



CINEMA UNBOUND: THE CREATIVE WORLDS OF POWELL + PRESSBURGER

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

Michael Powell on 'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp'

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

Directed by: Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger
Production Company: Archers Film Productions
Produced by: Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger
Assistant Producer: Richard Vernon
Floor Manager: Arthur Lawson
Management: Sydney S. Streeeter, Alec Saville
Archers Secretary: Joan Page
Assistant Directors: Ken Horne, Tom Payne
Continuity: Maggie Unsworth *
Written by: Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger
Based on a cartoon character created by: David Low
Photographed in Technicolor by: Georges Périnal
Chief of Colour Control Department: Natalie Kalmus
Technicolor Cameramen: Geoffrey Unsworth, Jack Cardiff, Harold Haysom
Chief Electrician: Bill Wall
Special Portraits: Fred Daniels *
Process Shots: W. Percy Day
Edited by: John Seabourne
Assistant Editors: Thelma Myers, Peter Seabourne
Production Designed by: Alfred Junge
Costumes Designed by: Joseph Bato
Costumes Executed by: Matilda Etches
Make-up: George Blackler, Dorrie Hamilton
Music Composed and Arranged by: Allan Gray
Conductor: Charles Williams
Sound: C.C. Stevens, Desmond Dew
Military Adviser: Lieut-General Sir Douglas Brownrigg
Period Advisers: E.F.E. Schoen, Dr C. Beard
Logo: D&P Studios
Cast:
Anton Walbrook (*Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff*)
Deborah Kerr
(*Edith Hunter/Barbara Wynne/Angela Cannon*)
Roger Livesey (*General Clive Wynne-Candy*)
Roland Culver (*Colonel Betteridge*)
Harry Welchman (*Major Davies*)
Arthur Wontner (*Embassy Counsellor*)
Albert Lieven (*von Ritter*)
John Laurie (*Murdoch*)
Ursula Jeans (*Frau von Kalteneck*)
James McKechnie (*Lieutenant 'Spud' Wilson*)
Reginald Tate (*van Zijl*)
David Hutcheson (*Hoppy Hopwell*)
A.E. Matthews (*president of tribunal*)
Neville Mapp (*Stuffey Graves*)
Vincent Holman (*club porter, 1942*)
Spencer Trevor (*period Blimp*)
James Knight (*club porter, 1902*)
Dennis Arundell (*café orchestra leader*)
David Ward (*Kaunitz*)
Jan Van Loewen (*indignant citizen*)
Valentine Dyal (*von Schönborn*)
Carl Jaffe (*von Reumann*)
Eric Maturin (*Colonel Goodhead*)
Frith Banbury (*Baby-Face Fitzroy*)
Robert Harris (*embassy secretary*)
Count Zichy (*Colonel Borg*)
Jane Millican (*Nurse Erna*)
Phyllis Morris (*Pebble*)
Muriel Aked (*Aunt Margaret*)
Capt. W.H. Barrett US Army (*Texan, US Army*)
Corp. Thomas Palmer US Army (*sergeant, US Army*)
Yvonne Andrée (*nun*)
Marjorie Gresley (*matron*)
Felix Aylmer (*the bishop*)

There was one nice scene in *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* which I shot but later had to cut out; it's between Godfrey Tearle and Hugh Burden as the elderly rear gunner and the young pilot. They are talking about the girl (played by Pamela Brown) and suddenly the older man makes an observation which startles the young man. He says, 'You know, you are like what I was when I was young and I'm like what you will be like when you're old.' In other words they were both typically British. Then the young fellow looks at him and says, 'Are you right in the head, George?' At first nobody understood the old boy and they didn't bother to, they just thought he was a bit of a nuisance. Later he proved that his experience in everything really meant something. What was really interesting about this was that out of this story Emeric said, 'Why don't we make a film about this theme that young men can't understand the old men and old men can't explain what it is to be experienced?' And that started the idea of making a film called 'The Life and Death of Sugar Candy'.

As it progressed and became more and more an epic, a saga of a wonderful, half-lovable, half-infuriating character, it occurred to one of us, I don't know which, to lug in Colonel Blimp. It was probably because the whole idea seemed to chime together and the thought of dramatising the life of Colonel Blimp appealed enormously, because at that time Blimp was a household word. That was how *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* evolved. And that was when all the trouble started which everybody now knows about.

Some time before this, Jack Beddington, who had been Head of Publicity for Shell, had been appointed in charge of the MOI's films division in the place of Kenneth Clark. We began to have very lively contacts with him. He had a very good mind himself, and as well as understanding publicity, he understood artists and creative people and he took great pains, he and the Ministry, to put us all in touch with the people who were doing documentaries and training films. I remember going there to see films smuggled out of Europe, two or three times a week sometimes, to see films on blood transfusion, on plastic surgery for pilots who were burned ... He took great trouble that feature filmmakers should be well-informed, much better informed than the average person about what was going on in the war. It was very good, don't you think?

