



The National Archives

**Press release**

Wednesday 2 September 2009

## **Not so ‘Inglourious’ use of artistic licence**

***The National Archives brings alive the facts that inspired classic Second World War films in a series of videocasts***

To commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second World War, [The National Archives](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) has created a series of six videocasts entitled ‘War on Film’, which recount the key events that went on to inspire popular war films using extracts from real government records and archive footage.

The videocasts will be available on The National Archives' website – War on Film: [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/warofilm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/warofilm). The first videocast will be released on Thursday, 3 September and addresses the theme of evacuation, which lies behind the 1987 film, *Hope and Glory*. A videocast on a different theme will be released each week until 8 October 2009.

The real events behind films such as *The Dambusters* and *The Longest Day* are retold by Principal Military Records Specialist William Spencer of The National Archives.

*“The videocasts are a fantastic new way to bring history to life”, says William, “They allow anyone to explore the archival truth behind the stories told in some of the most iconic British war films of all time”.*

The events featured in the videocasts include: the evacuation of children and the vulnerable out of large cities - *Hope and Glory*, (1987) bombing raids on three German dams - *Dambusters*, (1955), the attempted escape of air force serviceman from Stalag Luft III prisoner-of-war camp - *The Great Escape*, (1963), the D-Day landings - *The Longest Day*, (1962), the deception that the Allied invasion of Sicily, would take place

elsewhere - *The Man Who Never Was*, (1956), and the heroism of Special Operations Executive Agent Violette Szabo - *Carve Her Name with Pride*, (1958).

The makers of the *Dambusters* (1955), and *The Great Escape* (1963), were not as fortunate as those visiting The National Archives' website today as they did not have access to the vast range of information that is available now. Some of the facts remained secret whilst the films were made or were altered or invented in the name of 'artistic license':

- **Dambusters, (1955)**

- The 'bouncing bombs' were portrayed as spheres in the film when in reality they were more like 'stubby' cylinders. The bomb's specifications remained secret under normal conditions of the 30 year rule.
- The 'spotlight altimeter' – the device used in the film to accurately target the bomb - was not devised by Guy Gibson after a visit to the theatre but instead was suggested by Benjamin Lockspeiser of the Ministry of Aircraft Production and had been used by the RAF Coastal Command aircraft for some time.

- **The Great Escape, (1963)**

- After the escape of 76 air force personnel, 50 of the escapees were rounded up and executed together at the prisoner-of-war-camp, when in fact, Hitler ordered the executions to occur across Germany and the occupied countries. A list of the intended victims was given to the Gestapo with instructions of how to carry out the murders.
- The film was shot in summer time when the attempted escape took place in March 1944 when the snow was six inches thick. The prisoners decided to still go ahead with the escape as it was thought the tunnel would be discovered soon.
- The motorcycle scenes did not occur in reality and were added at Steve McQueen's suggestion.

**-Ends-**

**Notes to editors**

If you require any further information or images please contact:

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Many of the official documents that refer to the events were released 30 years after they were created.

### **Accurate portrayal of key events**

The plot for *The Man Who Never Was* (1956) sounds like it should be complete fiction when in fact it gives an accurate account of the deception that the planned Allied invasion of Sicily would take place in another location. A human cadaver was dropped into the sea off the coast of Spain onto which fake documents were planted.

### **Images**

#### **Dambusters**

- Diagrams of the 'bouncing bomb' and how it worked
- Bomb attached to a Lancaster
- The Mohne dam before and after the raid

#### **Great Escape**

- Escapees from Stalag Luft III
- Memorial to the dead at Sagan, Poland
- Aerial view of the Stalag Luft prisoner-of-war camp

#### **The Man Who Never Was**

- Fake identity documents
- Pictures of his fake fiance