



CINEMA UNBOUND: THE CREATIVE WORLDS OF POWELL + PRESSBURGER

One of Our Aircraft Is Missing

One of Our Aircraft Is Missing

Directed for *The Archers* by: Michael Powell
Production Companies: Archers Film Productions,
Royal Air Force

With the full co-operation of: The Air Ministry,
Royal Netherland Government London

Presented by: British National Films,
Alexander Korda

Produced for *The Archers* by: Michael Powell
Associate Producer: Stanley Haynes

[Written] By: Emeric Pressburger, Michael Powell
Photographer: Ronald Neame

Stills Photography: Fred Daniels
Editor: David Lean

Art Director: David Rawnsley
Sound Recorder: C.C. Stevens

uncredited

Unit Manager: Sydney S. Streeter

Production Secretary: Joan Page

Associate Director: John Seabourne

Continuity Secretary: Betty Curtis

Associate Photographer: Bob Krasker

Special Effects: Freddy Ford, Douglas Woolsey

Associate Editor: Thelma Myers

Sound Supervisor: A.W. Watkins

Technical Advisers: M. Sluysen, James P. Power

Cast:

Hugh Burden (*John Glyn Haggard*)

Eric Portman (*Tom Eamshaw*)

Hugh Williams (*Frank Shelley*)

Emrys Jones (*Bob Ashley*)

Bernard Miles (*Geoff Hickman*)

Godfrey Tearle (*Sir George Corbett*)

Googie Withers (*Jo de Vries*)

Joyce Redman (*Jet van Dieren*)

Pamela Brown (*Els Meertens*)

Peter Ustinov (*the priest*)

Alec Clunes (*the organist*)

Hay Petrie (*the burgomaster*)

Roland Culver (*naval officer*)

David Ward (*1st German airman*)

Robert Duncan (*2nd German airman*)

uncredited

Hector Abbas (*the driver*)

James Carson (*Louis*)

Bill Akkerman (*Willem*)

Joan Akkerman (*Maartie*)

Valerie Moon (*Jannie*)

Peter Schenke (*Hendrik*)

Stewart Rome (*station commander*)

David Evans (*Len Martin*)

John Salew (*German sentry*)

William D'Arcy (*German officer*)

Robert Beatty (*Hopkins*)

Michael Powell (*control tower radio operator*)

UK 1942

106 mins

35mm

The screening on Tue 31 Oct will be introduced by
film historian Ian Christie

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits
including priority booking at BFI Southbank
and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

Made quickly and relatively cheaply (for £700,000) at the height of the war, *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* was one of Powell and Pressburger's early successes both critically and financially. Although the script is a little shapeless and the story tends to wander from one episode to another, the direction is taut and scenes are well handled by Powell. On the strength of its box-office, Powell and Pressburger were offered an unprecedented film-by-film deal with J. Arthur Rank, allowing them to choose their own projects.

Aircraft was one of the first major film roles for Googie Withers – who had previously appeared in four Powell 'quota quickies' – as the Dutch resistance leader who comes to the airmen's aid, and whose mixture of charm and determination baffles them. The character provides further evidence of the way the war was beginning to change society and the role of women, as does a similarly strong role for Pamela Brown. Both actresses attracted the attention of critic C.A. Lejeune in *The Observer*.

The gripping story of the airmen also impressed the *New Statesman*. Particularly striking is the opening sequence, in which Powell shoots each airman in close-up, creating intimacy and giving the audience a sense of the bomber's cramped conditions and the dangers its crew face. The low position of the camera, looking admiringly up at the airmen, reinforces their heroism.

For the flying scenes, art director David Rawnsley covered the entire studio floor with a model of Stuttgart in miniature; cameraman Freddy Ford completed the aerial camera shots by lying flat on his stomach for ten hours a day high in the roof of the studio. The painstaking work paid off: the viewer feels the terrifying danger the airmen confront as they fly over enemy lines under fire from anti-aircraft guns.

