

Report to the Stockholders

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DURING THE WAR the people of the United States owned a Hollywood motion picture studio, complete in every detail. Officially it was called the First Motion Picture Unit of the Army Air Forces. Because it was a military installation, a curtain of secrecy covered its activities and little was known about it. But, now, the public is entitled to know about it.

It all started in the fall of 1942 when Montgomery was chasing Rommel across the sands of North Africa, when U. S. Marines were getting a bloody toe-hold against the Japanese at Guadalcanal. Here, in America, the Army Air Forces were desperately expanding from a few thousand men to more than three million.

The AAF needed the fastest, most modern, and most thorough training program ever devised. Students, bank clerks, laborers, and farmers had to be transformed almost overnight into pilots, navigators, bombardiers, gunners, and mechanics. As a major part of this mass training program, the AAF went into motion picture production. At the Hal Roach Studios a Training Film Program designed to meet the urgent need got under way.

The industry's producers, directors,

writers, and film technicians were brought in as soldiers and officers. And these men with backgrounds of making entertainment films quickly set out to solve the problems of their new job—to produce effective, accurate, and interesting training films.

Doubting Thomases in Hollywood regarded this military film studio in their midst with raised cocktail glasses. They dubbed the installation "Fort Roach," and referred to the personnel of the unit as "Celluloid Commandos." They made many brilliant witticisms while the men at Fort Roach quietly went to work and made films for the war.

Production started in October, 1942, and continued until October, 1945, with results that rival those of any major Hollywood studio. Over this three-year period FMPU turned out 228 films, with a total running time of 78 hours and 37 minutes. The 228 projects varied in length from the "50 Hour Inspection of the B-26 Marauder," running time 2 hours and 3 minutes, to the "Labor Incentive Shorts," 2 to 3 minutes each.

The films produced at FMPU fall into four main categories: *Educational* Films, primarily imparting information; *Orientation* Films, primarily creating or changing attitudes toward the war, jobs, obligations, regulations, or codes; *Education-Orientation* Films, having the dual purpose of giving information and of changing attitudes¹

¹ The categorizing of one film or another might be open to dispute. On the whole, the authors believe their placement is justified.

(any film attempting to impart information will also have an effect on attitudes, and any film for changing attitudes will necessarily impart information); and *Special Psychological Test Films*, designed for learning and aptitude measurements. The accompanying tables give some idea of the nature of the work done at Culver City.

Every phase of Air Forces' activity

Some procedures or techniques taught by the film had never before been established. The writers had to work out the rules with technical advisors, establishing them for the entire AAF. In 1943, for instance, two writers were assigned to do field research for *Ditch and Live*. They found that no standard procedure for ditching (abandoning an airplane at sea) existed.

TABLE 1

Type of film	No. of films	Per cent of total number	Running time (min.)	Per cent of total running time
Educational	149	65.4	2,728	57.9
Orientation	63	27.6	1,355	28.7
Education-orientation	12	5.3	388	8.2
Psychological test	4	1.7	246	5.2

had to be covered in one way or another. Sometimes a film was requested to solve a life-and-death problem that had arisen overseas. *Identification of the Japanese Zero* was rushed through production for immediate use in the Pacific. Owing to a similarity of appearance with our P-40 airplane, the Zero was confusing to many of our pilots. Some careless and inexperienced American pilots were shooting down their own planes. This film was given top priority, was completed as quickly as possible, and prints were flown to Pacific bases, saving uncounted lives.

FMPU training films were planned as an integral part of larger AAF programs. The B-29 series is a good example of this planning. Preparation of training films for Superfort air crews and ground crews began while the plane was still in its experimental stage. Scripts had been written before a single 29 had rolled off the assembly line.

Technical experts all over the world, men who had survived at sea, were consulted and the result was a film which passed along the information to all personnel, and which established all-important life-saving methods.

There was no telling where need for the next project might arise. The sky was the limit. Tables 2 and 3 give an over-all idea of the variety of subjects, as well as the amount and percentage of footage devoted to different areas of training.

The wide range of subject matter covered by these films points toward much-needed exploration into the scope of educational films, a study which the writers hope to present in a later article. Schools and universities, businesses, industries, and labor unions are, taken all together, a vast potential market which at present is relatively untapped by film makers.

