

Tonight to mark Remembrance Day we present:

1) A Triple bill of shorts by Humphrey Jennings:

Words for Battle: 8-minute short directed by Jennings for the Crown Film Unit (1941).

Listen to Britain: 20-minute film co-directed by Jennings, with Stewart McAllister, for the Crown Film Unit (1942).

The Silent Village: 36-minute film written and directed by Jennings for the Crown Film Unit (1943).



Born in 1907, Humphrey Jennings was one of the first English directors to understand that documentaries could be more than mirrors to the world.



Also known as “For Us the Living”, *Words for Battle* film combines the quintessence of Jennings' love of England with a plea for help from the USA. It comprises seven short pieces of prose and poetry read by Laurence Olivier: William Camden, Milton, Blake, Browning, Kipling, Wordsworth and Abraham Lincoln.

Listen to Britain creates a generous sound-portrait of the country, so that the chimes of Big Ben, the roar of a fighter plane taking off, children's feet dancing in a schoolyard, the clip-clop of horses' hooves and the beery banter of working men are all heard alongside each other, equally important elements of a spectrum that is as moral as it is auditory.

Throughout the war, and before his premature death in 1950, Jennings's films were screened at WI halls, guilds, small local theatres. They were even screened on mobile projectors in factories during lunch breaks.

The vision of England that audiences saw in these deeply personal, emotion-saturated cine-essays often brought them to tears. They have the power to do so even now.

Discussing his admiration for Jennings, Lord David Attenborough recalled “He worked with Stewart McAllister on *Listen to Britain*, and it was a revelation to me that those two people could work perfectly together even though their roles - the one director, the other editor - were so different. But they worked as one: whatever ideas came in were reciprocated both ways. I think Humphrey had a great regard for his editor because he was a damn clever editor himself.

I admire *Listen to Britain* because, although he used reality and real people in real circumstances, he also understood that synchronised sound was not necessarily most effective or most poignant. In other words, he started to use sound and music in a way that was innovative.



Because such talented people made documentary films about reality, it affected the style of acting of many postwar films. In my opinion they, more than anybody else, were responsible for taking film acting into the contemporary world. In no small measure, they shaped what British cinema became after the war, with a reality and a truth, and a commitment and a passion which were scarcely known before.”

The Silent Village, was made for the Ministry of Information at the behest of Czech officials and freedom campaigners. It dramatises events, as record, when the Nazi's massacred over 170 men in the Czech mining village of Lidice. It was made in Cwmgiedd, South Wales with the co-operation of local miners. There's a civilised reticence about Jennings' treatment. Sometimes the approach seems distant - but overall Jennings instinctively finds the right tone giving a tribute to the devastated community. It suggests that the slaying could have happened in any similar village.



In an affecting scene, Welsh locals, forced by occupying Nazis to register at the village hall, reveal their actual names. Fellow-feeling between the Czech and Welsh communities here seems complete.

There is almost no overt violence. Even the final act is shown off-screen. Women and children form a silent crocodile as they are taken to concentration camps or into exile within German families. (Many Lidice women and children died; very few returned).

Jennings died in 1950 on the Greek island of Poros after accidentally slipping off a cliff while looking at locations and with his passing Britain lost a significant and influential director.

2) Overlord

UK 1975 85 minutes cert 15

Director	Stuart Cooper
Screenwriters	Stuart Cooper and Christopher Hudson
Cinematography	John Alcott
Composer	Paul Glass
Editor	Jonathon Gili

Cast	
Tom	Brian Stirner
Jack	David Harries
Arthur	Nicholas Ball
The Girl	Julie Neesam



Stuart Cooper's **Overlord** is a drama constructed from a combination of genuine period material and new footage. It's part documentary; part mournful, imaginative and occasionally surreal fiction. "Overlord" was the codename for the Normandy landings in June 1944.

The film was made with the assistance of the Imperial War Museum, which gave Cooper access to its 39 million feet of archive footage. The resulting story follows a young man going through his army training. He's an ordinary, introspective, 20-year-old, a tiny cog in the vast military machine, which is presented here through some remarkable footage.

In an interview with The Guardian, the director recalled:

"Before starting research, I was introduced to the museum's very patient keeper of film, Anne Fleming, who politely asked me: "What portion of the archive would you like to view?" Knowing little about it, I remember saying: "As I am here, I might as well look at the entire collection." "Fine," responded Fleming, "will you come Monday through Friday?" "Yes," I responded. "Very good, Mr Cooper, if you view Monday through Friday, nine to four daily, you might get through the collection in about nine years."

I spent approximately 3,000 hours in that dark cell between 1971 and 1975, briefly interrupted by a couple of other projects. It was during the archival research that I developed the idea of a dramatised feature film about an English soldier who sees his first action on D-Day, interweaving the archive footage to expand and tell the story. More research in the museum's document section - reading letters and unpublished diaries of ordinary soldiers who saw action in the first wave of D-Day - refined the concept.

A writer, Christopher Hudson, then came aboard to continue the research and co-write the screenplay. What became apparent about the writing process was that until we knew what the film archive would support in narrative form, we could not write the screenplay. In other words, the film archive controlled what historical events our soldier's story would encompass. Once that was established, Hudson was able to dramatised some wonderful and totally original scenes extracted from diaries and letters of real servicemen.

A major concern for my cinematographer, John Alcott, was how to match the texture of the archive footage. In an unprecedented move, the museum granted us access to the original nitrate negatives. The quality of the original nitrate negatives was pristine. After Alcott examined them, we decided to film *Overlord* on period lenses. Alcott scoured England and found two sets of 1936 and 1938 German Goetz and Schneider lenses. Alcott then applied a lighting style in keeping with the war photography, seamlessly blending the archive and dramatised story. Seventy per cent of the film is live action, which was completed in 10 days of filming.



None of it would have been possible without the help of the Imperial War Museum. It connected us to the Ministry of Defence, which became involved with our endeavour. *Overlord*'s actors were trained by the Royal Marines; we used their landing craft; old 1940 barracks were opened to use as locations and the last operational Lancaster bomber was flown over the Bristol coast for us to film. Military costumes, weapons and props came from the basement of the museum. The production and costume design was created by museum curators. Their historical knowledge was invaluable."

With a final certified cost of £89,951 *Overlord* revisits familiar territory but with a remarkable new tone. This is achieved by not just the blend of archive and newly staged footage (30 per cent of the film is archive material), but also by the specific focus on just one young man facing up to the anonymous enormity of the war.

Iain McGlashan