6. Documentarist as . . Bugler

Definition(s):
The “bugle-call film”—adjunct to military action, weapon of war—a “call to action” (note that both *Listen to Britain* and the *Why We Fight* series literally begin with bugle calls over the opening credits); the filmmaker’s task—to stir the blood

Key Concepts & Issues:
Use of battle footage—e.g., expanded newsreels in the *German Weekly Review*
Repurposing of captured footage—in WWII, both sides engaged in this (e.g., *Why We Fight*)
“Documenting” a thesis with fiction excerpts (e.g., use of footage from Fritz Lang’s *M* in *The Eternal Jew*; footage from *Drums Along the Mohawk*, *The Good Earth*, *Marco Polo*, and many others in the *Why We Fight* series)

Key Documentarists:
Humphrey Jennings (1907-1950)
A new member of “Grierson’s Boys” (including Alberto Cavalcanti, Paul Rotha) at the GPO Film Unit, which became the Crown Film Unit.
A Cambridge graduate with a broad arts background, his style was “precise, calm, rich in resonance.”
Among his films, one earned him a world-wide reputation: *Listen to Britain*: (a) Featured Jennings’ specialty, vignettes of human behavior under extraordinary stress—they are “carrying on;” (b) Typical of Jennings’ war films—the film never explains, exhorts, or harangues—it observes; (c) The soundtrack is an “anthology of the sounds of Britain at war.”

The Soviets
Shot unique war footage “up close.”
The state film academy—founded in 1919 in the middle of the revolution—added combat photography to its curriculum.
*Cameraman at the Front* (1946), by Vladimir Sushinsky, shows the cameraman’s own death.
Important practitioners included Leonid Varlamov (*Stalingrad*, 1943), Roman Gregoriev (newsreel editor), Mikhail Slutsky (*Day of War*, 1942).

Frank Capra
Already an important narrative filmmaker in the Hollywood Studio System (e.g., *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *It Happened One Night* (1934), later *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946)), he was tapped by the U.S. War Department to make indoctrination films for new draftees after Pearl Harbor. He had never before made a single documentary. He produced the seven *Why We Fights* between 1942 and 1945. Drawing on a wide variety of Hollywood talent, he created simplistic films with tough-talking VO’s, films that were a “strange amalgam” of (a) real combat footage (both U.S. and captured from the enemy), (b) fiction film excerpts, (c) animated sequences.

Others—Note the strange cases of Paul Zils, and (again!) Joris Ivens