

Appendix A

55

INTER-OFFICE COMMUNICATION

To Mr. Jerry Wald

Date December 2, 1944

From Mr. Alvah Bessie

Subject "Objective Burma"

Dear Jerry:

I'd like to put on the record what we were discussing yesterday on the phone. Namely - the scene in "OBJECTIVE BURMA" in which the newspaper correspondent says the Japanese should be "wiped off the face of the earth".

I've discussed this with Lester Cole, and he feels precisely the way I do about it -- that the statement, as used, can be a very dangerous one and, in a film that so sedulously avoids political statement of any kind, this one highly political statement sticks out like a sore thumb.

It seems to me that if you are going to dramatize Japanese atrocities - and I think they should be dramatized then you owe it to yourself to make it plain that such atrocities are not the private property of one nation or one race of people.

You will recall that in the story I wrote for you the atrocities were dramatized, and a character did state that "these are not men - they are beasts". And that Nelson correctly answered: "There's nothing especially Japanese about this... You'll find it wherever you find fascists. There are even people who call themselves Americans who'd do it, too."

I am not asking for a complete explanation of these things. But I assure you that if you do not answer the racist statement: "They ought to be wiped off the face of the earth," you are falling into the enemy's trap. Wiping people off the face of the earth is the private idea - and policy - of fascists. The Italians tried it in Ethiopia. Franco is doing it in Spain; the Germans have tried it with the Jews, the Poles, the Russians. And even the Russians, who have suffered more from fascist bestiality than any other people, are not talking about wiping the Germans off the face of the earth.

I quote you Roosevelt's recent statement on this: "In all peoples, without exception, there lives some instinct for truth, some attraction toward justice, and some passion for peace - buried as they may be in the German case under a brutal regime... We bring no charge against the German race as such, for we cannot believe that God has eternally condemned any race of humanity."

You handled this idea very well indeed in "DESTINATION TOKYO" when Gary Grant made it plain that people can be trained from childhood to be brutes - or they can be trained to be decent human beings.

Of course, you might argue that the correspondent's statement refers only to the Japanese Army. But it seems quite likely to me that even if this is the intention, the phrase is quite ambiguous, and could be interpreted to mean the Japanese people. And since this is obviously not the policy of our government or any of the other Allied governments, a very bad impression indeed could be created.

I would strenuously urge that if it is technically impossible for Nelson to answer the correspondent's remarks then the correspondent's speech should be cut. The scene carries enough impact as it is, without Henry Hull's hysterical commentary.

P.S. I'm taking the liberty of sending copies of this memo to Mr. Warner and Steve Trilling, as I believe I owe it to them to let them know what I feel. Also, I am sure neither Warner nor Trilling would want our film to be misinterpreted, or to apparently carry the tone or a typical Hearst editorial.

cc - Mr. Warner
Mr. Trilling

AB:MR

Appendix B

INTER-OFFICE COMMUNICATION

To Mr. COL. J. L. WARNER

Date January 26, 1945

From Mr. JERRY WALD

Subject "OBJECTIVE, BURMA!"

Dear Jack:

The reviews this morning on BURMA were of course, easy on the eyes, but the real purpose of this note was to thank you for having a good deal of faith in a title and a vague idea on my part to make a picture called "OBJECTIVE, BURMA!"

As I read the reviews it struck me very forcibly that it doesn't require a great deal of initiative to make a film from a best seller or a hit play, but it takes a lot of courage to plunk down a million dollars on somebody's say-so.

Despite our many minor squabbles (which of course is an integral part of any creative business) I have to admit that Warners have done more to encourage free expression of new ideas on the screen than any other Studio. I recall vividly my meeting with you eight months ago when I brought up the idea of making a picture about the Burmese campaign and how quick you were to share my enthusiasm.

Too many of the film producers in town talk about a liberal screen policy and do very little to adhere to it in their films. Making topical stories during these trying times isn't easy because there is a lot of opposition set up by the powers who would like to see the American public kept completely in the dark regarding vital issues that should be faced by the American people.

This note is written to thank you for having faith in me and my ideas and that you backed them up. In the early days when we were getting BURMA ready for production, there were times when Brother Flynn refused to become a part of the entire project and I know that it was you, injecting your confidence into the production, that succeeded in selling Flynn into making the picture. Flynn, too, should be grateful because I sincerely feel that it will do more good for him than anything he has done on the screen.

I have received innumerable calls from friends of mine of the press, who commented mainly on how good Flynn was in the picture and how suprised they were that he was capable of turning in such a legitimate, honest performance.

No one man makes a picture. Certainly your faith in the initial picture, Walsh's direction, MacDougall's excellent script, Amy's fine editing, Waxman's splendid score, Ted Smith's authentic sets makes me feel that my part was very minor in the whole set-up and I am grateful indeed that I was fortunate in having such good associates.

JERRY WALD

VERBAL MESSAGES CAUSE MISUNDERSTANDING AND DELAYS
(PLEASE PUT THEM IN WRITING)

January 27, 1945

Dear Jerry:

Thanks for your splendid note on OBJECTIVE BURMA. I am very happy the picture turned out the way it did. It was worth all the effort and your good words for Raoul Walsh are swell and deserving.