Now, what about the technique of

TABLE 2
 BREAKDOWN OF TRAINING FILMS PRODUCED AT AAF FIRST MOTION PICTURE UNIT,
 CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA—BASED ON NUMBER OF FILMS

	No. of films	Per cent of number of films
I. Educational films		
A. Flight training		
1. For the pilot..... (E.g., <i>How to Fly the B-17; Flight Characteristics of the P-51; Cockpit Procedure for Troop-Carrier Airplanes</i>)	23	10.1
2. For the navigator..... (<i>Driftmeters; Aerial Navigation Map Reading</i>)	6	2.6
3. For the bombardier..... (<i>Operation of the Norden Bombsight</i>)	2	0.8
4. For the radio operator..... (<i>V.H.F. Airborne Radio Set</i>)	2	0.8
5. For the gunner..... (<i>Position Firing; Operation of the K-13 Gunsight</i>)	8	3.6
6. For the flight engineer..... (<i>B-29 Flight Engineering</i>)	1	0.4
7. For all crew members..... (<i>B-29 Flight Procedure</i>)	3	1.4
	<u>45</u>	<u>19.7</u>
B. Nonflying training		
1. Mechanical..... (<i>Desert Servicing of Aircraft; Operation and Maintenance of the Electro-turbo Supercharger</i>)	15	6.6
2. Intelligence..... (<i>Photo-Intelligence for Bombardment Aviation</i>)	3	1.3
	<u>18</u>	<u>7.9</u>
C. Radar..... (<i>GCA; Mark III</i>)	7	3.1
D. B-29 briefing films*	6	2.6
E. Eglin Field and Orlando Test reports..... (<i>Fire Bombs with Thickened Fuel</i>)	6	2.6
F. Operational training films..... (<i>Fighter-Bomber Aircraft against Mechanized Targets; Air Defense Team—Night Fighters</i>)	11	4.9
G. Medical Treatment..... (<i>Emergency Care of Air-Crew Casualties</i>)	2	0.8
H. Identification of aircraft..... (<i>Identification of the Jap Zero Fighter; Recognition of the JU52</i>)	54	23.8
II. Orientation films		
A. Special labor incentive..... (Shorts made for public release to raise morale of defense workers in various critical areas such as Los Angeles, Seattle, San Diego, Akron, etc.)	8	3.6
B. Documentaries for public and military morale..... (<i>Memphis Belle; Target Tokyo; China Crisis</i>)	24	10.6

* These films are described in detail on page 236 of the January, 1946, issue of the *Hollywood Quarterly*.

TABLE 2—(Continued)

	No. of films	Per cent of number of films
C. Orientation for military personnel		
1. Preventive medicine (Films designed to inculcate new attitudes; e.g., <i>Three Cadets</i> , which deals with venereal-disease prevention)	2	0.8
2. Rehabilitation (Made to improve military patients' attitudes toward recovery— <i>Road to Recovery</i>)	2	0.8
3. Safety and survival (<i>Learn and Live; Ground-Crew Safety</i>)	7	3.1
4. Job orientation (<i>Introduction to Flying; Bombardier-Navigator</i>)	16	7.0
5. Miscellaneous orientation (<i>Resisting Enemy Interrogation</i>)	4	1.7
	<u>31</u>	<u>13.4</u>
III. Educational-orientation films (<i>Ditch and Live; Land and Live in the Jungle</i>)	12	5.3
IV. Psychological-test films (<i>Measuring Skill for Navigation</i>)	4	1.7

these AAF training films? What did the producers, directors, and writers at FMPU do to make them more effective weapons of learning?

First, they used animation. It was found necessary in almost every training film. It could simplify. It could illustrate theory and make it come to life. It could reach into places that the eye or the camera could not, such as a cross section of an engine or the charting of large-scale organization. It could emphasize vital points made in live action. FMPU applied animation techniques, already known, in such a way that completely new vistas of visual teaching were opened.

The possibilities of full-length animated films as an effective educational method were explored. The first of these was *Camouflage Cartoon*. A very sophisticated Mr. Chameleon instructed neophytes in the art of camouflage. Who could better teach camouflage than a chameleon?

Following this, a request was received at FMPU for a film explaining the theory and techniques of aerial gunnery. And so it was that "Trigger Joe" was born. He made his first appearance as the star of a film titled *Position Firing*.

"Trigger Joe's" star was destined to rise, for the response was immediate. Gunnery instructors, students, C.O.'s, all shouted, "We want more films like *Position Firing* that make the theory simple and clear and yet keep us interested. And Trigger Joe! He's great!"