The creation of such imaginary worlds was to become a hallmark of Powell and Pressburger's films. *Aircraft* signalled the end of the first phase of their partnership; with the freedom its success brought them, their work together now took an increasingly ambitious direction.

Nigel Arthur, BFI Screenonline

Michael Powell on 'One of Our Aircraft Is Missing'

One of Our Aircraft Is Missing begins as a documentary, and gradually moves away from it. It was, after all, the first time the thing was done: the first time you dealt with a bombing raid. So a certain amount of authentic details was essential to build up the basic idea, which was to show what happens to a bomber crew in a neutral country occupied by the enemy. All our pictures arose from thinking along the lines of what was happening or what was going to happen. We hadn't finished *49th Parallel*, when I said to Emeric 'Does it interest you, the title *One of Our Aircraft Failed to Return?*' – which was the current phrase on the radio at that time. He said 'It's an interesting idea,' and then he thought up this story. By that time the phrase had changed. 'Failed to return' was obviously deemed officially too sad.

That marvellous plane crash at the beginning was typical Emeric: the empty plane flying back and crashing into a pylon. That is Emeric's storytelling, though the way I shot it, of course, that's up to me. It was all shot in a real bomber.

War Starts at Midnight: Nationalism and Conflict

The Spy in Black + Smith

Sat 21 Oct 15:30; Sun 29 Oct 15:30 (+ intro by Bryony Dixon, BFI National Archive Curator)

49th Parallel

Sun 22 Oct 12:20; Mon 6 Nov 20:30

One of Our Aircraft Is Missing!

Sun 22 Oct 15:10; Tue 31 Oct 20:40 (+ intro by film historian Ian Christie)

Contraband

Mon 23 Oct 17:50 (+ intro by Miranda Gower-Qian, BFI Inclusion Lead); Mon 30 Oct 20:30

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

Sun 29 Oct 17:20 (+ intro by Kevin and Andrew Macdonald); Sun 5 Nov 17:45; Thu 23 Nov 17:45; Sun 26 Nov 14:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by Stephen Fry)

Ill Met by Moonlight

Fri 17 Nov 20:40; Sat 25 Nov 12:40

The Battle of the River Plate

Sat 18 Nov 18:20; Mon 27 Nov 20:30

With thanks to



SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk



BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

Another thing I said was, 'As this is the first "real" war picture we're doing, don't let's have any music: let's have nothing but natural sound all the way through' – which we did. The titles just had airplane noise, of course. The atmosphere carried itself, it didn't need music.

In *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* there was a scene between the old rear-gunner, played by Godfrey Tearle, and the young pilot (Hugh Burden), which was cut out of the final picture. They're leaning on a bridge after the episode in the church, and the old boy says to him 'Nice girl, wasn't she?' and he says 'Yes'. Tearle says 'Do you think you're coming back, after the war?' and he says 'I don't know. I don't know how I'll get through the war.' He laughs and they make some joke and he says 'You know, you'll think me mad, but you are like I was in the past, and you will become like I am now.' And the young boy looked at him and said 'You're mad, George, what are you talking about?' 'You wouldn't know anything about it, you young bastards, you've got exactly the same sort of general mentality and character that I had when I was young, and I tell you that in 40 years you'll be just like me, a crusty old bugger.' All this was cut out.

Emeric said, 'I like that scene, let's make a picture about it. I said it was a bloody good subject and then we got the idea of making it about Colonel Blimp.'

Kevin Gough-Yates (ed.), *Michael Powell in Collaboration with Emeric Pressburger* (BFI, 1971)

A contemporary review

This is an exceedingly good flying-war film. Lovely photography, first-class direction, straightforward production and sincere acting from people who know their job put it at the top of its class so far. The story is based on fact, and full support has been given by the Services and the Royal Netherland Government. It is unique in that it does not include the 'blonde bomb-shell' interest. The acting is so good that it is invidious to make distinctions. It is, in short, a film worth seeing with excellent propaganda value, and is a credit to the British film industry.

Monthly Film Bulletin, April 1942