreels were viewed and assessed by an Library of Congress team (operating out of the Museum of Modern Art) in New York's newsreel theatres. Their reports [LPC] are duplicated on 229 fiche in **World War II Through the American Newsreels, 1942-1945** (see note 1). A good overview of the project was provided by Barbara Deming, one of the team, in «The Library of Congress Film Project: Exposition of a Method», **Library of Congress Quarterly Journal of Current Acquisitions** (II, No.1, 1944).

(13) Library of Congress, LCP/ OWI, Bureau of Intelligence Report Newsreels Screened February 10, 1942.

(14) The newsreel transcript material is drawn from the Library of Congress Project file at the Library of Congress. Whereas newsreel stories and some entire issues were preserved by the LPC, the newsreel shorts were apparently dismissed as insignificant and have been lost.

(15) H. V. Kaltenborn and Cary Longmire also produced pro-British news shorts, see especially Longmire's «What Every American Should Know About Our British Allies» (21 January 1943).