An entire series of gunnery films was planned and produced, using this new star and hero. "Trigger Joe" became a beloved character as well-known among gunners as Bill Mauldin's "Willy and Joe" or George Baker's "Sad Sack." But, at the same time that fabulous "Trigger Joe" amused, he performed an exceptional job of instruction. He could make sidesplitting mistakes in learning the theory and practice of a new gun-

TABLE 3
 BREAKDOWN OF TRAINING FILMS PRODUCED AT AAF FIRST MOTION PICTURE UNIT,
 CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA—BASED ON RUNNING TIME

	Running time (min.)	Per cent of running time
I. Education films		
A. Flight training		
1. For the pilot.....	528	11.2
2. For the navigator.....	139	3.0
3. For the bombardier.....	33	0.7
4. For the radio operator.....	58	1.2
5. For the gunner.....	105	2.2
6. For the flight engineer.....	20	0.4
7. For all crew members.....	60	1.3
	<u>943</u>	<u>20.0</u>
B. Nonflying training		
1. Mechanical	560	11.9
2. Intelligence	65	1.4
	<u>625</u>	<u>13.3</u>
C. Radar	168	3.6
D. B-29 briefing films	231	4.9
E. Eglin Field films.....	88	1.9
F. Operational training	223	4.7
G. Medical treatment.....	70	1.5
H. Identification films	380	8.0
II. Orientation films		
A. Special labor incentive	158	3.3
B. Documentaries for military and public orientation.....	441	9.4
C. Orientation for military personnel		
1. Preventive medicine.....	50	1.0
2. Rehabilitation	34	1.8
3. Safety and survival.....	149	3.1
4. Job orientation	352	7.5
5. Miscellaneous orientation	121	2.6
	<u>756</u>	<u>16.0</u>
III. Educational-orientation films	388	8.2
IV. Special psychological films.....	246	5.2

sight. He could fly on a magic carpet, ask that his target's speed be slowed, even stopped, to help him (and our audience, of course) understand what he was doing, and he could take the usual pratt falls. "Trigger Joe" was con-

ceited one moment, astounded at his ignorance the next. He was doubtful and scornful of new ways. And he insisted on learning the hard way—through trial and error. However, by the end of the film Joe understood the

new gunsight perfectly and so did most of the students who saw him.

Joe's instantaneous appeal to his audience was no accident. Anyone who could teach as convincingly and clearly, and yet interestingly, as Joe, was bound to be a hit. Each gunnery student found a little bit of himself in Joe. Really, when laughing at Joe the student was laughing at himself, his own foibles, stubbornnesses, and difficulties. That was Joe's big appeal, this self-identification by the audience.

Undoubtedly, the field of the animated cartoon could learn a great deal from "Trigger Joe"—and not only about gunnery. Replacing of the time-worn chase, and supplementing the now hackneyed, sentimental, and cut-out inhabitants of any cartoon forest, it could increase its prestige, its box office, and its humor by making films which contained some useful content. Imagine Herman the Hippo advising the average moviegoer how to watch his diet, or Hilda the Hog pleading for safer driving or any problems with which the audience could identify itself dramatized in this manner.

Second, FMPU developed the use of the dramatic form, the telling of a story, applying it to the problems of educating with films. Some full-length storytelling films were produced. For example, *Resisting Enemy Interrogation* taught our airmen what to do in the event of capture by relating the story of a crew captured by Nazis. This film, nominated for an Academy Award, was as exciting as any Alfred Hitchcock thriller.

Other films combined the storytelling techniques with the straight narration technique. Usually, the story in these films reinforced points already

illustrated. Consider *Malaria Discipline*, which first provides a lecture on malaria and then presents the story of men in a malarial region.

An offshoot of using a story was the humorous approach or character. *Introduction to Flying* brought fundamental rules of flying and safety to Air Cadets by the explanations of a whimsical fellow cadet.

Unquestionably, utilizing storytelling technique in educational films is not always most advantageous. Less information can be presented than with the use of straight narration. Production costs, too, are generally greater. And it is possible for the story to interfere with points to be taught. Although the pros and cons of telling a story must be weighed for each educational film, it should be emphasized that dramatic effects—heightening interest, characterization, etc.—can be applied in many ways.

In conclusion, the impression should not be given that FMPU was a Shangri-la of motion picture production. It was not. There was waste, confusion, and delay—well summed up by the army word "Snafu." In spite of these difficulties, the public can feel satisfied that a good job was done. As a by-product, educational film makers can look to FMPU as a milestone; and Hollywood should examine it for constructive ideas.

We regret that we cannot name here the writers and directors of the films discussed. Since no system of assigning credits was defined within the broad cooperative set-up of the First Motion Picture Unit, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences established the policy of not listing formal writers' and directors' credits on the Unit's films.—THE EDITORS.