I'm sure it was with Jack that we had most of the rows about *Colonel Blimp*. They weren't really rows: simply that we were determined to make it and they were determined that we shouldn't. Reddington and Brendan Bracken were probably laughing like hell in their offices, but they had to do what they were told and follow the policy of the War Office and the Cabinet. James Grigg was the one who started the alarm but afterwards he withdrew the whole thing. The thing that affected us was that not only could we not have Laurence Olivier to play Blimp, we couldn't have one gun, one rifle, one uniform or one truck. So everything we have on the screen in the form of khaki uniforms and trucks is stolen. We could have been shot for it, I suppose, but then nobody minded about a little thing like that then! It shows how well film prop men had been trained by Korda, you know, how do you make a Hungarian omelette ... first

Helen Debroy (*Mrs Wynne*)
 Norman Pierce (*Mr Wynne*)
 Edward Cooper (*BBC official*)
 Joan Swinstead (*secretary*)
 Ian Fleming (*Major Plumley*) *
 Norris Smith (*Napoleon Smith*) *
 Diana Marshall (*Sybil Hopwell*) *
 Ronald Millar (*Sergeant Hawkins*) *
 Pat McGrath (*Corporal Tommy Tucker*) *
 Wally Patch, George Woodbridge
 (*debris clearing team*) *
 Desmond Jeans (*barman*) *
 Spencer Trevor (*angry general*) *
 Charles Mortimer (*Dr Crowler*) *
 John Adams (*German officer*) *
 Robin Burns (*soldier*) *
 Ferdie Mayne (*man in bierkeller*) *
 Pete Murray (*young man at BBC*) *
 Robert Brooks-Turner (*dinner party guest*) *
 Patrick Macnee *
 Norman Williams *
 UK 1943
 163 mins

* Uncredited

New 35mm – A BFI National Archive print (Sun 29 Oct and Sun 5 Nov) & Digital (Thu 23 Nov and Sun 26 Nov)

With introduction by Kevin and Andrew Macdonald (Sun 29 Oct) & pre-recorded intro by Stephen Fry (Sun 26 Nov)

With thanks to



The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp is one of a selection of classic titles presented on brand new 35mm prints, made by the BFI with funding from the National Lottery and the additional support of donors to our Keep Film on Film campaign.

Restored by the Academy Film Archive in association with the BFI, ITV Studios Global Entertainment Ltd., and The Film Foundation. Restoration funding provided by The Material World Charitable Foundation, The Louis B Mayer Foundation, Cinema per Roma Foundation, and The Film Foundation. Supported by Simon and Harley Hessel. Restoration consultants: Martin Scorsese & Thelma Schoonmaker Powell.



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

steal three eggs. Alfred Junge was wonderful, he hadn't been on *One of Our Aircraft* because at first all enemy aliens were interned. There was a story: he was interned at Liverpool in a big camp where a lot of very good art directors were interned who'd worked for Korda. They were all put to work at camouflaging the camp and they did it so well nobody could find it! Alfred was always known as Uncle Alfred to the entire unit.

I don't really know whether *Blimp* was ever shown in its complete version because, at the time of its premiere, I was already in the Mediterranean shooting material for *The Volunteer* (1943). I was on the beach in Oran, Algeria, wondering how to get off it. Of course, I got off with the Americans, that's the answer always. More or less right away, the Rank people, they loved the picture but decided it was too long for commercial release in wartime and asked us to cut it. I've got a feeling that all the opening sequences with the young soldier bursting into the Turkish bath were lopped and the film made into a straightforward narrative story instead of being mostly in flashback. That may have been partly because of opposition from Churchill and the War Office, because it is a much less abrasive way of telling the story. But we had quite consciously set out to make a big epic because we didn't think we could tell the three episodes of Blimp's life in much less than two hours and a half.

The cast of *Blimp* was marvellous. Deborah Kerr is enormously sensitive and responds to a director particularly. I think she could have gone on to become a very great actress, but she went on as a contract artist with MGM for just too long. Her performance, performances really, were clever too – with help from me, she makes the three girls absolutely different. And I had always wanted to work with Roger Livesey; he was going to be in *The Phantom Light* (1935) but Michael Balcon didn't like his voice, that lovely hoarse voice of Roger's. Mickey Balcon was very suburban in his tastes. I hadn't the slightest doubt; when C. M. Woolf and Arthur Rank said to me if you can't get Olivier who will you get, I said Roger Livesey. 'Is he available?' 'Yes, he's working in an aircraft factory' – I'd already found that out.

Michael Powell interviewed by David Badder, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1978-79