I liked your paragraph, especially about freedom of expression that is possible at this Studio, particularly during this time of chaos and strife throughout the world. We certainly can do a lot with the tools we have to help make this world a better one.

One of the most important things I can take from your note is that we have a great team and a good coach here at Warner Bros.

Sincerely,

"POP" WARNER

Mr. Jerry Wald

Appendix C

C
O
P
Y

WAR DEPARTMENT
BUREAU OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
WASHINGTON 25

7 February 1945

Warner Brothers Pictures, Inc.,
West Coast Studios,
4000 West Olive Avenue,
Burbank, California.

Attention: Mr. William Guthrie.

Gentlemen:

The War Department has screened the Warner Brothers feature production, "Objective, Burma", for military propriety and security and interposes no objection to the national release or export to territories and foreign countries of this film.

For the Director:

/s/ CURTIS MITCHELL

Colonel, A.U.S.,
Chief, Pictorial Branch.

cc
Office of Censorship
N.Y. Bd. of Review
L.A. Bd. of Review

Appendix D

All communications to be addressed to the Firm and not to individuals

Telephone
GERRARD
5 6 0 0
(15 lines)
CENTRAL RELEASE OF
'OBJECTIVE, BURMA' SUSPENDED.

WARNER BROS.
PICTURES, LTD.
WARNER HOUSE
WARDOUR STREET
LONDON
W.1.

Telegrams
WABROPIC
R A T H
LONDON

The general release of 'Objective, Burma' will be suspended after the picture completes its engagement at Warner Theatre on Thursday night.

In announcing this decision, Mr. Max Milder, managing director of Warner Bros. Pictures Ltd., stated: "Criticism levelled against the production has accused Warner Bros. of deliberately ignoring the major part played by the 14th Army in the Burma campaign. Without any foundation in fact, the protests have exaggerated what we intended solely as a piece of screen entertainment into some sinister move against the friendship of our two nations. The absurdity of these charges is realised by everybody who knows Warner Bros.' record as the only American or British film producing company to attack the Nazi menace before the war, and the only American company to champion the Allied cause openly and vigorously in our picture before the United States joined in hostilities. Our record was maintained throughout the war, and will continue just as strongly through the peace.

'Objective, Burma' set out to dramatise a single incident in the Burma war and to give a realistic interpretation of the conditions of jungle fighting. The foreword emphasise that

the experiences shown on the screen were shared by British, Indian and China forces who carried the campaign to its victorious conclusion. I contend that we succeeded in what we set out to do: that 'Objective, Burma' is one of the finest war pictures the film industry -- American or British -- has produced, and that any distortions lie not in the picture but in the grotesque imputations made against Warner Bros.' integrity.

"Since it opened at Warner Theatre last Friday, 'Objective, Burma' has 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."

Appendix E

So far as I know, Objective Burma is the only motion picture ever to have been the sole subject of an editorial denunciation in Britain's prestige and establishment newspaper, The Times. In its reflection of peculiarly British attitudes and values, and in its airing of inter-allied tensions, it stands, I think, as a document of some interest:

FILMS AND THE ALLIES

There are at the moment two films to be seen in the West End of London which, in their different ways, show a disquieting tendency to give an appearance of truth at the same time as they are deliberately and consistently misleading. Objective Burma is an American film and tells a fictional story with a smattering of documentary method: the Russian film Berlin is largely a newsreel account of the fall of the city. In Berlin the Russian achievement is fully depicted, but the commentary throughout makes only the most fleeting references to the allies and implies that the downfall of Germany was due solely to the Red Army; Objective Burma once mentions WINGATE in an aside but is silent throughout on the subject of the Fourteenth Army and leaves the audience to draw the conclusion that the Burma campaign was fought exclusively by American troops. It is left to an American, LIEUTENANT-COLONEL WILLIAM H. TAYLOR, of the U.S. Army Air Force, to state the case against the film in terms which a Briton might hesitate to use. He writes in Seac, the newspaper of the South-East Asia Command, of his personal embarrassment as an American who, as one of a minority, fought beside the British in Burma, and goes on:

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 who know better.

It may seem that only a trivial and a touchy mind will be disturbed by what is after all "only a film," but the issue is not quite so simple as that. The film, for the reason that it is always a little larger and a good deal less complex than life, speaks in a language that can be understood by millions, and misrepresentation on the screen can do very much more harm than an article in a newspaper. Post mortems, whether on winning or losing games, are normally to be avoided, but it is essential both for the enemy and the allies to understand how it came about that the war was won. Because the history of the 1914-1918 war was twisted and obscured by German propagandists, the way was opened for 1939; and it is hardly less important that the nations should know and appreciate the efforts other countries than their own made to the common cause. An unpleasant feature of professional football used to be the effusive manner in which players

would surround and embrace the actual scorer of a goal, but it was a poor critic who did not give credit to the men who began and carried on the victorious movement. It is natural that each country making its own war films should put emphasis on its triumphs, but the "frantic boast," which falsifies and distorts, makes itself heard beyond the frontier and spreads resentment and mistrust. The film, which proved its value as a weapon of propaganda in war, has a great responsibility in peace, and there is The True Glory to show what can be done by team-work to give honour where it is due and foster understanding and mutual respect among the victorious nations.

(25.9.45)